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The Cask of Amontillado

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THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

by

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THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

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This document details the process of creating an opera, from its inception through the premiere. Opera is a very large musical genre, and having a new opera premiered poses different challenges than other musical genres. I discuss the adaptation of the short story, *The Cask of Amontillado*, into an opera libretto, the composition of the opera, the production and directing of the opera, and what I learned in the process. In the conclusion, I discuss what I have learned as a composer and director, as well as how I can use this knowledge in future productions.

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CHAPTER 1: INCEPTION

My main reason for composing *The Cask of Amontillado* is simply that I wanted to compose an opera. More specifically, I wanted to compose a full-length opera with a suspenseful story and characters who are difficult to side with. I contemplated working with a librettist to come up with an original story, but decided upon *The Cask of Amontillado* for a few reasons.

First, I have always loved the writing of Edgar Allan Poe. I appreciate the often obscure vocabulary, and the rich language which is wonderful to set to music. Previously, I have used Poe's poems for song cycles. I also love the way he begins stories without giving much background. Many of his short stories read as if you are overhearing a stranger tell a story to someone else, or as if you have picked up a letter that was not written for you. His narrators are often people who are at their wits' end, or who are extremely eccentric. *The Cask of Amontillado*, one of Poe's most famous short stories, is about a man who is fed up with the behavior of his neighbor.

Another reason I chose this story is because there are pieces of the story that I could expand upon. The story begins with striking language as the narrator, Montresor, rants about Fortunato's insults. However, almost no background is given about the characters or their conflict. Fortunato is revealed to be Italian, but Montresor's nationality is never mentioned. It is early spring, which is clear when Montresor mentions Carnival. Both characters are wine connoisseurs and do not wish to be compared to a man named Luchesi. Finally, a few other characters are mentioned for plot reasons, but are not

otherwise featured in the story. There is enough information for the story to progress, but enough missing information to allow for expansion.

Musically, I had a few initial reasons to turn this story into an opera. The story begins, as previously mentioned, with striking language as Montresor goes through a number of mood changes before devising a plan. Between the words themselves and the variety of emotion, the first few paragraphs of *The Cask of Amontillado* inspired me to create a musical setting. Carnival was another major musical impetus. I knew immediately that I would be adding scenes of carefree party-goers, and that the music needed to be catchy and drama-free in contrast to the Amontillado music. The addition of music, as well as staging and a little extra material, makes my adaptation of *The Cask of Amontillado* a bit more complex than the original short story, and hopefully a bit more suspenseful.

CHAPTER 2: ADAPTATION

Much of the original story appears as text or stage directions in my opera. The first three paragraphs make up Montresor's first aria. Because the sentences are very long, I rewrote many of them as shorter statements and exclamations. I also changed the tense, where necessary, because the story is told in past tense. After the opening, Poe describes the setting of the story and Fortunato's costume, then the two characters have dialogue. Almost all of the dialogue is used verbatim, and some of it is used twice. Dialogue is adapted as the letter which Fortunato reads out loud. It is then used in Act II Scene 2 as Montresor greets Fortunato before going to the vaults. In the story, Poe stops the dialogue to mention that Montresor's servants had snuck out, then the dialogue resumes. The remaining dialogue is used almost verbatim in the final scene of the opera, while the narration informs stage directions, musical interludes, and set design.

The following elements appear in my libretto, but are only mentioned briefly in the original story. First, and most importantly, is Montresor's motivation. My goal was to develop the main characters in a way that the audience cannot fully like or dislike either of them. Montresor's decision needed to be understandable, even if the audience would judge it as wrong. For this, I decided on an ongoing conflict between the two men in which Fortunato is a bully. Fortunato, however, cannot be intentionally mean, or the audience might not feel sorry for him. The conflict I decided upon is that the two men are equally knowledgeable wine connoisseurs. Montresor is older and more experienced, while Fortunato is young and arrogant. Fortunato is always bragging and poking fun at Montresor, comparing him to another man, Luchesi, who drinks a lot. While Fortunato

thinks he is just being funny, Montresor is very hurt by this. Throughout the opera, Fortunato is condescending to Montresor, and Montresor keeps his feelings to himself rather than attempting to solve the problem.

The next element is five new characters. Lady Fortunato, who is mentioned at the end of the story, is added in order to make Fortunato seem like less of a jerk. Montresor's servants are mentioned in one short paragraph from the original story. The four servants in my libretto are added to create a contrasting secondary plot, and to tie the Carnival scenes to the main plot. In addition to new characters, the chorus is added for the Carnival scenes, and a few chorus members will represent Luchesi and the "man in black."

Finally, extra text is added to the libretto. This includes scenes that do not occur in the original story as well as three arias, one for each of the main characters. The first scene is entirely new, introduces the three main characters, sets up the Carnival scene, and introduces the conflict between the two men. In Act I Scene 2, after Montresor's first aria, the four servants are introduced and Montresor insists that they stay home while he is at Carnival. After Fortunato reads the letter in Act I Scene 3, the rest of the scene is added material: Fortunato's wine aria and an argument between Fortunato and his wife. Act II is mostly added material. The servants plan to sneak out and go to Carnival in the first scene, and in the third scene decide they do not need to hurry back. Act III begins with Lady Fortunato worrying about Fortunato, and the last scene is almost directly from the story aside from an added aria for Montresor.

The chorus text was originally conceived as a “costume parade,” in which the chorus points out various strange costumes and masks. To generate this text, I gave myself a rhythmic template: four-line stanzas with no rhyme scheme, four beats per line with any subdivision, lines begin with “I see a” or “there’s a,” each line ends with an eighth rest to allow breathing except for line three, which connects into line four. The words are different for every chorus entrance, and while the rhythmic pattern stays the same, there are a few different meters and melodic contours used.

The dialogue between the main characters in the first scene went through a couple drafts. The original draft was freely written without including any phrases from Poe’s story, and it merely introduced the fact that the two men were fighting and Lady Fortunato sensed something bad. In the second draft, I focused on making my writing style match Poe’s, and adapted some of the phrases from the end of the story. For example, Montresor’s first line is based on one of Fortunato’s last lines in the story. This creates some symmetry and also helps the language to be more consistent. The second draft also introduces the conflict and mentions Luchesi, who is mentioned throughout the opera.

New Characters

Lady Fortunato is mentioned in Fortunato’s dialogue at the end of the short story. I chose to include her as a main character for a few reasons. I wanted a female role, since the original story only has male characters, and I decided to make her a lyric soprano. I also wanted to include Fortunato’s wife as a good person who loves him, since Fortunato himself has few redeeming qualities. In creating her character, I wanted to make her

logical and intuitive as well as devoted to both her husband and God. She balances out Fortunato's impulsive and arrogant personality, and she also is able to empathize with Montresor and attempts to stop her husband's teasing of him. In Act III, she can tell that something is wrong based on how the men were interacting before, as well as the fact that they are late for Carnival. She copes with her worries by taking a deep breath and praying.

In the original story, Montresor ensures that no one will be home by telling his servants that he is going out and that they should watch the house. They do the opposite as soon as his back is turned. I added four servants to my adaptation so that they could be an SATB quartet. Their function is comic relief, and they have their own side story, which is an expansion on that one moment from the original story. This side story ties together the main story and the carnival scenes. Adding these smaller roles with their own lighthearted plot helped me to expand the story.

The main character in the side story is the cook, who is a tenor. He is very passionate about his craft, but is distracted because it is Carnival, and he wants to go out. He also has a romantic interest, who he expects to be there. The cook is the most well-behaved of the servants and has to put up with the maid always flirting with him and the page always stealing things from him. The page is the soprano in the quartet, and he is a very mischievous young boy. He picks on the cook specifically because he is so serious, but also enjoys picking pockets and goofing off. He wants to go to Carnival so he can run around and be a kid, and also steal from rich ladies' purses. The maid is the mezzo-soprano in the quartet. She is very charming and flirty, and especially likes to

bother the cook since he is not interested in women. She wants to go to Carnival so that she can look stunning and be surrounded by young men. The old man is the manager of the other servants. He pays the most attention to Montresor's needs and tries to keep the young servants in line. He doesn't always have control of them though, and when all three of them beg him to let them go to Carnival, he agrees. Later, he decides that he, too, has earned the night off, and he tells them they have no curfew.

Arias

The three arias I added to the opera serve to give the three main characters a chance to show off their voices, while also revealing something about their character. Fortunato sings about the characteristics of Amontillado and rants about how Luchesi is not a connoisseur like himself. Lady Fortunato's aria is a worried recitative followed by a calm and repetitive prayer. Montresor's second aria is an anonymous poem, which comes from a nineteenth-century masonic publication.

In order to write Fortunato's wine aria, I needed to look up what makes Amontillado distinctive. I used Google to find the characteristics of Amontillado, the winemaking process, and other types of sherry and their characteristics. From there, I created a short description of each sherry. With a basic understanding of the winemaking process and a collection of descriptive phrases, I decided on an ABA form. The A section describes Amontillado and what makes it distinctive, while the B section lists other sherries and points out that Luchesi cannot distinguish them. The purpose of this aria is to show off Fortunato's knowledge and interest in the Amontillado, as well as his arrogance.

Lady Fortunato's solo scene is admittedly nonessential to the story. It has already been established that the couple is going to Carnival that evening. What this scene accomplishes is to remind the audience that Fortunato has someone waiting for him, which creates more tension. In the recitative, Lady Fortunato expresses her worries about her husband being gone too long and the conflict she senses between the two men. The aria is ABA', in which A is a simple prayer and B is a resurfacing of her worries. In addition to generating sympathy for Fortunato, this scene briefly develops Lady Fortunato's character as cool-headed and non-impulsive. She is not the type of person who would go find the men and scold them for wasting time. She is worried, but chooses to wait and pray that nothing is wrong.

Montresor's Act III aria is much different from his Act I aria, in that it is not his own words but rather a song that he has learned, which he is using to prove to Fortunato that he is indeed a mason. The poem comes from a book called *Masonic Library*, published in 1854, which is a history of masonry. The poem itself is cited as a common toast. Montresor sings the poem twice in response to Fortunato's incredulity.

The second draft of the libretto included all text, stage directions, and preliminary musical ideas written in the margins. It was completed by December 2015. I began composing from this draft, changing small things as I went. A final draft of the libretto was made after composing, from the score itself

CHAPTER 3: COMPOSITION

The first draft of the opera was an incomplete piano-vocal score. This allowed me to focus on pacing, tonality, themes, and text setting, while leaving the orchestral sections for later. The piano-vocal draft was written in small sections and added into Finale gradually. Drafts were printed out and edited by hand.

Originally, I was planning on longer opera of 144 minutes. One of my first pre-composition activities was to set duration goals for acts and scenes, as well as moments within scenes. I chose the golden ratio as an arbitrary way of dividing the durations. Initially, intermission would occur at 89 minutes, with 55 minutes after intermission. The first 89 minutes were divided into 55 minutes for Act I and 34 minutes for Act II. Scenes and arias were divided up in the same way. By February 2016, much had been drafted, and I compared what I had with my duration goals. Some parts were close to the goal, while other parts were much too short. The goal was shortened to 89 minutes, and some of the smaller divisions were taken out in favor of following the bigger ones. Eventually, I stopped focusing on these duration goals and focused instead on the pacing, but the goals were helpful in the initial stages of composition.

Tonality and key areas were also decided in pre-composition. Each character has a key and a mode. Montresor has two modes. The keys for the three main characters were based partially on their vocal ranges. For Lady Fortunato, the range I initially decided on was from C4-C6, and I chose F as the key area so that I had the option to use the high C at a cadential moment. I wanted Montresor to be able to sing a low G2, so I chose G as his key area. Fortunato would sing from B2-B4, and I chose E as his key area so I could

use the high B at a cadence. The Carnival music was put in Eb in order to contrast with the main characters' keys, but it is closely related to Montresor's key area. This is because Montresor is the main character and is in control of the story.

Tonality, or rather modality, was chosen to reflect the personality of the characters. Lady Fortunato's music is all in F dorian and uses open harmonies while avoiding the tritone. Her aria is chant-like with static but shimmering accompaniment. Her music features the danger motive, which indicates that she senses the danger.

Montresor has two modes, one for his inner thoughts and one for his social persona. His first entrance features his social mode, which is in G mixolydian, and features F moving to G at cadences. His mixolydian lines are legato and smooth, and syncopated but not swung. Montresor's Act I aria begins in his inner thoughts mode. This mode is G phrygian and uses plagal cadences. This mode also features the danger motive, which is a leap of a 7th followed by a chromatic descent and ending with an augmented or diminished chord. His phrygian lines are text-centered and free. Throughout the opera, Montresor switches between these two modes.

Fortunato's mode is E lydian with a flat seventh. His dialogue features ascending half steps, which represent joking, and swung rhythms. He never uses the danger motive until the very end. This ending was planned out in pre-composition. Fortunato sings the chromatic descent at the end, which ends on F, and the chord resolves to G minor. After this, the Carnival music returns in phrygian.

A few motives are used throughout the opera. The first, and most permeating, is the "danger motive," which is the first musical idea I came up with for this opera. It

begins with a dramatic leap of an ascending seventh, then continues with a chromatic descent spanning a tritone. The initial conception of the motive was as part of a theme (example 1).



Example 1. Danger theme

The motive is repeated twice. At the end of the first descent, the final pitch is harmonized with an augmented chord. Another chromatic descent immediately starts from the bottom of that chord. The second phrase is nearly identical, but the motive ends over a diminished chord, from which another chromatic descent starts. It originally was conceived as a bassoon melody, but it is played by a number of instruments throughout the opera, and occurs in vocal lines. This theme, containing the “danger motive” is the main theme of the opera.

Immediately after creating the main theme, I started composing the Carnival music. The opening Carnival chorus was completed before anything else was composed and features a recurring theme (example 2) in the lydian mode.



Example 2. Carnival theme

Within this theme is the “Carnival motive,” which occurs every time the word “Carnival” occurs throughout the opera. The motive is meant to follow the natural rhythm and inflection of the spoken word, and is defined by the syncopated rhythm in $\frac{5}{8}$, as well as

an often dramatic descent after the first syllable. The “Carnival motive” also appears as a fanfare in the brass and percussion.

Other themes and motives came to be during the composition process. Lady Fortunato’s theme and Fortunato’s “Amontillado motive” both were created when I was setting the text. The word “Amontillado” first occurs at the end of Montresor’s aria. The rhythm and general contour of this occurrence is fairly similar to the setting of the word in Fortunato’s aria. The “Amontillado motive” heard in Fortunato’s aria, as well as throughout the opera, consists of a dramatic leap of a seventh, two steps down, and another leap of a fourth. Its contour is similar to the “danger motive,” which allows for the two motives to overlap. The Amontillado theme (example 3) extends the motive with smoother, stepwise motion.



Example 3. Amontillado theme

Text setting

The first step in composing the opera itself was setting the text. I have come to employ a certain text-setting method, which I used in my song cycles, and which gives the text priority over the music itself. I like this method for setting Poe because the text is so rich, and often contains obscure words. I can assist both the singer and the audience by setting those words as closely to natural speech as possible.

I begin by dividing the text into sections, noting with one slash where natural pauses would occur in speech, and a double slash where a change of subject occurs. Next,

I give each syllable a stem in the music without assigning a note value or pitch. I note which syllables are emphasized within multisyllabic words, as well as which syllables are emphasized in the context of the phrase. I then create a rhythm which honors these emphases, allowing syncopation and various subdivisions to occur as they would in speech. After the rhythm is created, I give each phrase a melodic contour which follows the natural inflection of speech, but which fits into the character's mode and can also contain motives. Harmonic implications are noted, but accompaniment is created after the text has been set.

The initial piano score was finished in June 2016. This version of the piano score was meant as a starting point for the full score, and while it included music for scene changes and introductions and endings for arias, it did not contain larger orchestral sections. The overture, ballet, entr'acte, and ending were left out of the initial piano score, as I intended to compose those first for orchestra and reduce them for the final piano score. This allowed me to avoid writing idiomatic piano music, and focus on writing for the instruments that would actually be playing.

I created the full score by working on the orchestral sections, starting with the ballet. The orchestration was done in finale rather than on paper, both because of the number of lines and because the themes had already been determined. After doing the orchestral sections, I began converting the piano score, first arranging it for the strings. Certain instruments had been paired with characters in my precomposition work: Montresor and bassoon, Fortunato and horn, Lady Fortunato and oboe. In the orchestration process, I also paired the Page with flute, the Maid with harp, the Cook with

clarinet, and the Old Man with trombone. In addition, I differentiate the two households by using woodwinds for Montresor's estate and brass for Fortunato's. The full ensemble is saved for scenes with more people onstage. The full score was completed in June 2017.

CHAPTER 4: PRODUCTION

I began planning the production before even finishing the score. Much of the blocking was planned as I was composing, but I began thinking about other aspects of the production about a year in advance. These other aspects included scheduling the premiere and rehearsals, building a production team, funding, and permissions to use the space. In April 2017, I began keeping a separate journal to record my progress on the production.

My original plans were to begin rehearsals immediately after UNL opera was finished with the rehearsal space, and premiere on March 28, 2018. I expected to put together a team consisting of myself, an accompanist, a choreographer, a chorus master, a costumer, a set designer and crew, and a conductor. I planned to apply for grants from school and other sources, which would involve making a detailed budget well in advance. Finally, I made a list of who I needed to ask for permissions and scheduling, and made plans to meet with them toward the end of the semester. At this time, I also began thinking about auditions, fitting this project into my degree requirements, and advertising.

In May 2017, I met with the school of music director to request permission for a longer time in the performance space as well as an extra performance of the opera. I scheduled the space for March 27-31, 2018 with performances on March 30 and 31. I asked about how I was allowed to use the performance space, including use of the orchestra pit. I was discouraged from using the pit, but was told in the meeting that I needed four people and a few hours to set it up. By May, my production team consisted of myself, a conductor, and a set designer.

Over the summer, I completed the full score, decided to rehearse the chorus myself, put my set designer in contact with the school's technical director, and created a rehearsal schedule. I still needed to find a choreographer, stage manager, costumer, and accompanist. I met with both the technical director at school as well as my set designer in August 2017, before school started. We planned to do most of the set with projection and lighting with a few moving staircases for the end scene, and a few furniture pieces for other scenes.

At the beginning of the fall semester, I joined the faculty for opera auditions to cast my show. I found all but one character and planned to ask a few singers who had not auditioned for the remaining role. I found a choreographer and made an audio clip from Finale so she could hear the ballet. I began working on the budget for the Hixson-Lied grant, which was due at the end of September, and looked at other grants that I could apply for. Unfortunately, many of the grants I found were not for student projects, and the remaining grants were not available at the right time. These resources could be useful for me in the future, after graduation. For budget reasons, I decided to do without a costumer and take a minimal approach to costumes, allowing singers to wear their own formal wear while providing costume elements such as masks.

Toward the end of the fall semester, in November 2017, I was notified that I would receive \$1000 toward funding my project. I found a singer for the missing character, and began thinking about posters and programs. I created a Go Fund Me for the remaining expenses, and created a Facebook event for advertising. Over winter break, I found a stage manager and an accompanist. I finished editing piano scores for rehearsals

as well as drafting the poster, and ordered printed copies. At this point, I started keeping an expense log as well as scanning my receipts. I also emailed potential chorus members.

Once spring semester started, I made a shared folder in Google Drive for the production team and scheduled a first meeting. I sent my team a link to the shared folder, as well as the links to the Go Fund Me and the Facebook event. From this point, I began experiencing some difficulties.

Production Challenges

The first problem I encountered was a miscommunication with the conductor about who was responsible for finding players for the orchestra. I had delegated this task to him over the summer, and he believed that I was finding players. This was at the end of January 2018, about a month before rehearsals were to begin. I immediately took over this task, in addition to finding chorus members and ordering costume pieces. By the end of the month, I had three people in the chorus and four in the orchestra. I made a roster of cast, chorus, and orchestra members in the production team folder and asked for assistance from the rest of the team. As a result of this, I was able to find 12 players for the orchestra, and I had to rescore the entire opera to fit the smaller ensemble. The deadline for finding players was March 2, 2018, at which point, I would be able to rescore before the first orchestra rehearsal on March 5.

The second problem I encountered was at the beginning of February 2018, my choreographer informed me that she would not be able to make it back for the production. She had moved out of state and was planning to come back for the production, so she did not officially quit the project until February. It was too late for me to find another

choreographer, so as a result of this, I ended up reimagining the ballet as comedic blocking.

The third problem I encountered was having a very small chorus. The music was written for a chorus of around 20 people. This problem was caused by not engaging singers early enough. I ended up with four singers, one woman and three men. One of the men was given the alto part to sing down an octave. This was not too much of a problem, but I did have to allow for some sections to be sung unison which were originally in harmony or call and response.

The biggest problem I encountered was after a successful first week of rehearsals. We had blocked the entire show, including the “ballet” and singers were starting to look away from their scores during rehearsals. On March 2, I received an email from the school’s technical director, giving me new restrictions for my use of the stage, the biggest being that I would no longer be allowed to use the orchestra pit and must have them onstage. The other big restriction was that I would only be allowed one performance now. I responded to the email, saying that I was willing to adapt, but that I was given permission to have two performances in May 2017. I also emailed my production team about having an emergency meeting over the weekend. The meeting ended up being only me and my set designer, and we decided not to fight for use of the pit but rather to come up with a new plan.

The first weekend in March was spent not only rescoring the entire opera for a smaller ensemble, but also reblocking the entire opera to accommodate for a small orchestra in the middle of the stage. I received no response to my email, but on Monday,

March 5, I received an email from the school of music director, reiterating that I would not be allowed both of my scheduled performances. He was unavailable for a meeting until the end of that week. When we finally met, he would not change his mind, but I stressed the fact that I had people who were already planning on coming to both performances. I had to choose only the Saturday performance, and was told to remove advertising of the Friday performance. However, I could still use the space for a final dress rehearsal, and if anyone happened to come watch that night, they would be allowed. I emailed my team and singers about the change, and asked my conductor for his contact list for the orchestra. He had not collected a contact list, so I found all of their emails myself and then emailed the orchestra.

After Challenges

The cast and chorus adapted very well to the new blocking, and were off-book by the end of the second week of rehearsals. I wish that I could have been more focused on directing during that week, but adapting and communicating with the administration took precedence.

Starting on March 12, I added the chorus to rehearsals, and on Friday, March 16, we ran the entire production twice. March 17 was meant to be the Sitzprobe, but many players ended up being absent so another one was scheduled for the following weekend, after spring break. Over the break, I ordered proofs of the program, met with my technical director and stage manager to plan tech rehearsal and shop for supplies, and crafted costume pieces.

After spring break, we returned for a Sitzprobe and one more day of rehearsal before moving into the performance space. Tuesday, March 27 was our tech rehearsal, and we spent much of the day setting up chairs and stands for the orchestra, moving furniture from storage, and crafting last-minute props and set pieces. The wall, which Fortunato walks into at the end, was mostly assembled off-site and then finished backstage. The actors got to work with the set piece before running the show. The rehearsal itself went smoothly, and we did not have to stop frequently. A few things needed to be smoothed out. These were a quick costume in Act II, and the moving of the wall in Act III. After running through the show with lights, we fixed some spots where the actors were not standing in the light. One unanticipated challenge with having the orchestra onstage was the positioning of stand lights. We needed to check that they were not pointed at the audience, but also not in the way of the music.

Wednesday, March 28 was originally meant to be the final dress rehearsal. The technical elements were in place and the actors were familiar with the space. I was able to pay attention to details and give some final notes. On Friday, March 30, we had a small audience for our final dress rehearsal. My technical director was unfortunately injured in an accident on his way to that rehearsal, so we had to do with simpler lights controlled by my stage manager. Luckily, the technical director for UNL opera was able to step in for the premiere, and coordinate with my stage manager to recreate the correct lighting.

CHAPTER 5: PREMIERE

The premiere was a success. Approximately 80 people were in attendance, and the video had over 300 views by the next day. I received positive feedback, especially about the catchy Carnival music. There were no major mistakes in the music or the blocking, and the acting was good. While the production turned out well, I would like to produce this opera again in the future with changes.

This performance was not exactly what I had imagined due to several factors. The “costume parade,” in the chorus scenes would require a larger budget and at least one costumer on the production team. The chorus itself was meant to be about 20 people, but we only had 4 for this production, which is another reason for fewer costumes. The orchestra was smaller than I had planned. In addition to some missing instruments, the strings were soloists rather than sections. The smaller orchestra made it less of a problem when we could not use the pit, but having them onstage was not ideal. It was more of a challenge to balance the ensemble and singers. It also prevented us from using the set design that we had planned. Finally, we had to plan a minimal set in the first place due to the small budget and lack of time in the performance space. With more resources and a larger space, I would have as grand a set as we could change within the timeframe of the musical interludes. The end scene would ideally involve a long descent down many staircases.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Often in reference books, the dates given for the composition of an opera span a couple of years, and a premiere date is also given. I was aware, going into the project, that it would take a long time, and the composition process took a year and a half. I have learned a lot from working on this project, both composition and production. I have also considered how I will use what I have learned on future projects.

Certain aspects of my composition process were very successful. Starting at the piano and focusing on the music linearly was a good choice. Giving myself timing goals was also helpful early in the process. My text-setting method is very effective for recitative, and I will most likely continue using it. Finally, leaving the orchestral sections until after the piano score was drafted was a good decision, and it enabled me to write an overture that hints at all the important themes.

I also noted a number of things that I will do differently next time. This time, I printed a new draft each week or so and edited as I went. Next time I would rather wait until the whole draft is complete and then edit. The complete piano draft needs to have voiced chords rather than figured bass, all ideas should be written down even if they are incomplete, and the draft should have no empty linear space. At least a melodic idea or chord progression should be written down between vocal lines.

There are a few things I can do to save time regarding Finale input. Next time I intend to check syllable divisions before setting the text rather than waiting until I put it into Finale. When orchestrating, I will note changes in the piano score as I go and update both files rather than waiting until the orchestral score is finished. I also plan to apply

formatting to the score and parts at the same time with regards to system breaks between scenes.

I have learned a lot from directing and producing this opera. While I knew that I needed to find a team and delegate responsibilities, there were communication aspects to working as a team that I had not thought of. Most importantly, everything should be communicated in writing, and there needs to be a record of everything that has been delegated or discussed. Many of my problems with this production could have been solved with better communication skills. I also learned that while a smaller team is easier to put together, it does leave a good deal of the work for me to do, and I would have been more successful if I had not taken on the jobs of chorus master and costumer in addition to directing.

One of the more fun aspects of directing is casting. I did not have a huge number of singers to choose from, so it was fairly easy to cast, and listening to everyone's voices was very nice. Before auditions, I had not considered that looks were much of a factor, but in callbacks, I realized that height differences were especially important to note, especially when one of the characters needs to look like a child compared with the others. Another thing I had not considered was to offer chorus positions at the time of casting. Had I done that before spring semester, it would have helped with singers being too busy to join me.

I also learned some more stressful aspects of producing a show. Namely cost of production, and adapting to restrictions. I managed to keep the production inexpensive by asking for minimalist set, doing minimal costuming, and using mostly students and

friends in the production. In a professional production, I would have more people to pay, as well as more expenses for set and costumes. Using Go Fund Me to supplement the grant was a good decision, but if I choose to do a small-scale opera outside of school, I may want to ask for sponsors.

Next time I direct or produce something of this scale, I plan to be more realistic about how much work I can handle myself. I will find team members well in advance of the production. Expectations for each team member will be clearly communicated in writing at the beginning of the project, with deadlines, similar to a syllabus. I will communicate all delegated assignments via email and carbon copy to everyone who needs to be involved.

My communications with cast members were very thorough, although I could improve by being more strict about punctuality. A written document for the cast, in addition to the schedule, would be helpful to lay out my expectations for punctuality, communication of conflicts, and preparation for rehearsals. I would prefer to know all conflicts in advance and accept no other conflicts that pop up after rehearsals have started. In this case, some of the conflicts were other rehearsals or classes, which I had no control over, and I was able to adapt my rehearsal schedule to accommodate.

In general, I will find all the people I need farther in advance, including production team, cast, chorus, and orchestra members. I will find out about all conflicts by a specified deadline, and will set the rehearsal schedule in stone. Communications will always be in written form, even if I have already communicated verbally, and all communications will be saved in an organized manner. I will send carbon copies of

emails to everyone who is involved with what is being discussed, even if that means an annoying number of emails for the production team.

Finally, opera involves many elements and is an expensive art form. Next time I produce something like this, I will secure funding in advance, through grants, fundraisers, and donors. I also would prefer to produce a show somewhere that I could either charge admission or post a suggested donation amount. I would like to be able to pay people for their time, both the production team and the musicians.

The entire process has made me think about how I can compose in a way that makes opera more accessible. Having composed and produced a full-length opera, and having learned from some of my mistakes, I have a few ideas about my future composition projects. I wish to compose operas that can be done on a small budget, with minimal scenery, lighting, and costumes, and which require fewer people to produce. An opera that does not require a large stage can be performed at more venues, and with fewer people involved, everyone can be paid better. I also wish to compose operas that appeal to a wider audience, including a young audience. This means setting stories that are comedic, well-known, or just easy to follow. With operas like that, I could put together a team of around 10 people and tour the way a local band would, going to different cafés, bars, and outdoor venues, in addition to the traditional concert stage. While I also have plans to write larger-scale operas, I wish to challenge the opinion that opera is somehow an elitist art form, and to foster more of an appreciation for opera among casual music listeners.

APPENDIX A: LIBRETTO**Act I, Scene 1: Carnival**

The chorus enters in Carnival costumes

Chorus: Carnival! Don a mask, grab a drink,
let loose, follow us! Carnival!
Grab your friends, masquerade
dance all night, celebrate! Carnival!
Come and join the great parade!
Come and drink your fill of wine!
Come and feast, now winter's over!
Carnival!

There's a king dressed in a skirt.
There's a dog in a feathered hat.
There's a fish with a golden crown
and a mask that's shaped like the moon.
See the costumes and the masks
in an endless bizarre parade.
Grab your friends and come along
as we celebrate.

Come and join the great parade!
Come and drink your fill of wine!
Come and feast, now winter's over!
Carnival! Carnival! Carnival!
Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Montresor: *From within the Carnival crowd*

Ha ha! Ha ha ha! You are such a joker! An excellent jester!

Montresor pushes his way forward through the crowd

I shall have a laugh about this back at the palazzo! over mediocre wine! With my dear friend Luchesi!

Fortunato: *Fortunato pushes his way forward through the crowd*

Be a good sport, Montresor! It was but a joke!

Montresor: A joke! Luchesi is a quack! I am a connoisseur! everyone knows that my taste rivals yours, and I am equally knowledgeable in matters of wine.

Fortunato: Oh Montresor, your passion may rival mine, but you are no match for me. I am a true expert in the subject.

Lady Fortunato comes out from the crowd

Montresor: You are a drunken buffoon!

Lady Fortunato: Gentlemen! There is no need to hurl insults at each other. My love, perhaps we should be going.

Montresor: No need! I am leaving! I have had quite enough of your antics, Fortunato.

Montresor exits.

Fortunato: I'll see you tomorrow! Same time!

Lady Fortunato looks to see that Montresor is out of earshot.

Lady Fortunato: Montresor is not someone you want to anger. something is not right with him.

Fortunato: My dear, he is my friend, and quite familiar with my jokes. He is a bit sensitive, but not dangerous.

Lady Fortunato: No, something is off about him. There is something in his eyes, something dangerous.

Fortunato: Perhaps you've had too much, my love.

Lady Fortunato grabs his flask and finishes the contents, then hands it back to him.

Lady Fortunato: Alas! Your drink is gone too! We should go home.

Fortunato: Yes, let us be off.

They hold hands and exit. The chorus comes forward.

Chorus: Come and join the great parade!
Come and drink your fill of wine!
Come and feast, now winter's over! Carnival!

Come and join the great parade!
Come and drink your fill of wine!
Come and feast, now winter's over!
Carnival! Carnival! Carnival!
Come and join the great parade!

The chorus gradually disappears and the scene changes.

Act I, Scene 2: Montresor's Palace

Montresor is pacing angrily.

Montresor: The thousand injuries of Fortunato, I have borne. But this insult!
I will have revenge! I have never given utterance to a threat,
but at length, I will be avenged.

I must not only punish, but punish with impunity.
A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser.
It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as
such to him who has done the wrong.

Montresor stops pacing

By neither word nor deed have I given Fortunato cause to doubt my goodwill.

I will continue to smile in his face, and he will not perceive that my smile is now at the thought of his immolation

He has a weak point, this Fortunato.
He prides himself on his connoisseurship in wine.
Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit
In the matter of old wines, Fortunato is sincere.
In this respect, I do not differ from him...

Montresor walks to a desk and begins writing

I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado...

He continues writing

The page comes running in holding a paper. The cook comes running in angrily and chases the page around.

Cook: Give that back, you little pest!

Page: Give what back?

Cook: Don't play stupid!

The maid enters between them.

Maid: What are you boys fighting about?

Cook: He stole a page from my recipe book!

She won't let him past her, he turns around, and nearly collides with the old man.

Old Man: What is all this noise? Can't you see the master is trying to write?

Cook: That little thief is being a nuisance!

Montresor finishes writing and stands.

Montresor: Your attention, everyone!

All stand at attention.

I shall not return until the morning.
 You shall not stir from the house.
 I have no specific projects for you,
 but in my absence, you must be watchful.
 I expect to return to the house exactly as I left it.
 Do I make myself clear?

Servants: Yes, sir! We shall not stir from the house!
 We will wait patiently, and be on our best behavior.
 You have my word.
 We promise!

Montresor: *To the page*

Now deliver this letter to Fortunato.

Page: Yes, sir!

The page exits, the other servants exchange glances. Scene changes

Act I, Scene 3

Fortunato is relaxing with some wine. The page skips in from the opposite side that he exited and hands Fortunato a letter, then exits. Fortunato opens the letter, and is suddenly excited.

Fortunato: "My dear Fortunato, I hope you are well. I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts."

Looking up from the letter

Amontillado! In the middle of Carnival!

He resumes reading

"I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain."

Amontillado!

"I have my doubts, and I must satisfy them. If you are engaged, I can ask Luchesi. Some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own."

Angrily

Luchesi cannot tell Amontillado from sherry!

Amontillado: a perfect balance
between a fino and an oloroso,
Versatile and complex, pleasing to the eye,
with a deep, amber color, and a flavor rich and nutty.
Amontillado begins as a fino, aging under flor,
but the flor fades away and it mingles with the air
The older vintages are smooth and take on the character
of their oaken barrels.

Luchesi cannot distinguish Amontillado
from other sherry.
He would drink "Amontillado" that didn't come
from Andalucia.
He cannot tell the pale and delicate fino
from the drier and brinier manzanilla,
or the manzanilla pasada, fuller and darker
or the palo cortada, both delicate and rich,
or the full, dark oloroso.

I can tell the pale and delicate fino
from the drier and brinier manzanilla,
and the manzanilla pasada, fuller and darker,
aged an extra seven years.
The palo cortada, both delicate and rich,
and the full dark oloroso, aged without flor.

But Amontillado! A perfect balance
 versatile and complex its flavor rich and nutty.
 pleasing to the eye, with its rich amber color.
 Its character unique!

Amontillado! Amontillado!

He resumes reading

"I do not wish to impose, and I understand if you have an engagement.
 otherwise, I invite you to come to my vaults before we leave for
 Carnival tonight. Ever Yours, Montresor."

Lady Fortunato enters

I'm off!

Lady Fortunato: Whither?

Fortunato: to the palace of Montresor!

Lady Fortunato: My love, no!

Fortunato: You are worried for nothing. We will be back before Carnival!

Lady Fortunato: It's not the time that worries me.
 There is danger in his eyes.
 He is not your friend.
 Please, my love, don't fraternize with danger.
 Don't choose your vices over me.
 Don't leave these eyes that love you.
 Please, my love!

Fortunato: I know you dislike Montresor,
 but he is my friend, and it is not your concern.
 My love, this is a matter of honor.
 I will not lose this opportunity to an amateur
 I will return before you miss me.

Lady Fortunato: But there is danger in his eyes

Fortunato: Montresor is not your concern.

Lady Fortunato: But you are!

Fortunato: Then say a prayer for me! Ha ha!

He exits

Lady Fortunato: ...danger in his eyes... be careful, my love.

Act II, Scene 1: Montresor's Palace

Cook: Montresor doesn't need any food prepared tonight. We can be back before he returns. No... I burned that cake yesterday because I just can't focus. I just need a night out, to get some fresh air.

Maid: I would love to go out tonight! I love Carnival! My costume is brilliant! I shall look exactly like a flute of champagne, with a golden skirt that curves like so and I've crafted the top to look like I am wearing nothing but bubbles!

Cook: On second thought, perhaps I will stay in tonight.

He backs up

You go ask him about it, and have fun!

Old Man: ask me about what?

Cook: Well... um...

The maid catches him.

It was nothing really. Just a thought... a stupid thought.

The page comes sprinting in, wearing a chicken costume and poses dramatically.

Old Man: What do you think you are doing, young man?

Page: We are going to Carnival, right?

Maid: Yes! Please let us!

Page: Please let us!

Cook: I could use the night out, to get some fresh air.

Page: The master's gone!

Maid: I have the perfect costume!

Cook: I just can't focus!

Old Man: enough! I agree. The master will not return until morning. What better way for him to find the house exactly as he left it, than to keep you three miscreants out of it all night?

Page: Carnival!

Cook: Miscreants?

Maid: Yes!

Old Man: But... You will have a strict curfew. You will return before midnight, then go straight to your beds. Do I make myself clear?

Servants: Yes, sir!

They all rush to exit

Page: But, aren't you coming with us?

Old Man: I suppose I could.

He exits

Page: Carnival! Wear a mask! Run amok!
 Cut a purse! Don't get caught! Carnival!
 Come and join the great parade!
 Come and drink your fill of wine!
 Come and feast, now winter's over! Carnival!

Cook: Just one night, the master's gone!
 Time for us to celebrate!
 Just one night to slip a way!
 And focus on nothing!

Maid: Come and join the great parade!
 Come and drink your fill of wine!
 Come and feast, now winter's over! Carnival!

Chorus: Carnival! Grab your friends! Masquerade!
 Dance all night! Celebrate! Carnival!
 follow us! Stay out late!
 Have a drink! celebrate! Carnival!

I see a child in a feathered suit.
 I see a golden champagne flute.
 I see a masked man all in white,
 And a man that looks just like a frog.

The old man enters

Old Man: Come, let's join the great parade!
 Dance all night and celebrate!
 The master never has to know!

Chorus: Carnival!

Act II, Scene 2: Montresor's Palace

Montresor: My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are looking today. I have my doubts about the Amontillado.

- Fortunato: A pipe? Of Amontillado? In the middle of Carnival? How?
- Montresor: I have my doubts, and I was silly to pay the the full Amontillado price.
- Fortunato: Amontillado!
- He coughs*
- Come, let us go!
- Montresor: My friend, no. I perceive now that you are afflicted with a severe cold. The vaults are insufferably damp. The are encrusted with nitre.
- Fortunato: Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchesi, he cannot distinguish sherry from Amontillado
- He coughs*
- Montresor: But your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible Luchesi...
- Fortunato: Enough! I shall not die of a cough.
- Montresor: True... true.

Act II, Scene 3: Carnival

- Chorus: Carnival! Carnival! Carnival!
tonight we dance, tonight we drink,
we masquerade, and stay up late.
The winter's gone, we celebrate
with laughter and a feast.
- Cook: tonight romance instead of work.
tonight exciting rendezvous.
tonight my cares can disappear.

I drink to you, my dear!

Maid: How enchanting is this night!
Everything is beautiful!
I'm in love with all of you!

Chorus: Come and join the great parade!
Drink, and dance the night away!
Stay up late and celebrate Carnival!

There's a pink horse with green wings,
and a walking talking clock.
I see a sea monster swimming
through the crowd with glist'ning scales.

I see a man clad all in black,
and a gown of radiant flow'rs.
I see a monster with large horns
and a dancing apple tree.

Page: Oh, how lucky am I!
This party is the perfect scene.
With a little sleight of hand,
I'll be richer than a king!

Old Man: How delightful is this wine!
Pouring freely down from heav'n.
Bacch-us, how I love thee!

Chorus: Birds with jewels on their wings,
silken masks with glitt'ring stars,
acrobats, magicians, jugglers,
dancers clad in stunning garb!

Ballet

Old Man: I could stay here all night long!
Hell, why not! Let's celebrate!
Who cares what the master says!

Chorus: Carnival! Don a mask, grab a friend,
have a laugh, stay all night! Carnival!

Page: We can stay?

Maid: Wonderful!

Cook: See you later!

Old Man: No curfew!

Chorus: Carnival! Carnival! Carnival!
Now's the time to misbehave!
Don't hold back, enjoy yourselves!
Life will be there in the morn!
Don't give it any thought!

Here's to happy rendezvous!
All your fantasies come true!
Raise a glass and celebrate
Carnival! Carnival! Carnival!

Come and join the great parade!

Act III, Scene 1: Fortunato's Palace

Lady Fortunato: He's not back yet.
How long can it take to taste some wine?
There's something unsettling about Montresor.
What if my love is in danger, and I cannot protect him?
He is too trusting, too carefree.
Oh, my love, be careful.
Oh Lord, keep him safe.

While my love is out of sight,
far from the eyes that love him,
keep him safe from harm.

Those dangerous eyes have him ensnared,
Eyes that burn with anger.

Oh Lord, return my love to me,
back to my eyes that love him.
Deliver him from those dangerous eyes
that burn with furious hate.
return my love quickly, oh Lord!
Keep him safe from harm.

Act III, Scene 2: Montresor's Vaults

Fortunato: The pipe?

Montresor: It is farther on, but observe the white web-work which gleams from
these cavern walls.

Fortunato: Nitre?

He coughs

Montresor: Nitre. How long have you had that cough?

Fortunato: *He coughs*

...it is nothing. The cough is a mere nothing. It will not kill me. I shall
not die of a cough.

Montresor: True, and indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily; but
you should use all proper caution. A draught of this Medoc will defend
us from the damps.

Fortunato: I drink to the buried that repose around us.

Montresor: And I, to your long life.

Fortunato: These vaults are extensive.

- Montresor: The Montresors were a great and numerous family.
- Fortunato: I forget your arms.
- Montresor: A huge human foot of gold, in a field of azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are embedded in the heel.
- Fortunato: And the motto?
- Montresor: Nemo me impune lacessit. No one attacks me with impunity.
- Fortunato: Good!
- Montresor: The nitre! See, it increases. It hangs like moss up-n the vaults. We are below the river's bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough...
- Fortunato: It is nothing! Let us go on. But first, another draught of the Medoc.
- Montresor reaches for the Medoc, revealing the trowel under his cloak*
- Are you of the brotherhood?
- Montresor: How?
- Fortunato: You are not of the masons?
- Montresor: Ah, yes. Yes.
- Fortunato: You? A mason? impossible!
- Montresor: A mason.
- To him that all things understood,
 To him that found the stone and wood,
 To him that hapless lost his blood
 In doing of his duty.
 To that blest age, and that blest morn.
 Wherein those three great men were born,

Our noble science to adorn
With Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty.

Fortunato: You jest, but let us proceed to the Amontillado.

Montresor: Be it so.

They travel in silence

Proceed, herein is the Amontillado. As for Luchesi...

Fortunato: He is an ignoramus!

Fortunato walks into the dead end. Montresor chains him to the wall.

Montresor: Pass your hand over the wall; you cannot help feeling the nitre. Indeed it is very damp. Once more, let me implore you to return. No? Then I must positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power.

Fortunato: The Amontillado!

Montresor: True, the Amontillado!

Montresor builds the wall

Fortunato: Ha ha ha! He he! A very good joke indeed! An excellent jest! We will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo. He he he! over our wine. He he he!

Montresor: The Amontillado!

Fortunato: He he he! Yes, the Amontillado. But is it not getting late? Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo? The Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone.

Montresor: Yes, let us be gone.

Fortunato: For the love of God, Montresor!

Montresor: Yes... for the love of God!

Fortunato is silent

Fortunato?

Fortunato?

Fortunato's hat falls to the floor

In pace requiescat.

APPENDIX B: PRECOMPOSITION

1/0.618 = 1hr to 37 min
 1.5hr to 55.6 min ... just use 89/55

<u>Amontillado</u>	<u>Time</u>	
<u>Act I</u>	55 min	
- Scene 1	- 13	overture
• Chorus	• 8	• chorus
• Recit	• 3	• dialogue
• Chorus	• 2	• chorus (finish)
- Scene 2	- 21	- scene change
• Aria	• 13	• Mon. pacing, Soliloquy
• Recit	• 3	• servant entrance
• Aria	• 5	• Mon. Instructions
- Scene 3	- 21	- scene change
• Recit		• letter aria
• Aria		• dialogue
• Duet		
<u>Act II</u>	34 min	
- Scene 1	- 8	• dialogue
• Recit	• 3	• character lines
• Chorus	• 5	• chorus
- Scene 2	- 5	- scene change
• Duet		• dialogue
• Recit		- scene change (big)
- Scene 3	- 21	• chorus
• Chorus	• 8	• ballet
• Ballet	• 8	• chorus
• Chorus	• 5	• big finish
<u>Act III</u>	55 min	<u>Intermission</u>
- Scene 1	- 21	• entracte
• Recit	• 13	• Lady recit
• Aria	• 8	• big aria
- Scene 2	- 34	- scene change
• Scene		• dialogue
		• mason aria
		• arrival

solar (2/12) 15m

• started
★ finished

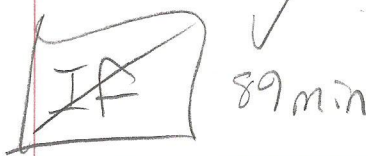
- more mus. interludes
- may expand overture
- talk to Ian about ballet

(now) approx. 144 min

I. 1.	Overture	5	13	55
	Chorus	(12s) • 3	—	—
	dialogue	(2m) 2	—	—
	Chorus	(10s) • 2	—	—
	— scene change (theoretically) non music	1	—	—
2.	Mon soliloquy	(2m45) • 13	21	—
	servant's antics	(35s) 3	—	—
	Mon instructions	(1m48) 3	—	—
	— scene change	2	—	—
3.	letter rec. + wine aria	(6m20) • 13	21	—
	dialogue	(1m14) 8	—	—

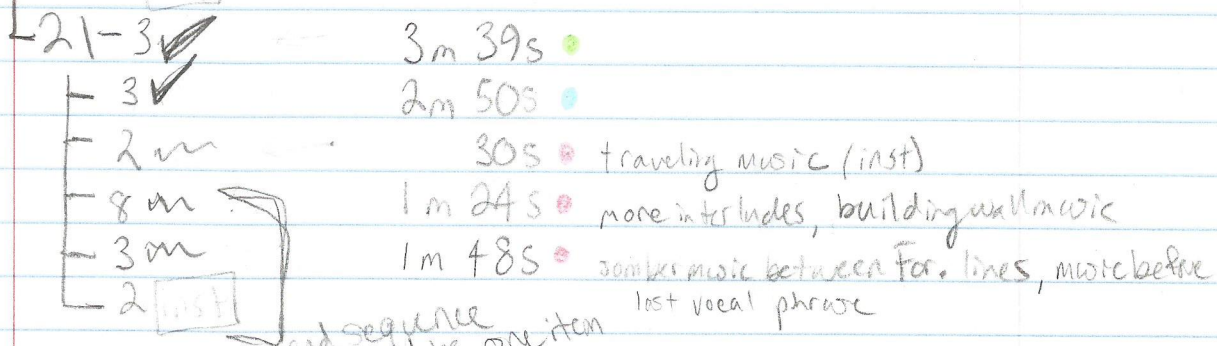
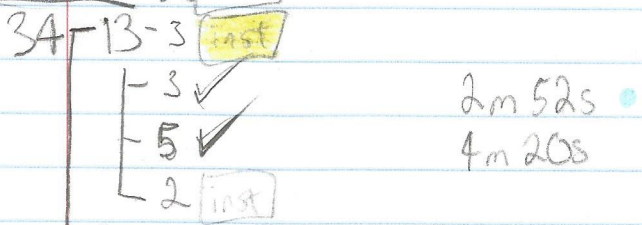
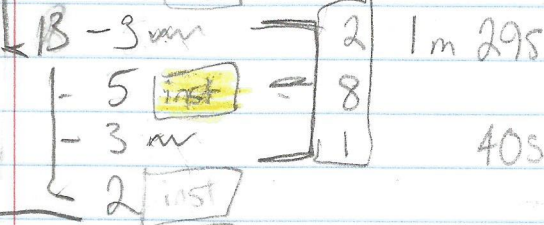
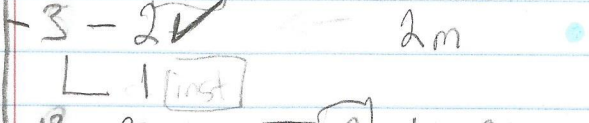
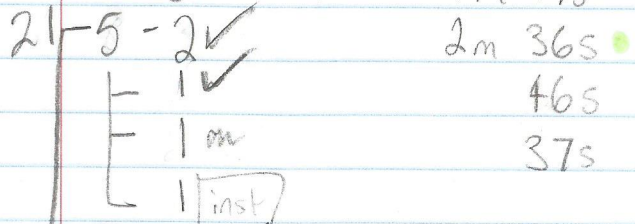
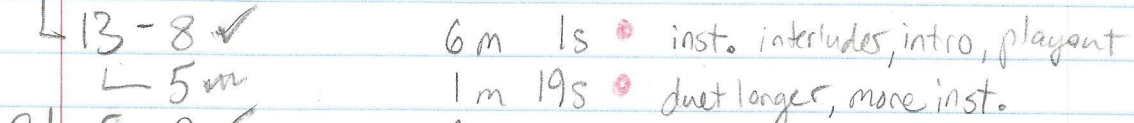
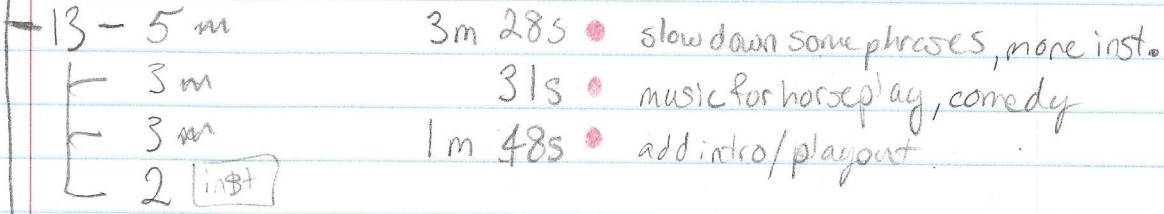
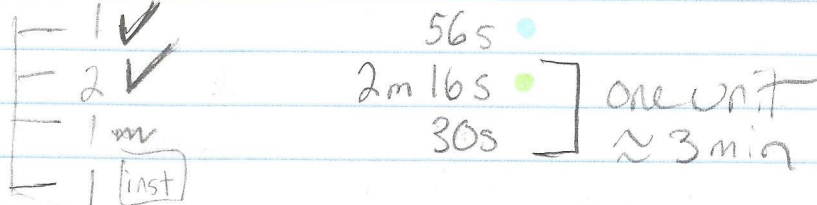
II. 1.	dialogue	(2m37) 3	8	34
	character lines	(35s) • 2	—	—
	chorus	(39s) • 2	—	—
	— scene change	1	—	—
2.	dialogue	3	5	—
	— scene change (big - carnival)	2	—	—
3.	chorus	(1m20) • 8	21	—
	ballet	5	—	—
	chorus	(1m+) • 5	—	—
	big finish (orchestra - show off)	3	—	—

III. 1.	entracte	8	21	55
	Lady recit	• 5	—	—
	aria	(4m) • 5	—	—
	— scene change	3	—	—
2.	dialogue	5	34	—
	Mas on aria	(2m30) • 5	—	—
	dialogue/coral	3	—	—
	soliloquy/build up	(1m30) 13	—	—
	For. frantic/finish all	(1m45) 5	—	—
	Final music (2:1 - ironic/lady)	3	—	—



- ballet now 8 min
- write interludes between things
- overture leads to carnival ⁴⁶
- entr'acte starts upbeat, then slows - danger → prayer music

34 - 8 - 3 lost will compose orch. version, then reduce



end sequence could be one item 13 min

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