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# Characters

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, architect	High Lyric Baritone
MAMAH CHENEY, one of his clients	Soprano
LOUIS SULLIVAN, Wright's mentor	Tenor
EDWIN CHENEY, Mamah's husband	Bass
CATHERINE WRIGHT	Mezzo Soprano
MAID / 3RD TOWNSWOMAN	Soprano
1st Townswoman	Soprano
1st Draftsman's Wife	Soprano
2nd Guest's Wife	Mezzo Soprano
2nd Townswoman	Alto
2nd Draftsman's Wife	Alto
2nd Workman / 2nd Reporter / 2nd Guest	Tenor*
5th Workman / 1st Reporter	Tenor (Lead)*
First Draftsman / Last Draftsman	Tenor / Baritone
3rd Workman / 3rd Reporter / 2nd Draftsman	Baritone*
1st Workman / 1st Guest	Baritone
4th Workman / 1st Photographer	Bass*
Waiter	Spoken
Chef	Spoken
Two Children	Mute

*\*the Barbershop Quartet*

MIXED CHORUS of 40 voices who at various times portray DRAFTSMEN, CONSTRUCTION WORKERS, TOWNSPEOPLE, REPORTERS, PHOTOGRAPHERS, PARTY GUESTS, FIREMEN, and the TALIESIN STAFF.

Onstage Piano Trio (Piano, Violin, Violoncello) in Canape Variations

## Orchestration

2 Flutes (1, 2 doubling Piccolo)	Timpani
2 Oboes (2nd doubling Cor Anglais)	3 Percussionists
2 Clarinets (2nd doubling Bass Clarinet & E-flat Clarinet)	Piano (doubling Synthesizer)
2 Bassoons	Harp
2 Horns in F	Strings
2 Trumpets (2nd doubling Flügelhorn)	
2 Trombones	
Tuba	

Full score and orchestral parts are available on rental from the publisher.

## Duration

Act I: 58 minutes      Act II: 62 minutes

# Synopsis

## PROLOGUE

The Cliff Dwellers' Club, Chicago, 1903. Architect Louis Sullivan, erstwhile mentor and friend of Frank Lloyd Wright, sits alone. He has been drinking all afternoon. He muses on his estrangement from Wright, who was once "a pencil in my hand." The estrangement has cost Sullivan dear.

## ACT I, SCENE I

Wright's Office, Oak Park, Illinois, 1903. Wright brings prospective clients Edwin and Mamah Cheney into his busy studio. He enthusiastically outlines his plans for their house. He and Mamah are clearly taken with each other; Edwin is leery of the cost of the house. Shortly after the Cheneys depart, Wright's staff leaves for the day. Wright's reverie about Mamah is interrupted by his wife, Catherine, who in frustration, and with some bitterness, urges him to come home to his family. But he is preoccupied and distant, so there can be little real communication between them. After Catherine leaves, Wright's thoughts turn again to the Cheneys. At the same time Sullivan, visible at the Club, reflects again on his falling out with Wright.

## ACT I, SCENE II

The Cheney construction site, six months later. As workmen begin their day, several townswomen discuss the rumored affair between Wright and Mamah. Edwin Cheney comes to inspect the progress of the building and realizes that as his house is being built his marriage is being destroyed. Wright and Mamah appear, exchanging intimacies, and are surprised by Edwin. Mamah and Edwin clash, and she announces her intention to leave him. Edwin is crushed, Mamah determined to throw off the chains of a conventional marriage. Wright urges Mamah to escape with him "to make our mark on the well-worn slate of Europe." They leave Edwin inside the four open walls of the half-built house.

## ACT I, SCENE III

Mamah's apartment in Berlin, 1910. Mamah has for several years been working on translations of German and Swedish literature. As she translates some verses from German (the "Hymn to Nature") Mamah thinks about Wright, who is away at work in Italy. She comes to terms with her strongly ambivalent feelings about her life with Wright, recognizing, despite her love for him, that her dream of an equal partnership with him must remain a dream; his hunger for wealth and fame will always eclipse her. For all the romance of rejecting her conventional former life she has ended up, like Catherine before her, waiting on Wright. Sullivan, still brooding in his club, echoes her disappointment in Wright.

## ACT II, SCENE I

Taliesin, Spring Green, Christmas, 1911. Wright, with Mamah at his side, greets a crowd of reporters, photographers and townspeople at a Christmas Morning Press Conference in his living room. He delivers a prepared statement attempting to explain his living out of wedlock with Mamah while still married to Catherine (who will not grant him a divorce). His audience seems unconvinced that "the artist must take a higher road, a harder road." When Mamah and Wright speak privately, it is clear that she is dissatisfied with the imbalances in their life together, though he doesn't really seem to hear her.

## ACT II, SCENE II

Taliesin, Summer, 1914. At a party hosted by Wright and Mamah, her children play among the guests, employees and neighbors of Wright's who express a variety of opinions about his worth as a man and as an artist. Mamah realizes incontrovertibly that she and Wright are living separate lives; they are not the picture of connubial bliss they seem.

## ACT II, SCENE III

The Cliff Dwellers' Club, later that summer. Wright visits Sullivan, apparently hoping for a reconciliation. Their conversation is at first strained and indirect. Ultimately neither is able to reach out successfully to the other; it is hard for Sullivan to let down his guard. Edwin Cheney enters with a telegram: Taliesin has been destroyed by fire. Wright is stunned; Edwin hauls him off to catch a train to Spring Green. Alone, Sullivan cries out in anguish — he seems to feel Wright's loss, as well as the loss of Wright.

## ACT II, SCENE IV

The ruins of Taliesin, deep in that night. There is great despair. The dead are laid out on the ground. The victims are seven in number, including three employees, the child of one, Mamah's two children, and Mamah herself. Some died in the fire; the latter three were hatched to death by the man who started the fire, Julian Carleton, Wright's Chef, who is missing. Edwin takes away the bodies of his children; Wright bids him a contrite farewell and mourns Mamah. The Maid, in hysteria, announces that the Chef has been found, his throat burned from drinking hydrochloric acid. Wright finds a paper in his coat with Mamah's translation of the "Hymn to Nature": "She sweeps us off our feet, and dances round and round, then flings us back, exhausted, on the muddy ground." Wright imagines rebuilding Taliesin in Mamah's memory.