

Choir Practice

A Comic Opera in One Act

Words by Tara Wohlberg (b. 1967)

Music by Stephen Chatman (b. 1950)

It is choir night in a community hall in Vancouver, circa 1985. Dawn, the blind woman, arrives for her first rehearsal and Corey, the stuttering tenor, arrives for his entrance audition. Marilyn sings about her infatuation with him. Warm-ups, roll call and plenty of innuendos follow as the rehearsal for the national competition in Toronto begins. Frustrated by interruptions of Kenny the clown, a Diva, Adonia the belly dancer, and an Angry Man, Willie Stroker, the new director (and a serious womanizer), attempts to conduct. He fails. The two competing soloists in *The Grand Hotel*, Heather the drunk, and Julia, engage in insults during *Ladies' Duel*, their mutual hatred culminating in attempted murder. After the Policeman's gunshot, signalling a blackout, *Fantasy Time - Dawn's Miracle* emerges on the dimly lit stage of 'frozen' choristers. Dawn sings *Seeing is Believing*, magically leading the choir into a world of light, harmony, understanding and musical perfection—a miraculous transformation. Corey realizes that Marilyn is the girl of his dreams and sings *Hanky-panky*. The choir's problems are resolved in the rousing *Finale: Darkness to Delight*.

Duration: c. 60 minutes

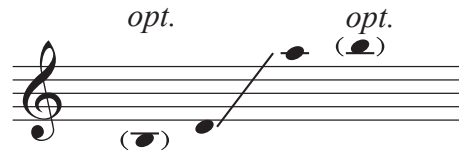
Orchestration: flute doubling piccolo, oboe, clarinet, alto saxophone doubling tenor saxophone, trumpet, piano (on-stage), 2 violins, viola, cello, bass

Premiere: University of British Columbia Opera, Nancy Hermiston, director, Jonathan Girard, conductor, members of University of British Columbia Symphony Orchestra, May 8 & 9, 2015, University of British Columbia Old Auditorium, Vancouver.

Characters (in order of appearance)

DAWN mezzo soprano or soprano

Range:



-Blind woman

-Calm, generous, supportive

-New to Vancouver, wants to contribute to the choir; she clearly has 'a voice'

-The 'guiding light', she transforms the choir in *Fantasy Time - Dawn's Miracle* by "touching" and hypnotizing the conductor and singers

-Sings ARIA #3 - *Seeing is Believing*

PIANIST man or woman

-On-stage pianist/accompanist, not a singer

WILLIE STROKER high baritone Range:



-Wants to be called WILLIAM but everyone calls him WILLIE

-Incompetent, unmusical conductor of promising but leaderless community choir

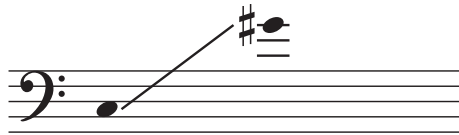
-Has no sense of rhythm nor conducting technique

-Wants the choir to win the national Choralfest competition in Toronto

-A womanizer

COREY high baritone or tenor

Range:

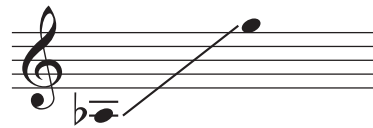


-The nervous stuttering auditioner. Attractive banker's son who is accepted to the choir, in part, because his father will pay for the competition travel costs.

-Not bright nor confident but has a nice voice. Realizes he is in love with MARILYN after 'Dawn's Miracle' and sings ARIA-DUET - *Hanky-panky*

AMY contralto or mezzo soprano

Range:

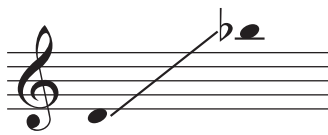


-A southern "born again" Christian who prays for forgiveness of her sin of adultery and quotes biblical scripture

-Asks to be an alto instead of a soprano

MARILYN soprano

Range:



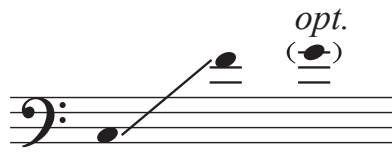
-Attractive, a la Marilyn Monroe. Although she is a confident flirt, she is nervous of the actual follow-up attention. JULIA's daughter

-Sings ARIA #1 - *He has only just arrived* about her infatuation with COREY, her "assets and talents"

-Briefly joins COREY in ARIA-DUET *Hanky-panky*

GERHARDT high baritone or tenor

Range:



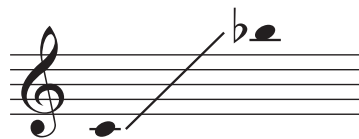
- Older German music librarian, speaks in both German and English with a heavy accent

-Highly volatile, enthusiastic, obsessive compulsive, appears efficient but is incompetent

-Loves Richard Wagner, German culture and opera singers

JULIA soprano

Range:



-MARILYN's mother; proper, self-righteous, gossip, wears gaudy jewelry

-Sees herself as sophisticated and superior to others.

-With her operatic voice, she has always been the soloist

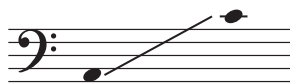
-Constantly insults HEATHER during rehearsal

-Sings DUET - *Ladies' Duel* and solo in *The Grand Hotel*

-Detests HEATHER and eventually knocks her out with her large bag. Also attacks WILLIE and POLICEMAN

DR. DAVE bass

Range:

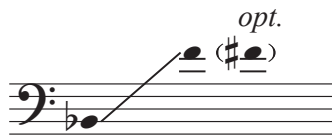


-Comments on new European music, Wagner, WILLIE, Hedy Lamarr, and trans-sectionals.

-Paged to attend an emergency, is not present when HEATHER is knocked out

RICHARD the POLICEMAN high baritone

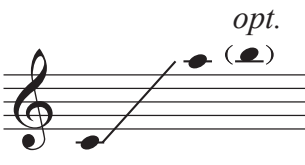
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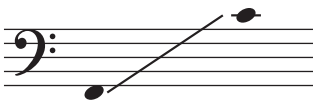
-Questions why the choir must sing "stuffy classical crap"

-Sings ARIA #2 - *Not that Kind of Song* about German verse, Schubert and Gretchen's spinning wheel


-Later intervenes as POLICEMAN and shoots himself in the foot

HEATHER mezzo soprano or soprano Range: 

- Drunk, earthy and crude, hillbilly or “country western” accent, but educated at U of T
- Hiccups throughout; constantly insults JULIA during rehearsal and desperately wants to be the soloist
- Sings DUET - *Ladies’ Duel* and solo in *The Grand Hotel*

KENNY the CLOWN low dramatic basso profundo Range: 

- A children’s party entertainer looking for the birthday party. He is in the wrong venue
- Also an opera singer specializing in Richard Wagner
- Sings an excerpt as King Marke from *Tristan und Isolde*

SALLY contralto or mezzo soprano Range: 

- Attractive; WILLIE propositions her
- Can’t match pitches well and sings out of tune

DIVA high soprano Range: 

- An opera singer who delivers a singing “divagram”
- Reappears to sing *The Grand Hotel* and again with a proposition

- ADONIA the BELLY DANCER** female dancer
- Attractive “Greek” lady, dances only, not a singer
 - Enters the rehearsal twice by mistake; reappears to dance during *Fantasy Time – Dawn’s Miracle*

ANGRY MAN high baritone Range: 

- Joins the choir toward the end of the rehearsal
- Unbalanced, angry, sings tirade about how awful the choir is

- CHOIR**
- SATB: the 14 singing characters plus at least 18 singers

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Words by
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It is choir night in a community hall or church in Vancouver, circa 1985.

(The curtain rises.)

Flowing, sustained ♩ = 96

(The pianist and Dawn, the blind woman with a white cane, enter.)

Piano
(Orchestra)

The musical score for the Piano (Orchestra) is written in 4/4 time. It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand features a melodic line with sustained notes and some grace notes. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The key signature has one flat (B-flat major or D minor).

(The pianist guides Dawn to her chair, then sits at the piano.)

opt. alternating tremolo notes (R.H.)

The musical score continues with a measure number of 6. The right hand has an optional instruction for alternating tremolo notes. The piano accompaniment continues with sustained chords and moving lines in both hands.

11 Dawn

p

The musical score for Dawn begins at measure 11. She enters with a piano (*p*) dynamic. Her vocal line is in a treble clef with a 3-measure rest at the start. The piano accompaniment continues with sustained chords and moving lines. The lyrics are: "My first re - hear - sal - what an op - por - tu - ni - ty. Some - thing".

My first re - hear - sal - what an op - por - tu - ni - ty. Some - thing

Composer's Engraved
Facsimile Edition

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(Willie enters)

16 **poco accel.** **A little faster** ♩ = 100

Dawn

ma - gic - al could hap - pen.

Willie

Willie *mp* Hel - lo Dawn. Your

mp cresc. *poco* *a poco* *sim.*



20 *cresc.* *poco* *a* *poco*

Willie

en - trance au - di - tion was in - spir - ing— we're so hap - py to wel - come a new



23 Dawn *mf* with gradually increasing intensity and dynamics

Dawn *mf* Thank you. I'm keen to get to know each and ev' - ry

Willie mem - ber. —

(*mf*)

26 *f* poco accel. A little faster ♩ = 102

Dawn
one of you— and con - tri-bute to the choir

Willie
Your voice is

f

poco accel. A little faster ♩ = 102

8^{vb}...



30 *with gradually increasing intensity and dynamics*

Willie
beau - ti - ful— such a love - ly tone. You sing from the heart— and you're so

8^{vb} | 8^{vb} | 8^{vb} | 8^{vb} |



34 A little faster ♩ = 108 *mp* (Corey pokes his head on-stage)

Dawn
Well, no, as you can see, I

Willie
charm-ing. Can you read mu-sic?

A little faster ♩ = 108

ff *mp* *p* *tr* *tr* *marc.*

8^{vb} |

(Corey pokes his head in again and leaves)

38 and leaves)

Dawn
can't— *mp* That's O K. You have to

Willie
mp I'm so sor-ry. I'm em-bar-rassed.



42

Fast ♩ = 138

(Willie notices Corey. Corey enters; he is nervous.)

Dawn
call them as you see them!

Willie
mf Come in— make— your-self

Fast ♩ = 138
mf marc.
sim.



46

Corey

Corey
mf O - K - K - K. *mf* C - C - C C -

Willie
comf - ter - ble. What's your name?

49

Corey

Cor-ey. I'm au - di-tion - ing_ for the c - c - c - c - choir. Are_ you

sim.



(Amy and Marilyn arrive, pacing in the background doing unusual warm-up gestures or movements, eventually singing soft notated warm-up scales and arpeggios.)

52

Corey

Wil - lie Stro - ker?

Willie

mf

Yes, Wil - liam Stro - ker Aren't you the son of our new



55

Corey

mf

C - C - C - C - Cor - rect.

Willie

opt. falsetto

bank - er? Hope you're a ten - or. _

58 *mf* *p*

Corey
M - M - M - M - M - May-be. What's a t - t - t - t - ten-or?

Willie
Are you?



61 *mp* *mf*

Willie
An en - dan - gered spe - cies. Are you warmed up?

Slower ♩ = 100 Fast ♩ = 138



64 *mf* *p freely*

Amy
ah

Corey
mf M - M - M - M - My hands aren't c - c - c - cold an-y-more. Seems O k - k - k -

Willie
I mean your voice.

sim.

(Gerhardt, the librarian arrives with the music and distributes some of it while rearranging chairs. More choristers, including Julia, Richard and Dr. Dave arrive in staggered entrances, some doing individual warm-ups with improvised movements.)

67 Amy *p* freely

Amy

73 *Amy mp freely*

Amy
ma ma ma... ma

Corey
ah

Willie
high-er. Bet-ter. Try this.

f

mf

marc. sempre



76 *Julia p freely*

Julia
ah

Amy
ah

Willie
ah

mp

marc. *(marc.)*

sim.

79 **Marilyn** *p* freely, continuous (♩ = 132 - 138)

Marilyn
ah

Corey
f hm o - k - k - k - k - k. *f* Ah

Willie

Willie, Corey and piano (on-stage) are not synchronized with ensemble.
♩ = c. 54

(♩ = 132 - 138)



82 **Amy** *mp* freely

Amy
ma ma ma... ma

Corey

Willie
f Ex - cel - lent! We're hop - ing to make it to

Julia
p freely

85

Julia
ah

Willie
Chor - al - Fest in To - ron - - to this year.



88

Julia
mp
Ah

Amy
mp freely
la la la la... la

Corey
f
Ah 3 3

Willie
A - gain.

91

Julia

ah

Marilyn

p freely

Ah

Corey

Willie

mf

Nice!



(♩ = 138)

(Marilyn, Amy and Julia warm-up and "talk"..
More choristers arrive; a few do visual warm-ups - stretching, etc.)

94

Corey

mf

I'm learn-ing t-t-t - t - t - tre-ble

Willie

f

Can you read mu - sic?

(♩ = 138)

f

mf marc.

sim.

97

Corey

c - c - c-clef and how to c - c - c - c - c-count.

Willie

mf

Have you learned — a song for this au -

(Corey gives Willie the sheet music.)

100

Corey

Yes, it's c-called -Na - ture's C-C - C - C - C - Cry.

Willie

di - tion?

103

Willie

rit. Gently flowing ♩ = 88

Fine.

rit. Gently flowing ♩ = 88

p legato

Red.

107 *f* *ff*

Corey
Blue grey is the co-lour of the o - cean,

Willie
f *mf* *mp*
Let's try a - gain. Start here, a lit-tle soft-er.



110 Dawn *mp*

Dawn
Just re-lax, Co-rey. You're do-ing fine. Sing from your heart.

p



114 *mp* *mp* 3

Dawn
That's bet - ter.

Corey
mp
Blue grey is the co-lour of the o - cean, But this

(Remaining choristers, except Clown, Heather, and Sally, have arrived.)

117

Corey

cresc. *mf* , *mp*

world, where deep and pure wa - ter meet is pre - cious. Wild

poco cresc. *mf dim.* *p*

(Heather arrives, drunk)

120

Corey

cresc. *f*

ros - es per - fume the wind and watch from a dis - tance,

cresc. *f*

123

Heather

Heather

loud hiccup

Corey

a lone ea - gle soars,

Willie (*interrupts*)

mf 3

That was a - maz - ing.

135

Willie

fund rais - ing com - mit - tee would like to meet your fa - ther. We have tra - vel ex -



138

Marilyn

He

Willie

pens - es for the com - pe - ti - tion in Tor - on - to.

rit. ♩ = 80 Marilyn *mp*

rit. ♩ = 80

p



141

Marilyn

sure is ea - sy on the eyes, — if not the ears.

rit.

p