ALAN LOUIS SMITH’S VIGNETTES: ELLIS ISLAND:  
THE HISTORY, EVOLUTION AND PERFORMANCE OF A MODERN AMERICAN 
SONG CYCLE

D.M.A. DOCUMENT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in the Graduate School of  
The Ohio State University

By

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*****

The Ohio State University
2009

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ABSTRACT

Vignettes: Ellis Island is a twenty-six piece song cycle by American composer Alan Louis Smith. Crafted as a genuine portrayal of the human spirit, it was initially meant to be a single song written as a birthday gift for mezzo-soprano and friend, Stephanie Blythe. The composer, however, was so compelled by this topic that he set a musical backdrop that chronicled American immigration in the early 20th century, through the stories of twenty-one refugees. A fortuitous meeting between Alan Smith and Paul Sigrist, Jr. (former director of the Ellis Island Oral History Project), resulted in a collaboration that became the catalyst for this song cycle. Mr. Sigrist supplied over 100 pages of quotations, taken from interviews he conducted with the Ellis Island Oral History Project, which then were carefully abridged by the composer to create Vignettes: Ellis Island. This document chronicles the development of this cycle, discussing its origins, influences, historical relevance, and performances. It also provides a biography on the composer, and details interviews conducted from July-October 2008 with Alan Louis Smith, Paul Sigrist, Jr. and Stephanie Blythe. Finally, it serves as a performer’s study on the musical and dramatic interpretation of the work, as coached by the composer.
Dedication to my family

To my husband, Joe Regensburger, whose unfailing love and support have shaped my life, without whom this accomplishment would have never been realized. My friend and soul mate, I love you.

To my sister, Nikki Ross, whose great example of strength, integrity, constant support and encouragement have inspired my success.

To my mom, Carolyn, whose ever fighting spirit to overcome adversity has taught me determination.

To my grandmother, Olga Horstman, whose whistling music could be heard from any room in the house, and even in death is still heard in my heart.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to extend my sincerest gratitude to Dr. Alan Louis Smith, who allowed me to write about this beautiful work. I am grateful for the kindness and brilliance he graciously shared during our interview. His insight and musical wisdom will influence the way I sing and teach forever. Additional thanks are bestowed on Stephanie Blythe for taking time out of her busy performance schedule to respond to my questions, and Paul Sigrist who was so generous with his time and knowledge.

Thank you to my committee members, especially my advisor, Professor Loretta Robinson, whose encouragement and mentorship inspired me to select a topic of true passion. I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. C. Patrick Woliver, whose zen and wisdom have given me hours of contemplation and reflection. Lastly, to Dr. Karen Peeler whose eternal zest for singing and teaching has provided a consummate example to model my future career path.

There are several mentors and teachers who additionally have helped guide my path on this journey. Betty Bothwell, my first voice teacher who ignited the spark, and Professor Andreas Poulimenos, who taught me how to move people with my music. Michael Strauss, Anna Gabrieli, Scott Nicholas, and Ed Bak are among the pianists, coaches and collaborators that also molded me along the way and I am forever grateful.

Without the help of my dearest friends my work would have been impossible. Their encouragement, laughter, caring hearts and listening ears, will forever be appreciated. Thank you Kathleen Sasnett, Moira McLaughlin, Karen Hilton, Andy and Amy Blosser, Jeff and Eileen Ebbeler and Jim Riehle.
VITA

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Opera Performance
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What inspires the soul to action is often difficult to define. The display of nature’s most beautiful sunset, the laughter of children, or the struggle of the human spirit overcoming insurmountable odds are all rich topics for potential artistic expressions. Since the beginning of time humans have strived to artistically represent the emotions and experiences that are motivated by these inspirations. Expressed in the form of art, poetry, dance or music these inspirations are preserved to honor our human experiences so that they can be relived, understood and remembered. In the summer of 1999 a composer by the name of Alan Louis Smith set to accomplish this goal. He was moved by genuine human stories that were paramount to our American history, and he sought to capture snapshots, vignettes if you will, of times of great strength, struggle, fear and hope. Smith composed Vignettes: Ellis Island as an homage to those people who lived through a profound time in our American history. The song cycle’s texts are quotations and anecdotes excerpted from interviews which were conducted through the Ellis Island Oral History Project. These interviews were recorded between 1989-1999. Smith endeavored to stay true to the words of the individuals who experienced firsthand the journey through Ellis Island. Their stories, retold by most in their advanced age, encompass a full array of human emotion: humor, sadness, fear, uncertainty, anger, hope and joy.
American composer Alan Louis Smith is known in smaller circles for the many roles he assumes in his professional life: pianist, teacher, vocal coach, accompanist, composer, and even poet. His work, however, has yet to receive the level of acknowledgment it truly deserves. Having published just one set of American Folk Song arrangements, his original compositions are not yet among the canon of literature available in publication to singers. This document serves to highlight one of these lesser known song cycles and bring it to the attention of voice teachers, performers, and publishers who might give it larger visibility in the musical world.

Purpose Of Study

The intent of this document is to serve three primary purposes. First, it will detail the biography of living American composer Alan Louis Smith, tracing his musical beginnings through his present day work. Secondly, it will discuss the origins of his composition, Vignettes: Ellis Island, including its historical significance, the text selection and information about the Oral History Project at Ellis Island. Finally, it serves to offer a performer’s study guide that collectively gathers the insights of the author, the coaching directives of the composer, and the interpretation ideas from Stephanie Blythe, for whom the cycle was written. By combining these three perspectives, I hope to assist future performers in capturing the authentic intentions of the composer, and enhance their performance experience with this work.
Procedure

The source material for this document is primarily based upon a series of interviews written and conducted by the author. The subjects of these interviews were Alan Louis Smith (composer), Paul Sigrist, Jr. (former director of the Ellis Island Oral History Project), and Stephanie Blythe (mezzo-soprano, for whom the cycle was written). Additional research on Ellis Island, U.S. immigration, and the Oral History Project was completed prior to the interviews. The author traveled to New York on July 22, 2008 and visited the Ellis Island museum and facilities to gain a stronger appreciation for the historical testimonies delivered in the cycle. During the visit she spoke with the current director of the Oral History Project, Janet Levine, and viewed the archive facilities and audio rooms that house over 2000 recorded interviews contained in the collection.

The author musically prepared and studied the vocal score prior to the live interview conducted on July 23-24, 2008 with Dr. Alan Louis Smith. This interview was recorded at the composer’s summer residence at the Tanglewood Music Festival in Lennox, Massachusetts. During the interview we discussed the composer’s life and music, and then engaged in a coaching session, which detailed the composer’s preferences and intentions for his work, Vignettes: Ellis Island. A transcription of the interview is included with this document as Appendix C.

The second interview was conducted with Paul Sigrist, Jr. by phone on October 3, 2008. Mr. Sigrist detailed the process of interviewing former immigrants, describing how participants were selected, and how live recorded interviews were arranged. He provided an in-depth testimony to the history of Ellis Island and the inception of the Oral History Project. Additionally he recounted the events that brought about the partnership between
himself and the composer. A partial transcription of that interview is included with this document as Appendix D.

Lastly, after several failed attempts to speak by phone with Stephanie Blythe, it was decided that the interview be conducted through email correspondence as her international performing schedule was too heavy at the time. Ms. Blythe was gracious in answering a long litany of questions that were sent to her by email in the month of October 2008 and this interview is included as Appendix E.

**Ellis Island, A brief history**

The dream of finding a better life and prosperity brought twelve million immigrants to the United States through the gateway known as Ellis Island. Travelers from across the globe set sail for America and were greeted by the sandy shore of this small island off the coast of New York City. Here, the origins of America were forged; our melting pot revealed in this microcosm of nationalities converging in the New York Harbor.

The island had meager beginnings. In the 17th century it was known as “Kioshk” or Gull Island to the Mohegan tribe which inhabited the area. The small three-acre sandy cay was barely visible at high tide and its only viable use seemed to be its abundant oysters, which could be harvested from its rich clay and sandy soil. Around 1664 ownership of the island relinquished from Dutch control to the British, but even after taking possession no real use for the land was employed. For a time it was known as “Gibbet Island” referring to the Gibbet trees that were used as gallows to hang men convicted of acts of piracy. In the 1770s the land was purchased by a man named Samuel
Ellis and he was the first to give the land a habitable purpose. He established a small
tavern that catered to pirates and fishermen in the harbor as they passed through.

During the Revolutionary War\(^1\) the British occupied New York City, due to a lack
of harbor fortifications which allowed their strong naval force to sail unimpeded into New
York Harbor. This vulnerability would prove to be an important event for the history of
Ellis Island.

Following the war, the United States Government felt that the British still posed a
threat to its Eastern coastal cities. The U.S. War Department directed a committee of
Army engineers to evaluate developing the existing islands within New York Harbor for
defensive fortification. The committee deemed the land to be strategically invaluable due
to its position within the harbor and put forth a recommendation that the government
purchase the parcel. In 1808 the land was purchased by the state of New York to secure
government control of the land and then later was bought by the Federal Government for
$10,000; a considerable price tag for a plot of land with limited usability.

As tensions escalated between Great Britain and the United States, the War of
1812 was impending. Preparations were made to fortify the small harbor island and Ellis
Island finally had a historical relevance and importance. The first structure, named Fort
Gibson, was a parapet used to house three tiers of circular artillery. Other smaller wooden
buildings were erected to be used for storage and training of soldiers. As it turned out,
the army and navy didn’t need this stronghold after all, and its primary functions after the
war were a munitions armory and a prison.

\(^1\)The Revolutionary War (1775-1783)
In 1890 the House Committee on Immigration selected Ellis Island as the site for the new Immigration Station. They appropriated $150,000 for construction and improvements to make the land usable. Landfill was brought over from the excavation of the New York Subway system, which increased the land mass from three acres to six acres. The main two-story building was four hundred feet long and one hundred and fifty feet wide, and boasted grand four-story towers on each of the four corners. The ground floor was primarily intended for baggage while the great hall on the second level was used for inspections and processing of immigrants. Smaller buildings, formerly from the old Fort Gibson compound, were converted into hospitals, kitchens and dormitories. The island contained its own power plant, cistern water well system, and employed a staff of 500-850 people.

Photograph 1.1: Main building Ellis Island 1892

Ellis Island officially opened on January 1, 1892, and the total renovation costs soared to nearly a half a million dollars. Fifteen year old Annie Moore from Ireland was the first traveler admitted through the new station. She was greeted by city officials and given a $10.00 gold piece. Three large ships waited in the harbor and that first day 700
other refugees, who left behind families and homes passed through its gates in search of the promise of America.

The United States saw a great increase in the number of immigrants arriving from Northern and Western Europe. More than one million immigrants from Ireland sought refuge in the United States following the great potato famine. Simultaneously a large number of German immigrants were fleeing from the political unrest and economic instability plaguing their country.

Immigration laws began to tighten and required that the shipping companies return any deportee who could not pass inspection at Ellis Island back to their homeland. Every rejected passenger cost these companies money and they were eager to find ways to protect their bottom line. In order to prepare immigrants for departure the shipping companies built these large screening facilities at the ports of departure, to ensure that their passengers would pass inspection. It is a common misconception that surnames of immigrants were changed as they came through Ellis Island. In reality, most alterations occurred at the port of embarkation. The shipping companies knew that the inspections would go more quickly if the immigration officials were able to read the passenger manifests and questionnaires without stumbling over long foreign and unfamiliar names. The longer a passenger was presented in front of the inspectors, the more likely that they would identify some problem. For this reason, most immigrants complied with the name changes and accepted a new identity with the hopes of gaining a new homeland.

The experience of immigration varied widely depending on the social class of the immigrant. First and second class passengers, often from affluence, were easily processed on the ship and were passed through Customs at the pier and immediately admitted to the
United States. Third class passengers were not as fortunate. These immigrants traveled in the lower hulls of the ships, often in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. The journey would last between two and three weeks and some passengers would experience constant seasickness with the rough waters of the Atlantic. Sometimes known as the “steerage class”, these immigrants were put through an extensive evaluation of mental, physical and legal scrutiny to ensure that they would not become a burden on the American government. Upon arrival at the pier, third class passengers were put on ferries or barges and taken to Ellis Island for inspection.

Photograph 1.2: The Great Hall Ellis Island

Once on the island, immigrants were taken to the Registry Room, also known as the Great Hall where they awaited inspection. Doctors would complete a quick scan of the passengers, known as the “six second physical”, and could often determine whether contagious ailments or other threats to public health existed. They also looked for things like deformities and terminal or mental illness, conditions that would hinder the immigrant from earning a living or would require public hospitalization.
Next the refugees were taken for their legal review. At the ports of departure passengers were required to complete a survey answering a litany of questions:

- Name in Full
- Age
- Sex
- Marital Status
- Calling or Occupation
- Literacy Reading and Writing, and which language(s)
- Nationality
- Race
- Last Permanent Residence (Country and City or Town)
- Name and complete address of nearest relative or friend in country of origin
- Final Destination (State and City or Town)
- Does passenger have a ticket to the final destination?
- By whom was passage paid?
- Whether if in possession of $50, or if less how much?
- Whether ever before in the United States, and if so, when and where?
- Whether going to join a relative or friend, and if so what relative or friend, and his name and complete address?
- Purpose of coming to the United States:
  - Whether alien intends to return to country of origin
  - Length of time alien intends to remain in the United States
  - Whether the alien intends to become a citizen of the United States
- Whether the alien has ever been in prison, or an institution for the care and treatment of the insane.
- Whether a polygamist?
- Whether an anarchist?
- Condition of Health: Physical and Mental
- Deformed or crippled and nature of the impairment, the length of time and cause?
- Height
- Complexion
- Color of Hair and Eyes
- Marks of Identification
- Place of birth (country and city or town)

If all paperwork was in proper order and the health inspection clean, the process would last between three and five hours. Most immigrants were granted passage, and only about two percent of the arriving immigrants were marked for deportation.
Ellis Island processed its peak number of immigrants in 1907, when in that single year 1.25 million people came through the island. Each of those and many others were greeted in New York Harbor by sight of the Statue of Liberty, or the literal translation Liberty Enlightening the World (French: La liberté éclairant le monde).

Illustration 1.3: Statue of Liberty as seen today

This icon which became one of the most recognized symbols of the United States was a gift from the French in 1876 to commemorate the centennial of the United States’ Declaration of Independence. It wasn’t completed until 1886, a decade after its proposal. It reached 305 ft high when measured from its foundation (which the Americans built), to the tip of the torch, and weighed 450,000 pounds combining its steel and iron frame. This would certainly have been an unprecedented sight as the steam ships entered the harbor and revealed this beacon of hope and the promise of prosperity.
Though by no means a comprehensive history of Ellis Island and US Immigration, this brief chronicle serves as a backdrop for the texts within the song cycle. An attempt was made to highlight details within the history of Ellis Island that were relevant to the short vignette texts that were selected by the composer. The intent of this introduction was to further enrich an understanding of the complex hardships tolerated during the immigrant’s journey to America and their profound sense of hope, shared in the midst of strangers.
CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHY OF ALAN LOUIS SMITH

Born on October 21, 1955, Alan Louis Smith was the middle child of Raymond and Dorothy Smith of McAllen, Texas. McAllen is just west of the southern tip of Texas on the Gulf of Mexico, approximately three miles from the Mexican border. His father was a farmer of citrus, watermelon, and tomato crops, and made a living as a nursery man. As was a common hardship of farming, his crops had been wiped out several times by unseasonable freezes, leading to some lean years for the Smith family. Tragically, when Smith was just three years old his father was struck by a drunk driver who ironically was driving a beer truck. The accident itself did not kill him, but severely broke his leg. His father was hospitalized for his injuries, and developed a blood clot in the leg. This clot eventually broke loose and went to his brain resulting in his death.

Dorothy Smith made her career as a nurse and eventually would become the director of a school of nursing in McAllen, Texas. Now retired, she remains close with her children and speaks frequently with her son by phone. As a single parent raising three children in the sixties, she made necessary sacrifices so that music could be a strong part of their household. Music pervaded their everyday life, and Smith recounted that she sang them to sleep, and shared many musical moments around the breakfast table with them. The composer recalled:

There was a Cream of Wheat jingle when I was a little kid. First we’d say a prayer and then we’d sing the Cream of Wheat song and then we’d eat our Cream
of Wheat. [the] song ends with ‘and makes us shout hurray’ so we’d all shout “hurray” then have our breakfast. So there was always singing in my home.

Both of Smith’s maternal grandparents possessed musical genes as well. As amateur singers in their youth, they traveled with a Methodist preacher from church to church spreading the Good News. After the sermon the two would sing unaccompanied duets and hymns together.

Smith’s life was filled with song and music even from a very early age. A great uncle, whose hobby was restoring old pianos, gave the family their first keyboard instrument when he was just a child. His older sister, Judy, was the first to study, but Alan soon followed in her footsteps. At first Dorothy was reluctant to invest in his lessons, as money was tight and she feared that he would lose interest after a year or two and the sacrificed money would have been wasted. Therefore, his mother became his first piano teacher when he was seven years old. She played well enough to teach him hymns and notes on the keyboard, and this made it easier on them financially. Though he admitted, “[the lessons] were just painstakingly difficult. She would cry and I would cry and she’d say ‘this is that note’ (pointing to a page), and I’d say ‘no it isn’t!!’ and she’d say ‘YES it is!”’. These formative lessons made him an excellent sight reader in years to come.

When Smith was nine years old he began studying piano formally with Mildred Allen. She was the local church pianist, and operated a large private piano studio out of her home. Both Smith and his sister would go for their lessons, and each would wait their turn while the other was playing. This created a healthy sibling rivalry, which encouraged him to learn the more difficult pieces he heard his sister playing. Though
most lessons focused on Classical music, occasionally Mrs. Allen would give her pupil a popular piece from the radio. Smith enjoyed these excursions, but preferred the classical genre. Mrs. Allen continued to be his teacher until he went away to college. It is interesting to note that most accomplished pianists begin playing around the same age that they begin basic verbal reading skills, age five or six. However, the noted delay in Smith’s training seems to have had no real impact on his career path or success.

In addition to his private piano study, Smith had several other musical outlets that reinforced his edification. In the Southern Baptist church where he grew up there were graded children’s music programs that taught note reading, rhythm, and music theory. When Alan was 8 or 9 years old, he recalls, “they would offer food or a piece of candy if you could figure out a note on the staff, you know FACE and Every Good Boy Does Fine? So I was motivated very highly by candy.” Secondly the elementary and high school programs he attended strongly supported the arts and music. Quite unexpected for a small public school district in southern Texas, his choir director strengthened the curriculum by preparing the students annually for ensemble competitions. After years of receiving the highest ratings, his director realized that this experience no longer provided a growth opportunity for the students. Therefore, he initiated various fundraising projects instead that would allow the school to bring in members of the San Antonio Symphony Orchestra, in order for the choir to perform larger scale works such as the Vivaldi Gloria or the Schubert Mass in G.
In high school Smith took his first elective music theory course, which exposed him to the fundamental principles of music and the Kodaly method\textsuperscript{2}. Since he was slightly more advanced than his classmates, the teacher would assign him more complicated exercises. He assigned Smith exercises that were created by Nadia Boulanger, a influential French composer, conductor, and music scholar. These required Smith to play both hands at the piano while singing an additional line, often in a unique clef other than treble or bass. Smith believes that these early training exercises helped him develop the mental dexterity needed to be a skilled vocal coach, since much of this work relies on the ability to listen to the vocal line while autonomously maintaining the accompaniment.

It was also during this time period that Smith first began exploring composition. His sister was several years older than he, and during college she was a member of an all female vocal ensemble. One semester, after hearing their concert of Britten’s \textit{Ceremony of Carols}, he decided to arrange a choral piece for four part women’s voices. He found that arranging music was something he enjoyed, and he would often transform familiar hymns into solos for voice and piano or for small ensemble. Exposed to the music traditions of a conservative Southern Baptist church, he learned the power of words combined with the power of music. He felt fervor when singing the strength of church music, and experienced a similar connection later in life when he sang songs by Schubert and Fauré. Although their music did not possess the religious overtones, the setting of the

\textsuperscript{2} Kodaly is an approach to music education, developed in the mid-twentieth century to make music reading more accessible to children and to promote musical literacy.
text and its relationship to the music had a similar influence and emotional connection for him.

In 1974 Smith entered Baylor University as a solo piano major with a voice minor. His career goal at that time was to become the next Vladimir Horowitz, an internationally renowned concert pianist. Smith’s applied piano teacher was Jane Abbott-Kirk, who would become one of his life long mentors and confidants. She taught him “so much about touch and tone and how to create the most beautiful sounds,” possible. Still to this day he will call her:

When I have a pianist who is spectacular and has just totally blown me away in the most heart moving soul stirring way, I call Jane and I tell her, you won’t believe what just happened in my studio.

Though he felt tremendous admiration and gratitude for her, Smith’s solo piano endeavors were continually rerouted toward collaborative artistry as his love of accompanying and composing increased through these early college years.

Smith enrolled in his first formal composition class at Baylor in his junior year. He was given the choice between an elective in conducting or composition. “I guess I didn’t want to waggle a stick around, so I decided to compose.” Smith identified Professor John Gibson, as one of his most influential mentors, though their interactions were brief, having just one semester together. Professor Gibson was a former student of famed composer Arthur Honegger, who was one of the founding members of the Parisian-based Les Six\(^3\). While Gibson’s assignments were fairly open-ended, he instructed the students to explore music making by composing pieces for their own instruments. Smith

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\(^3\) *Les Six* was a Parisian based consortium of composers whose music sought to oppose Impressionism and Wagnerianism. The members included: Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc and Germaine Tailleferre.
wrote simple songs for voice and piano and Professor Gibson would return each composition with kind words of encouragement and high marks. Looking back, though, Smith admitted they weren’t particularly good but he was grateful for the encouragement that gave him the confidence to continue to pursue composition.

Smith also studied voice while at Baylor, and his teacher, Professor John McFadden, was another one of his greatest mentors. Smith and McFadden shared a love of German Lieder, and this uniting thread was the inspiration behind one of Smith’s earliest song cycle compositions for voice and piano, *Fünf Gesänge*, five songs. This cycle included poetry taken from Goethe and Gurst. The outcome emulated the lush sounds of Strauss and Wagner. At that young compositional age, Smith felt that he “over composed.” He said, “the piano parts were huge and beautiful, and the vocal part was huge, and beautiful,” but at that point he didn’t have an awareness “of when my writing would help illuminate the words and when I needed to get out of the way.” Even so McFadden found the songs to be very pretty and enjoyed singing them. He agreed to record them for Smith on a reel to reel and Smith still has that recording today.

Though Smith was only required to study private voice for two years to fulfill his voice minor, he maintained a collaborative association with McFadden by continuing to play in his studio for other student lessons. He absorbed a tremendous knowledge of the voice and artistry from this observer’s perspective, which continued to fuel his enthusiasm for collaboration and better prepare him for a career as a vocal coach.

In his senior year at Baylor, Smith decided to take a leave of absence from his studies. Something just told him he needed to get away for a time before returning to complete his degree. This experience was one of many in his life, that by following his
instincts, he arrived at the right place. He was hired to tour with a Texas based all-male Christian singing group. He did a great deal of arranging for them and felt the time off served him well. It recharged him to return to Baylor and complete his Bachelors degree. He decided to continue directly into the Masters Degree program in piano performance, at Baylor University.

As a Master’s student at Baylor, Smith was given a graduate assistantship appointment with the Opera Department. He was the rehearsal pianist, coach, and accompanist for the productions, which included opera scenes and a major opera every semester. Though the program was under funded, a large effort was made to provide a quality training environment for the students. “We’d meet in the warehouses that no one else wanted because it was full of cockroaches…and they would paint an old refrigerator box and make it look like a trellis in a Spanish garden!” However, the low budgets did not detract from the educational experience and the opportunity to learn repertoire from the opera canon.

During this period in his life Smith suffered a crisis of conscience about what his future was truly meant to hold. In younger years, he dreamt of being a solo concert pianist, but now he questioned whether the road to being Horowitz was even possible and if, in fact, he wanted that life. He was focusing more time and attention on opera and collaborating than he was on his solo work. Though she was supportive of his collaborative pursuits, Professor Abbott-Kirk became increasingly frustrated that he spent a majority of his time “playing for another oboe recital,” which greatly interfered with his solo playing. As a degree requirement, Smith needed to present two full-length solo piano recitals, but he asked permission to substitute his accompaniment of *Pirates of*
Penzance for one of his required concerts. It became clear to him that his heart was drawn far more toward making music in collaboration with others than just sitting alone at the keyboard.

After graduating with his Masters in 1981, Smith accepted a teaching position at a small school named Howard Payne University, approximately an hour and half from Baylor. There he taught solo piano and diction and was the musical director for the opera. He really thought that he’d probably retire there, but after spending five years teaching once again a fated event changed the course of his future. He received a phone call from a friend, soprano Cheryl Parrish, who was a resident artist with Western Opera Theatre. They had recently had a pianist drop out of their tour, and needed to find a replacement. Western Opera Theatre toured throughout the Northwest, and traveled on buses performing “Opera to Go” style with stored costumes and scenery. They offered Smith a month long accompanist position, for which he took a leave of absence from Howard Payne. The experience was remarkable and invigorated Smith’s love of opera and working with a higher level of talent. A young Deborah Voigt (internationally famed dramatic soprano) and Tracy Dahl (coloratura soprano) were among the resident artists that Smith worked with during this excursion. Throughout the tour people kept asking where he was based and none of them had ever heard of tiny little Howard Payne University. The consensus was that he needed to go to New York, that he was far too talented to waste it where no one would hear him.

Smith was not convinced that New York City would suit him, so he began looking for other possible options that would provide him with continued development and higher visibility. Dr. Karen Peeler was on the voice faculty at Baylor and had been a
strong advocate for Smith during his time there. They collaborated on several recitals, including one in her hometown of Jonesboro, Arkansas. She was the first person to suggest that he pursue a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in accompanying, and Smith credits her with being the catalyst which began his next initiative. In 1985 there were only a handful of schools offering this degree, but the reputation of Dr. Martin Katz at The University of Michigan was exemplary and Smith had heard recordings of Katz’s playing and felt that this was where he was meant to go. He admitted that, “I was much less interested in getting a doctorate than I was in studying with Martin Katz.” When Smith auditioned for the program, Katz said “you would be perfect fodder for my program, but I don’t know what I’ll teach you!” At his audition Smith was accepted on the spot and was offered a full scholarship.

In 1986, Smith entered the University of Michigan and finally for the first time he felt all the threads of his talents, passions, and preparations were coming together. His major was accompanying and his past experiences with vocal study, languages, and his love of making music with others were now converging into the career design Smith had always envisioned. Katz was indeed wrong about not having anything to teach Smith:

I learned tons from him, one of the things he helped me identify, is why I was already good at collaborating, and what was already good about it. Because honestly I didn’t know. [I] heard things like “you breathe well with a singer.” And I know I did, because I was a singer, but he helped me know why that worked mechanically and acoustically. That sounds boring, it wasn’t boring when I learned it from him, it was fascinating. [He taught me about] balance issues, he helped me know how I was already good at that and where I needed to be better at it… So I just learned tons from him, repertoire, style, and he is very strong on languages and diction, and so he really just made me do all of those things to the n°th degree.
Smith completed his DMA degree in three years. The third year he actually spent at Baylor, having been asked to fill in on the faculty for a year. He agreed because Henry Butler was hired as the stage director that season, and Smith didn’t want to pass up the opportunity to work with the famed actor who was in *The Adam’s Chronicles*, a 1976 mini series.

After completing his degree he applied for a faculty vacancy at the University of Southern California (USC). In 1989, Smith was hired as Professor of Keyboard Studies as the successor to Gwedolyn Koldofsky, who was known for initiating the concept of collaborative artistry as a study in the United States. Her teaching career at USC spanned over 40 years and Martin Katz was among her students. This appointment was an amazing accomplishment for Smith and he has maintained this position for twenty years. He is now the Chair of Keyboard Studies and the Director of Keyboard Collaborative Arts primarily teaching graduate level pianists. His studio, comprised of 12 to 15 masters and doctoral level majors serves to teach the craft of collaborative piano, as well as solo piano. In addition to the applied instruction, Smith has also designed a course in Song Interpretation. Designed as a graduate level joint offering for six singers and six pianists, the course explores the interpretation of the text and music so that both performers understand a deeper level of expression.

The same year that Smith began his faculty seat at USC he was also hired to the piano faculty at the Tanglewood Music Center in Lenox, Massachusetts. Tanglewood is an annual summer music program for young artists, specifically for emerging professional musicians to gain exposure and participate in master classes and workshops. The music center is a subset of the larger Tanglewood Music Festival, which is an annual
outdoor summer concert series and summer residency of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Founded in 1940, its sprawling 210 acres have hosted some of the world’s greatest musicians and singers. In 2001, James Levine (former conductor of the Metropolitan Opera in New York City) took directorship of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He conducts concerts and operas during the festival season, and works with fellowship recipients in the conducting program. Tanglewood is a highly sought after program for emerging professional artists, as the opportunity to work with Maestro Levine is unparalleled in the field of opera. Smith is currently full time on the voice faculty serving as coach to the select voice fellows that are accepted each year. He is also the coordinator of the piano program which is a half time appointment, which allows him to train emerging keyboard artists to be more successful collaborators.

COMPOSITIONAL STYLE AND INFLUENCES

Smith’s music is grounded in tonal beauty, and he approaches everything he writes with that intention. “I am a composer who happens to believe in tonal music; that not everything has necessarily been said that can be said. And there are infinite ways of putting together all of those twelve tones and it can be beautiful.” This is not to say that his music is never dissonant, but his intention is to always create beauty. One of his colleagues at Tanglewood, Phyllis Curtain⁴ was once working with a composer during

⁴ Phyllis Curtain is an internationally renowned soprano, known for her illustrious career spanning over 25 years. She performed at New York City Opera, The Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, and The Teatro Colon.
the summer festival. After listening to his composition, which was fraught with intensely
dissonant chords and strong angular movement she asked him, “Do you ever just think of
beauty?” This question really struck Smith, and made him realize that this idea of beauty
was one of the core requirements of his own music. Though he had been writing for
quite sometime he had never before realized how truly important it was to him.

His writing is emotive and, even when dissonant, it intends to signify the
emotional depths of the human soul. Smith has many composers who have influenced
his unique compositional voice, and they include: Samuel Barber, Aaron Copland,
Richard Strauss, Hugo Wolf, Gabriel Fauré, and Claude Debussy. Though these primary
influences span different eras, continents and native languages, there are two common
elements shared by their work that were formative for Smith. The first was their ability
to set their native language in a way that made the text communicative and able to be
delivered in a vocal registration that supported the clarity of the text. The second was
the ability to write with the utmost aural beauty. Smith says:

    Samuel Barber songs I just adore, as someone who writes in American English.
    Aaron Copland, also… Samuel Barber just has an ability to capture the overall
color of a poem and then [he] sets the words just specifically and the voice
exactly where you need it and the piano accompaniments are so beautiful.
    Copland, similarly, like in the Dickenson songs\(^5\), has the same gift. Of course
there are [examples] in any language that I can think of, there’s Strauss in the
German language repertoire, and Wolf is the total pinnacle of perfect word
setting. In French I adore Fauré, Debussy…

Smith certainly utilized several compositional liberties that are evocative of Samuel
Barber’s *Hermit Songs* in *Vignettes: Ellis Island*. He intentionally omitted key signatures

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and is best known for creating the title role in Floyd’s *Susannah*. She is currently Professor Emerita at
Boston University’s Opera Institute and Artist-In-Residence at the Tanglewood Music Center.
\(^5\) A song cycle composed in 1950 which set 12 poems of Emily Dickenson, written by American composer
Aaron Copland.
and time signatures in various places to give more flexibility and freedom to the structure of the work. This is an aspect of his compositional style that has evolved over the years.

Sometimes I don’t even write a key signature because it’s not so important to me. I was very aware of it when I was writing, before writing Vignettes, because I thought well I needed a key center, and I needed a key signature. But now I am more willing and ready to NOT put a key signature at all and just put in the accidental in whatever measure that it calls for, because it allows me the freedom of going anywhere I want to tonally.

Smith also found that by omitting time signatures in occasional places, the artistry and mechanical proficiency of the singer and pianist were improved, and the listener awakened. “It’s like; if notes are cows then you remove the fences and the cows can go wherever they want!” He had two intentions with using flexible meter; the first was that no constant time signature could provide the opportunity for notes to bunch up at the bar line, allowing the listener to realize “oh this is a new thing!” Secondly, it required that the pianist and singer pay attention and not get complacent with an expected metered bar.

In pointing to Richard Strauss specifically as a compositional modal, Smith commented:

[I look] for two things: One is the beautiful way they set the words and also the aural beauty is very important to me, just the sound. This is one of the things about Strauss that appeals to me is that not only does he set words well, for the most part, but just the harmonies and the textures are so beautiful, so rich.

Though Smith was greatly influenced by various composers, he always tried to keep his own unique imprint in his music. As an undergraduate when he composed Fünf Gesänge, he was trying to copy a representative German sound. Though his voice could still be identified, these pieces were heavily influenced by the dramatic, richly textured music of Strauss and Wagner. Following that period in his compositional development he then decided he didn’t want his music to sound like anyone else. He recounted, “in
Poulenc you can hear three chords and it can be two miles away, but if you hear those three chords, you know exactly that it’s Poulenc.” That was his goal- to have a sound that was identifiably his own. There were certain harmonic devices that he used frequently, though not always purposefully, that began to firm up his identifiable sound. Smith always had an affinity for stacked fourths; they brought just a hint of dissonance to the harmonic texture, without being too incredibly dissonant. Another device he utilized commonly was chordal planing, a sequential movement of chords that were spelled with identical intervals, but moved down in succession by half or whole step. This implement allowed him to modulate easily between keys without being pinned into one set tonality. Another characteristic of Smith’s music is the appearance of the raised fourth scale degree. He expressed that this alteration creates a shimmer to the tonal color that he just loves. As his writing became more sophisticated Smith devised harmonic textures around bi-tonal chording. This meant that the notes in the right hand would be in one key while the left hand in another, adding to the complexity of the sound. Even from listening to his early compositions hints of these elements existed. His compositional voice has continued to grow stronger through the years.

A common thread consistent throughout Smith’s compositions is that he writes his music for specific people and for someone for whom he has a deep affection or admiration. For this reason Smith never struggled to compose the way some others do. The inspiration was so deeply connected to his love of his subject that the music just came to him. “It’s more like taking dictation than it is making something up…I don’t just compose theoretically. I almost always write for a person that I know, for a voice that I know well, for a spirit I know well and usually for someone that I love a lot,” Smith
described. Though the inspiration came easily, the process of writing nevertheless could be grueling. He would begin composing and work straight through until it was finished or until he required food or sleep:

Once I get going, I just keep going and going and going. Often when I’m composing, I don’t stop to eat, I don’t stop to take a shower. I’ll be up till three or five in the morning and then I sleep for a few hours, then I go back to it. I don’t shave, I’m in my bathrobe and it wouldn’t be a pleasant time to see me because I’m not very nice looking. I have very little awareness of time.

Smith composed *Vignettes: Ellis Island* in just one week, an unbelievable feat, considering that the cycle is comprised of twenty six separate songs. Equally fascinating is that he wrote the set completely sequentially without having previously sketched out how the songs would flow, or what type of style diversity he wanted to use. What he created truly verges on genius, as the forty-five minute set switches easily between song genres, moods, and tempos while evoking nationalistic identities from the twenty one immigrants highlighted in the cycle. Likely his subconscious was in the planning process while he was selecting the texts for this cycle, because he discussed his intentions for creating a well-rounded cohesive set:

I think about contrast from song to song. I want there to be contrast, in dynamics, in tempo, so then an audience is having some sort of journey. Making a song cycle for me is kind of like planning a meal, you want salad, you want meat, and you want carbs, and you want something really good for dessert. So I [do] think of that while I’m planning it. And it happens a lot in *Ellis Island*. I think there is really something that keeps the ear alive.

When selecting texts for his work, Smith looks for things that are emotional first and rational second. The words need to have a very strong personal connection and need to say something that moves him. It is vital to him that the language be clear and understandable so that he may be as honest with the message as possible. For this reason
Smith has only ventured to write one cycle of songs in a language other than English. In his native tongue he can be clearest and most honest with the text. “My goal is to be honest. Musically honest, textually honest, emotionally honest.” Especially within *Vignettes: Ellis Island*, Smith felt a responsibility to the immigrants who spoke those words and whose stories were being given a voice by his music. For him the word setting must mimic the natural language stresses and non-stresses so that the words are delivered in a natural manner, and the melody doesn’t distract from their meaning. Smith organizes his melodies so that the rhythmic stress and arrival points are congruent with the strong stressed syllables in the words and vice-versa for the non-stressed syllables. Smith confessed though, “from time to time, in a 30 minute cycle for instance, maybe in two or three or four places I’ll set the words a little bit so that the stress is not [as expected]…, that it works against the words sometimes, because I find that it perks up the brain of the listener just a little bit.”

Smith’s music also takes into account the fundamental practicalities of music making. Having studied voice for a time, his awareness of registration and breath management are key elements to creating lines that can be delivered in musical and practical ways. Similarly, the piano parts are written particularly designed to go easily under the hand. Not that his accompaniments are easy but they are written in a way that feels natural to pianists. For this reason, performers find his music to be very accessible.

Though the majority of his compositions are for voice and piano, he has also written solo works for violin and blended instruments incorporating cello, viola, and oboe together with voice and piano. Smith was commissioned by Dr. Karen Peeler to write *Four Folksongs: four arrangements for soprano, viola and piano*, and these are currently
his only published works and can be found through Alfred Publishers. Most recently
Smith was commissioned by Music Accord for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln
Center to write a piano trio with violin, cello and mezzo-soprano. It is another series
based on historic testimonies, called *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*. This cycle
describes the daily life of a single frontierswoman, Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, from her
1850 travels across the open plains. The texts are drawn from her daily journal and much
like the *Vignettes: Ellis Island* are very personal and express genuine human struggle.
Appendix A contains a complete listing of Alan Louis Smith’s compositions.
Photograph 2.1: (left) Smith in a publicity photo for piano collaboration

Photograph 2.2: (right) Smith in a publicity photo for conducting
CHAPTER 3

VIGNETTES: ELLIS ISLAND,
ORIGINS OF THE CYCLE AND PERFORMANCE HISTORY

An inscription found on the first page of *Vignettes: Ellis Island* reads:

This song cycle was actually the brainchild of Paul Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Ellis Island Oral History Project. In 1997, he sent me a large number of excerpts from interviews he had conducted with persons who had passed through Ellis Island on their immigrations to America. He specifically chose excerpts in which “the use of language, narrative description or emotional content” struck him “as being inherently musical in some way.” He selected specific quotes with music in mind.

I selected and ordered passages from the excerpts so that they tell a progressive story from the preparation to leave for America through settlement in the United States. Since the excerpts are taken from the lives of many individual, the journey of the cycle like the journey of the immigrants, tells a collective tale appropriate to America’s “melting pot.”

The songs were written for mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe and were originally intended to be sung all by one voice; however, the songs could be divided between or among singers in several ways.

Alan Louis Smith
Pasadena, California
June 1999

The series of events that led to the unexpected collaboration between Alan Louis Smith and Paul Sigrist were quite serendipitous. The pair crossed paths merely by chance as a result of a common acquaintance, but the road that led to their successful collaboration began long before their chance meeting.
In 1989 Paul Sigrist moved to New York City, with his partner Todd Sisley, to accept a job with the National Parks Service (NPS). The position was intended as a three month temporary appointment to catalogue and identify historical furniture that was being stored in the abandoned buildings on Ellis Island. The immigration center had closed in 1954 and the abandoned buildings and storage had been left untouched for decades. Sigrist’s charge was to inspect the neglected antiquities and catalogue them for the Park’s Service archive. After three months, the budget for this project was expended, and Sigrist’s position was slated for termination. However, impressed by his work, his boss looked for someway to keep him on staff. There was a pool of money set aside by the NPS to organize an old venture called the Oral History Project, and Sigrist, having a background in American Studies and American civilization, seemed the ideal candidate.

In the 1970s a park ranger by the name of Margo Nash initiated a project to record oral histories of visitors that stopped at the Statue of Liberty monument. At this time the Ellis Island Immigration Museum was not yet in existence, and the Statue of Liberty, though a visitor destination, was in severe need of restoration. As a result, the NPS had no way of funding an oral history enterprise. Nash, functioning rather as a rogue operative, brought a personal tape recorder with her to work and approached people she saw, who were either crying or emotionally affected at the Statue. Having no script or agenda, she conducted impromptu interviews and captured what would become the start of the official Oral History Project. She continued her project throughout the 1970s, but after she left the Parks Service, her recordings, which for the most part were not transcribed, were stored away in boxes.
In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan asked Lee Iacocca, Chairman of the Chrysler Corporation, to spear head a project to raise privatized funds to restore the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. The Statue of Liberty--Ellis Island Foundation was created and raised over $160 million to complete the restoration and renovation of both the Statue and Ellis Island. Additional funds were also slated to offset the operational costs of the proposed immigration museum at Ellis Island, which finally opened in 1991.

With new funding, a second attempt to organize the Oral History Project was begun in the mid-1980s. This second phase of the Oral History Project became known as the AKRF interviews, which were intended to raise the profile of the project. These interviews were used extensively by the Statue of Liberty--Ellis Island Foundation for promotional endeavors, and eventually would become part of the museum’s audio experience exhibit. In one room of the museum there are a series of phones. Visitors are able to hear sound clips of the recorded voices that were excerpted from this series of interviews. They are still used in that capacity today.

Sigrist began his new post as the Director of the Oral History Project in 1989, and his efforts, along with his colleagues, would create Phase Three of the project. This effort sought to transform the previous initiatives from under funded and forgotten proposals into a world class, internationally famous Oral History Project.

One of the first strategies that Sigrist employed was a systematic approach to find interview candidates. He created a survey form that was distributed to visitors at the Statue and also sent them to nursing homes and senior communities that housed residents of the same heritage as immigrants that came through the island. He recalled when the first forms were returned:
I remember being so excited “OH MY GOD! Someone sent them back!!” And by spring of 1990, they started coming back, and I finally had something to work with. By the spring of 1990 we actually could start doing interviews.

Once the forms were returned to Sigrist, he would evaluate them for story content and completeness of memory. He tried to identify individuals that could still give a descriptive account of their experience. Since the high point of immigration at Ellis Island occurred in the early twentieth century, the mean age of interviewees in 1990 was around 80 years old.

Once an interview candidate was selected s/he was contacted about setting up an interview time and location. Interviews took place both at Ellis Island and in the homes of the participants. When Sigrist traveled to homes to conduct the interviews, he would tote portable recording equipment and was accompanied by the island photographer as well as an occasional student intern. Each interview lasted between thirty and sixty minutes and were largely unscripted. Sigrist would note on the recording who was present during the taping, who was running the audio equipment, and where it was taking place.

Once the interviews were taped they were transcribed and archived in the Oral History library at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. Now housing nearly 2000 interviews, the collection is world renowned, and historians from Europe have based their oral history libraries on the American design.

The Oral History department would occasionally get requests from various sources for sound bites or quotes that would aid in fundraising, marketing, or random associations to Ellis Island. Sometimes requests would specify quotes about the kitchen food on the Island, or other times about the inspections. Sigrist began sorting and collecting excerpts so that each time a request was made, they were conveniently available. Sigrist, being a
music enthusiast and part time performer, would select quotes that had a poetic or musical quality to them, with the thought that perhaps someday they might make a worthy subject for composition or dramatic performing. This would be an important effort in the months that led up to the collaborative efforts of the historian and the composer.

While Smith was completing his degree at the University of Michigan he became friends with a pianist named Todd Sisley, who was working on his Masters degree at the same time. After graduation Sisley moved to New Jersey but still maintained his friendship with Smith. In 1997 Smith was on a trip to New York and decided to visit his friend. The two were considering a sightseeing agenda, when Smith revealed that he had never seen the Statue of Liberty or Ellis Island. Sisley immediately said “let’s go to Ellis Island, if you’ve never seen it, you’ll love it!” Smith recalled:

I’d never seen the Statue of Liberty, and so we took the ferry [out to the island] ..Because Paul was working there we got to see some insides of it and go to the room where you listen to the tapes of the interviews. I was really undone by going there because I imagined that I could sense something of the people that had gone through there. There is that exhibit where you see their suitcases piled high, and that is the same exhibit where they have things that were left behind at Ellis Island. The rooms have quotes around the tops of the walls and the computer rooms, that giant hall…you go into the rooms where they may have slept overnight or where the medical examinations were. It really was so gripping to me because this was an actual place where people actually came. Then when you read that some of them were sent back. And one of the songs in [Vignettes:] Ellis Island where the lady died on the boat, it brought those things home to me. It made them real to me. To be in that space was a sacred moment in my life.
Obviously affected by his experience, Smith returned to California with what he assumed were just profound memories. About a month after his visit he received a packet in the mail from Paul Sigrist. The packet contained 30 typed pages of quotations from the Oral History Project interviews. Additionally, Sigrist included a personal note explaining that the quotations were chosen for their “inherently musical” tone and Sigrist hoped they might serve as inspiration for future musical compositions. While Smith was moved by the gift, he didn’t quite know what to do with the material. He tucked them carefully away in a drawer in his nightstand for safe keeping.
Vignettes: Ellis Island and Stephanie Blythe

Alan Smith first encountered Stephanie Blythe at an audition for Tanglewood in 1993, she was 24 years old, and her career had not yet launched onto the international operatic stage. As her voice filled the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, she made an immediate impression on him. She sang “Men of Verchivi” by John Duke and Smith remembered, “[she] blew me away! Not only the sound of the voice which was very impressive, but just a total understanding of the text. I wrote on my pad...‘THIS IS IT!’” Blythe was accepted as a fellow at Tanglewood for the next two years and the two of them developed a friendship that was built on mutual respect and a love of collaborative music making. Though there was a difference of age, and though he was a teacher and she a student, the bond that their souls made was undeniable. Their platonic friendship was kept strong by an ongoing correspondence that they maintained through the years. Their friendship began before the internet’s convenient email trend; therefore letters and cards were hand written and sent through the postal mail to keep each other appraised of their activities and pursuits. Blythe lived on the east coast and Smith the west, so they saw each other infrequently, but they made an effort to see each other when possible. Ever a support to her, Smith was in the audience on the evening that she won the Metropolitan Opera Council National Competition in 1996. Reciprocally she would visit during the summers when Smith was at Tanglewood.

In 1999, Blythe was approaching an “important” birthday, her thirtieth, and Smith had been looking for a text to set as a musical gift. In his mind he imagined one song, something charming that would mean something to her, but not necessarily something that
she would perform in recital for years to come. He remembered the package sent years before by Sigrist and went to his bedside drawer. Finally the inspiration hit him. He took the pages out and began reading the quotations and starred ones that made a strong impression. His original intention was just to set one song, but he continued marking until he had dozens of texts to choose from. He knew he needed to narrow down the list, so he started cutting out strips of his favorite quotes and laying them on every flat surface in his apartment. He thought that by seeing them, he’d be able to ruminate on ones which called out to him most strongly:

After that point, I can’t really say I did anything except follow the instincts that came to me. Partly I had said, I know it sounds a little bit spooky, partly these people were calling out because they still needed a voice.

Smith then explained how the texts took form into a cycle:

I began to notice that these [strips] were from [when the immigrants were] in Europe, and these were in the harbor, these are on the island. So I started taping them onto pieces of paper and putting them in the same pile. So that happened really kind of by accident. They ordered themselves really.

On June 3rd 1999, Smith went to work setting the 25 texts to music. He worked for seven straight days and emerged on June 10th with his completed cycle, *Vignettes: Ellis Island*.

It arrived as a complete surprise, Blythe recalls:

I was just sitting at home in Manhattan around the time of my 30th birthday, when a package arrived from Alan- inside was his birthday gift to me- a song cycle that would become a major part of my performing career. The words and music spoke to me instantly, but it wasn’t until a month or so later when I saw Alan at the Tanglewood Festival, that I would first sing through the songs with Alan. I will never forget that evening with him- reading through those songs and first discovering how they each felt in my heart and my voice.
A PERFORMANCE HISTORY OF VIGNETTES: ELLIS ISLAND

On February 24, 2000 Smith and Blythe presented the world premiere of Vignettes: Ellis Island at a concert at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. Since that inaugural performance, Blythe has incorporated the cycle into at least a dozen recital programs.

Vignettes: Ellis Island received its New York debut on January 21, 2001. Blythe and Warren Jones, premiered the work at New York’s famed 92nd Street Y. It received rave reviews and in the audience was the editor of Opera News Magazine, F. Paul Driscoll. He pitched the idea to record the songs for a New York public television station in a documentary style short film. Thrilled with the opportunity to further share Smith’s music, Blythe and Jones enthusiastically agreed.

In November 2003 the documentary film was recorded and began with an interview with Smith, and then Blythe and Jones performed the cycle in a semi-staged studio theater. In 2004 this recording was placed in the permanent collection of the Museum of Television and Radio in New York City.
In September 2007, Blythe and Jones were invited to perform *Ellis Island* in the season opening concert for the Chamber Music Society of New York. The concert was promoting Smith’s newest commission *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, which was written also for Blythe and Jones and was slated for performance later in the concert season.

**ALTERNATIVE PERFORMANCE OPTIONS**

Smith indicates in the score that though this work was originally intended to be “sung all by one voice; the songs could be divided between or among multiple singers.” In fact three such attempts have been made to adapt the cycle to accommodate opera workshop settings.

The first venture was performed at Tanglewood Music Center where Smith selected six singers and six collaborative pianists to perform the work. It was a semi-staged production that aimed to teach the Tanglewood Fellows the collaborative art for
which the cycle was written. Smith adapted ten of the original songs into higher keys to accommodate the range of singers performing the cycle. Six of the transpositions are from the women titled songs (Anna no. 3, Clara no. 6, Elizabeth no. 13, Martha no. 17, Irena no. 20, Anna no. 25) and four from the men’s (Angelo no. 9, Max S. no. 16, Max S. no. 21, Morris no. 22). Only a handful of the texts contain gender specific language beyond their titles and therefore may not need to be sung specifically by one gender or the other.

There was a woman in the audience at the Tanglewood concert who approached Smith about getting a copy of Vignettes: Ellis Island. She was affiliated with the University of New Hampshire (UNH), and hoped to perform them in concert. Smith obliged and the next summer she returned to coach the songs with him prior to her performance at the University of New Hampshire. David Ripley, who is the Director of Opera Workshop at UNH, was in attendance at her recital and was very moved by the song cycle. He contacted Smith to request permission to have them orchestrated for his opera workshop program. Michael Annicchiarico, Professor of Composition at UNH agreed to adapt the songs for orchestral accompaniment. This process took several years to complete but finally in April 2007, the cycle was presented in a fully staged performance with a cast of 22.

Smith did not participate in the orchestral translation for this program and therefore requested that once the performance had finished that Annicchiarico’s version not be distributed or performed again. Smith wanted to have more artistic input into an orchestrated version, and thought that perhaps in the future he’d explore more options in this regard.
Lastly, Smith authorized the voice department at the University of California, Irvine to perform the cycle with twelve singers and one pianist. Smith gave a pre-performance lecture where he addressed an audience of “non-musicians, or anyone related to classical music”, to express that his music was tonal and easy to enjoy. In his southern charm and Texan drawl he simply stated: “You don’t need to worry because my music is purdy, I write purdy music!”
CHAPTER 4

Examination Of Vignettes: Ellis Island

The final offering in this document is a performer’s guide meant to provide interpretive insight for the song cycle. This guide was formed from the collective perspectives of the author, the composer, and the singer who premiered them and for whom the work was written. The original composition is laid out in five distinct sets which are book ended by a Prologue and an Epilogue. Each set is grouped by a theme which represents a part of the immigrant’s journey to America. The index as it appears in the original score is labeled:

PROLOGUE

I. PREPARING TO LEAVE FOR AMERICA
   Emma
   Anna
   Manny
   Martha
   Clara

II. BOARDING THE SHIP
   Theresa
   Kaj
   Angelo

III. ON THE SHIP
   Max M.
   Mary
   Regina
   Elizabeth

IV. IN THE HARBOR
   Dora
   Estelle
   Max S.
   Martha

V. ON THE ISLAND
   Kaj
   Allan
   Irena
   Max Schnapp

VI. IN AMERICA
   Morris
   Jack
   Catherine
   Anna

EPILOGUE
   Anna

42
When Smith was titling the songs, he debated using quotations from the text, but decided that the personal nature of the words called for identifying each song with just the first name of the immigrant. Two exceptions are noted; first, the cycle contains two immigrants named Max and therefore the first initial of their last name is also used to distinguish them. Secondly, Max Schnapp’s full name is used in set five, because the song contains a reference to his last name. Several of the songs have identical titles due to multiple texts borrowed from the same immigrant. To avoid confusion the author will refer to each of the twenty-six songs by numbers 1 through 26. This numbering convention was not used by the composer, and should be recognized only as a convenient method to differentiate the songs, as it pertains to this document. Additionally, the author will number the measures in each song sequentially, one through the end of each individual piece. This will allow for clear reference of specific musical material.

The cycle was specifically written for the mezzo-soprano voice; however Smith transposed nine of the twenty-six songs into higher keys. The next section will individually discuss each piece and where a transposition exists it will be specified. Since the score is yet to be published, the musical samples in the following pages are taken from a photocopied score provided by the composer. A complete list of musical examples can be found in the front of this document, on page vii and will be referenced by the numbering convention discussed above. Smith originally wrote these pieces by hand on manuscript paper and later hired Mark Armstrong, a friend of Blythe’s to format and typeset the cycle with the software package Finale®.
1. PROLOGUE

Text: Humming or “oo”

Range: C4 - D5

Tempo Marking: Simple, dreamlike $\downarrow=42$

Smith wanted the voice to be the first thing heard, so that an immediate connection to the human spirit would be felt by the audience. The voice both begins and finishes the cycle with an exposed and vulnerable acappella melody which sets the intimate tone. His music’s purpose was to illuminate these true stories, giving the immigrants a voice to share their experiences. As shown in Musical Example 4.1, the cycle begins with a simple haunting lullaby that hangs starkly unaccompanied for the first seven notes. Reminiscent of the Brahms’ lullaby, Smith crafted his motive, which appears repeatedly within the cycle, around a falling minor third. Smith explained that the minor third is a universally significant interval that is a natural part of the harmonic systems of nearly all musical cultures of the world. This phenomenon has been studied extensively by musicologists and ethnomusicologists, who have discovered an aural consistency which exists even within our everyday tonal utterances. The sound of someone calling out, “yoo-hoo” or the tones of a doorbell, both represent the commonality and frequency with which our western tonal culture has adapted this interval. Smith wanted to represent a symbolic unification of the multicultural experience of immigrants and felt this was an appropriate application of this musical singularity.
Musical Example 4.1 “Prologue”, mm. 1-4, demonstrates the central lullaby theme in the vocal line, this theme returns throughout the cycle. Smith’s utilization of open fourths and the half step chordal planing can also be seen in the accompaniment. The cycle will continue to reference that half step pull relationship.

The piano enters in the third bar layering the vocal line with subtle dissonance. Strongly identifying Smith’s affinity for fourth-derived chordal harmonies, he introduces a leit motif of half step planing, which reappears in song thirteen, Elizabeth. This mild dissonance is meant to evoke a dreamlike state, which hints at apprehension and is contrasted with the legato calm of the vocal line.

Rhythmically the composer alternates every other bar between 6/8 and 9/8 allowing the accompaniment to intrude upon the serenity of the lullaby. The 9/8 bar serves to add a longer stretch of time to linger on the interruption, however the vocal line entrances come unexpectedly early. The metric scope of the prologue seems unsettled and represents the journey to come.

The melody should be sung with extreme legato and connection to create a seamless line of undisrupted sound. The composer chose the [u] vowel for its richer timbre in the in mezzo voice, though the score indicates humming is also an option.

The unexplained musical phenomenon of the falling minor third is similar to an unexplained phenomenon in the physical science realm; that of the Golden Mean (also known as The Golden Ratio). The Golden Ratio is a mathematical occurrence that
establishes ideal proportions for an object in nature, whereas the regularity of the intervallic sequence creates a pattern which defines a standard for aesthetic perfection. In nature, these mathematics are translated into swirl patterns which can be witnessed in flowers, sea shells, hurricanes or galaxies. Photograph 4.1 demonstrates the occurrence of the pattern within the natural world. A trend among twentieth century composers was to design an architecture plan for their compositions that set the climax at the point of the Golden Mean. Smith discussed that though he did not use this device in *Ellis Island*, he has utilized it in other compositions, specifically *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*.

![Photograph 4.1](image.png)

*Photograph 4.1* Photo collage demonstrating the natural swirl patterns found in nature on shells, galaxies, hurricanes and pinecones. The intervallic pattern is related to the Golden Ratio.

## I. PREPARING TO LEAVE FOR AMERICA

### 2. Emma Schmid Schawarz, born 1907, emigrated from Germany in 1926, age 18.

**Text:** *The morning that I left, my mother was already sitting on my bed at five o’clock, telling me to be always nice and decent, clean and do the right thing. Work hard, as good as you can, the best is not too much. And she says, “Always see to it that people look up to you, not down to you. And be a good worker…” And my mother always kept saying, “I know I’ll always have you. You are my youngest. I’ll always have you with me.” And it didn’t happen. I was the one that left, that went away the furthest.*

**Range:** C4 - E5

**Tempo Marking:** $\frac{\text{♩}}{} = 140$
This song actually begins in the last bar of the prologue, where the repeated Ds in the piano right hand represent the clock strokes for Emma’s 5:00 AM wake up call. Her mother is imparting last minute advice and is delivering directions in a forthright and matter-of-fact way. Smith was adamant that the speech be approached with a natural inflection of stress and non-stress, and shouldn’t be over sung. At measure 30 (“and be a good worker”) the line is almost an afterthought, and suddenly unaccompanied, as if the thought just occurred to her, and there wasn’t time for the pianist to provide accompaniment there. In measure 38, the singer is finally given permission to open up and stretch the line with a tenuto marking above the word “always”. Smith said, “Sing it like you’re singing Adriana Lecouvreur.”

The mixed meter and syncopated rhythm are intended to create a sense of bustle and urgency, and evoke the final packing and preparation for Emma’s journey. It should be noted that the articulation in the piano is largely in opposition to that of the voice. The piano has staccato markings throughout, while the vocal line is given full note values and often stress marks. With the 5/8 meter and the opposing articulations, it can be difficult to coordinate the two parts, however if a strong sense of downbeat can be felt, the eighth note pick-ups spring into the measure with a natural feel. Smith is extremely specific in his directives for both the keyboard and the voice, and by following his guide map the artistry reveals itself.
Musical Example 4.2 “Emma” mm.21-30. Demonstrating the articulation difference between the vocal line and the accompaniment, where eighth note pick-ups disrupt the grounded feeling of the downbeat for the vocal line. Afterthought line, “and be a good worker” is shown with the absent piano accompaniment.

Harmonically Smith utilizes many of the characteristic elements common to his sound. Measure 12 reintroduces the falling minor third lullaby theme in the right hand, however here it appears in E♭. The sound is superimposed over the left hand’s clustered chords which represent the sounds of industry and frenetic preparation. Smith uses planing harmonies in mm. 38-41, and the progressive chordal movement descends four times, until arriving at m. 42 with a bi-tonal chord. The right hand sounds a second inversion d minor chord built on tertial harmonies, while the left hand clashes dissonantly with an E♭ minor tonality with an absent root. This conflicted sound arrives simultaneously with the text, “and it didn’t happen.” The postlude offers a final gesture of the lullaby theme in the right hand in m. 45 where in the key of E♭, the fifth falls to the third and back up, however, in the final bar an eerie echo, in the left hand introduces an A♯, or raised 4th which falls to F#. Smith’s intention wasn’t to sound foreboding, but to merely recall the central theme. The modulation then leads to the D major key signature in the third song, Anna.
3. **Anna Zagar Klarich**, born 1902, emigrated from Yugoslavia in 1920, age 18.

**Text:** *I really didn’t have too much to pack. I had a new pair of shoes, and I was walking barefoot because I wanted to save my new shoes for America. And I had a new dress but I just wore my skirt and blouse because I was saving my new dress for America.*

**Range:** A3 - F#5 (transposition in higher key, Range: C4 - A5)

**Tempo Marking:** Fun and kicky, not fast \( \frac{\text{\textbf{\textbar}}}{\text{\textbf{\textbar}}}=74 \)

When Smith wrote *Anna* he pictured a young woman dancing about her room. She was likely listening to some popular music on the radio as she packed her clothes for America. He envisioned that her new shoes were bright red, thick wedge shaped heels that made her feel wonderful. Smith commented, “I just thought it was so darling that [she said], ‘I was saving my new dress for America.’” This text is exuberant and like many quotes within the cycle, the words are endearing and genuine. The perspective is that of the young woman who left for America, rather than the elderly woman who would give her testimony for the Oral History Project.

Smith really wanted his rhythmical precision observed, especially in m. 3 at the entrance of the voice. He said that when Stephanie Blythe and Warren Jones perform this piece, Jones often snaps his fingers on the second and third beats in that silent interlude to ensure that the rhythmic integrity remains steady and the vocal entrance is not rushed. It also provides comic relief and gives him something to do while the piano is resting.

The rhythms have definite dance origins, and are reminiscent of a modified Samba. Smith is very clear about specifying the articulation in the piano. He slurs the strong beats into the next given note, but then indicates staccatos for the remainder of the bar. He only migrates from this pattern twice in the song, in mm. 6 and 11 where he adds...
a rolled chord articulation on the downbeat to bring out the words “barefoot” and “saving”. This playful stroke serves to help paint the text and can be seen in Musical Example 4.3.

Musical Example 4.3 “Anna” mm. 5-6. The rolled chord in measure 6 accentuates the word “barefoot” and steps briefly outside the regularity and precision of the previous measures.

The composer noted that in measure six “Because I wanted to” should be sung exactly as written. He intentionally composed a rhythmic stress that opposes the natural inflection of “wanted”, with the longer value sustaining on the weaker syllable. He intentionally wanted a snap of that last sixteenth note on “to”, in order to propel the arrival of the word “save”. It becomes easy to mistakenly substitute a triplet on the end of m. 6, as he uses that grouping on the last page; however, Smith did not want the relaxed drag of the triplet at this impulsive moment.

Smith’s usage of fourths and fifths is seen throughout this song. He establishes the key of D major, but in wanting to keep the fourths present, a few extra notes are thrown in which provide texture to the tonal scope. The bass line maintains a steady pedal point on D which also aids in the anchoring of the tonal center.

**Text:** I bought a suitcase, a second-hand cardboard suitcase for two dollars... and I didn’t have enough stuff to fill it. All I had was the suit of clothes I wore... and an extra handkerchief and a pair of socks. I also had my stamp collection, a little crummy collection of stamps and a few family souvenirs and a few little things. I didn’t fill the suitcase... I didn’t have enough stuff to put in there.

**Range:** B♭3 - E5

**Tempo Marking:** Square, unpolished  \( \frac{}{8} = 88 \)

Smith wanted to characterize Manny as unpolished, but somewhat quirky. In the opening mm. 1-4, the usage of seconds in the right hand is meant to create an emphasized empty sound which illustrates the emptiness of Manny’s cardboard suitcase. The rests are equally, if not more, important than the notes, because similarly they signify the lack of material to “fill” the music. Intentionally left empty, the final two bars pause for a gapping five empty beats before the closing quarter note finishes the song.

In mm. 16-21 the melody suddenly becomes static and nearly monotonic. Smith likened this segment to the compositional technique of Debussy, who used a sparse melodic texture when he wanted the text to be prominent. In these bars, he wrote the vocal line on repeated singular pitches so that the focus could be strongly on the text.

Measures 5-9 reveal open octaves which are used to underline the text, and the identical staccato articulation for both the voice and piano create an emphatic delivery. Additionally, the sparse harmonic texture reflects Manny’s lack of sophistication, as the harmonic content is simple and uncluttered.

Smith’s musical humor is heard in m. 10, as the familiar strains of Mozart’s “Eine Kleine Nachtmusik” make a cameo appearance. Smith admitted that within the cycle he inserted several inside jokes. “I put a little tiny bit of that [Mozart] as an internal joke for
myself.” Though not intentional his quotation occurs in the same key as Mozart’s original, G major.

Musical Example 4.4 Mozart’s original violin melody from *Serenade No. 13 for strings in G Major.*

Measure 11 signifies a change in mood as Manny describes his few meager but beloved possessions. Smith’s music was inspired by what he called, “corny Tin Pan Alley music”, and what he imagined the music Manny was most acquainted with sounded like. The word “crummy” in m. 13 should not be sung as a derogative, but rather an endearment to Manny’s prized possession. Though he knows that a stamp collection from his homeland has no monetary value in America, it is sentimental to him nevertheless.
5. **Martha Kallens Reininger**, born 1911, emigrated from Germany in 1924, age 13.

**Text:** *The stories I heard about America! They have roast ducks and roast pigeons that fly through the air. All you have to do is pick them out of the sky. And the streets run full of milk and honey. That’s how beautiful it is…*

**Range:** Eb - G5

**Tempo Marking:** $\frac{\text{M}}{\text{M}} = 54$, then $\frac{\text{M}}{\text{M}} = 68$ Dancing

Smith introduces "Martha" with emphatic octaves doubled in both hands meant to symbolize the whopper of the tales she’s heard about America. He liked the angularity of the tri-tone, but then followed in m. 2 with parallel fifths to avoid any implication of negative emotion.

Smith writes music that is complex for both the pianist and the singer. This particular piece is quite challenging for the pianist, and Smith commented, “pianists that play the cycle, they always practice this one the most because it’s a real killer kind of piece. It does fit under the hand in a certain way, it is pianistic, but it is not easy.” The rapid right hand triplets rise and fall with winged inspiration, as if birds just took flight and are whizzing about. The atmosphere is not meant to be frightful, but rather awestruck.

**Musical Example 4.6** “Martha” mm. 3-4. The accompaniment’s challenging line in the right hand requires some dedicated rehearsal by most pianists.
Measure 13 indicates that the vocal line requires a sudden rich legato to deliver “and the streets run full of milk and honey” which directly contrasts the previous page of short energized staccatos.

The final piano gesture of the song is a small musical joke, referencing the bird images inspired on the first page. Smith called it the “final goosing”!


**Text:** My mother was sick when I left. And when I left, she went partways with me. We had no clinic in our hometown and she had to go to the clinic. She went with me when I left for America and went to the clinic on the same day that I left. And she said, “Oh, kiss me, because I’m not going to see you anymore...” I should have never left her...

**Range:** C4 - E5 (transposition in higher key, Range: E4 - G5)

**Tempo Marking:** Regretful \( \text{q} \text{=} 52 \)

“Clara” is one of the more personal stories within the cycle and shows an intimate vulnerability that instantly draws in the listener. Blythe said, “One of the reasons that this cycle has proved so popular with the audiences who hear it, [is that] it is very easy to put yourself in the shoes of the immigrants.” Smith wanted to write something that was sympathetic, and that tugged at the heart strings a bit. Musical example 4.7 shows how Smith’s coupled eighth notes alternate between a minor third tonality, though spelled as seconds, and a perfect fourth. Their steady rhythmic rock evokes a heartbeat quality, while the chromatic half-steps create tension and obvious distress. The left hand introduces a weeping melody, which pushes up from the A to the B♭ before falling off.
Smith emphasizes the text at the entrance of the voice in m. 7, with a monotonic repetition of the D. The singer can explore the percussive sounds of the language, and especially bring out the [k] in “sick”, and the [fট] in “left”. Ideally singers strive to connect vowel sounds together, however in a communicative text such as this, it can be very effective to stretch time on the plosive and labial consonants.

As the first truly lyrical song in the set, the singer has the opportunity to craft some beautiful phrases and apply a range of dynamic and emotional artistry. Measure 20 starts the build up to the dynamic climax of the song which arrives at the Eb⁵ and is sustained for two bars. The length of the note is intended to give Clara time to remember the past and remember the last time she saw her mother. The next ten bars switch narration to her mother’s coaxing voice to deliver the touching “kiss me because I’m not going to see you anymore.” Stephanie Blythe presents the final line in near whispered tones, as if the guilt is unbearable and the words too painful to hear aloud.

Smith continues his use of chordal harmonies built with fourths and fifths, particularly in lines of movement as in mm. 18-21. The ascending climb of fourths produce an instability, that clamors like an unstoppable cranking wheel. Comparing his preference to the tonal flavor of fourths and fifths Smith observed, “Ned Rorem also just

Musical Example 4.7 “Clara” mm. 1-4. Shows the weeping motive and the rhythmically coupled beats that imitate a heartbeat. The left hand introduces the weeping motive.
loves that fourthy/fifthy sound and does that a lot. And of course Copland also loves the open sound of the fifths. Now I can’t say that I was copying them, but [that sound] was just right for that moment.”

Another favorite moment for Smith arrives at measure 30 with the text “kiss me”. A 6/4 chord in B♭ major suggests a profound message, similar to cadence points in German romantic music. Schumann, Schubert, Strauss and Marx all frequently used the 6/4 for its exquisite sound. Smith wanted to underline the text with a certain tenderness.

As the song comes to an end, Smith utilizes a pedal point C in the bass line, and then overlays fourth based chords in the right hand. The steady pedal is contrasted distinctly by the upward shifting harmonies that seem to “peel away” from the C. Each new shift of tonality reveals a deeper recognition of the guilt Clara feels having left her mother. The final four bars contain a rolled chord articulation and drone-like tolling which forecast events to come. The composer’s indication of “attacca” directs that there is no break between this last piece of the first set and the beginning of the second.
II. BOARDING THE SHIP

7. Theresa Gavin Duffy, born 1892, emigrated from Ireland in 1912, age 19.

Text: The next day we were supposed to sail on the Titanic but we didn’t get on... because it was overcrowded... We got into the small boat to go out to the big ship, to the Titanic. When we got to the door, the captain opened it and said, “No one. Overloaded.” We were kind of disappointed, so we went back to the hotel. The next day it went down.

Range: G3 - G5

Tempo Marking: $\text{♩}=44$, then $\text{♩}=250$

The final chord used in Clara is carried over to the opening of Theresa, only it is shifted down an octave in each hand which gives a very different color in the lower registration. Theresa’s story tells of her missed chance to sail on the Titanic, just one fateful day before it sank into the cold Atlantic waters. The murky and dark opening chords are meant to evoke the images of the sunken Titanic ship, and its eerily static and frozen existence beneath the heavy water.

The song switches sharply between moods of the chaotic attempt to get to the boat and the foreboding demise of the ship. Abruptly in m. 3, Smith takes off with the bustling music that is the backdrop for the frantic preparation to get down to the dock and ready to board the largest passenger ship in history. A musical echo is heard after the text “on the Titanic” with open octaves in the upper registration in the right hand, to sound a warning siren. This gesture is repeated when that text returns in measure 30, on the second page. Smith played with tonal color and dramatic word painting in this piece. In measures 40-43, a cluster of dissonance is the foundation to the text, “No one. Overloaded”, as the captain barks to the hopeful passengers. Smith intentionally wanted the captain’s voice to sound like a fog-horn that blasted over the crowd. He used strong
dissonance to be grating and unpleasant, to reflect the disheartening news that the immigrants did not want to hear.

Smith alternates between the frenetic play of lively melody and the stasis of long sustained shell shock which interrupts the motion. A final return of the murky sunken chord appears in m. 56, and hangs in the air as the last line, “the next day it went down” is delivered.

Smith admitted that Theresa is mildly reminiscent of Prokofiev in how the vocal line is comprised of falling fourths and rising octave leaps. Its disjointed nature and fast tempo make it difficult to tune, therefore the singer must be always on top of the breath. Another challenge for the singer is the lack of time signature and the ever changing meter. This flexible bar line convention gives the impression of frantic unpredictability, while dramatically creating a wonderful sense of a racing heart that skips a beat.

Musical Example: 4.8 “Theresa” mm. 40-45. The fog horn sound of the clustered chords represents the sound of the captain’s voice delivering the news that there is no more room.

**Text:** The day I sailed my father said to me, “Remember this, if you smile and laugh, everybody will smile and laugh with you. But if you cry, you cry alone…” After I boarded the ship I was looking out over the gangplank. I looked out and my family was there. I saw my mother crying and I remember a lump coming up in my throat. But I was determined not to cry.

**Range:** C4 - Eb5  
**Tempo Marking:** Sweet, not sad ∫ =52

One element that makes this cycle so appealing is its diversity of music. There are twenty-six songs total. With the exception of certain musical themes threaded throughout, they are all unique and different. “Kaj” [(pronounced [kaI]) is a standout because of its simplistic tonal beauty, but also for its complete opposition to the complex and busy atmosphere created by the previous song. Derived from a hymn-like form, it stays clearly rooted in A♭ major. However occasional shifts in the chordal timing create brief dissonances as the passing tones line up momentarily with the consonant chords. Smith likens the sound of “Kaj” to Charles Ives, though the association didn’t occur to him until about a year after he wrote it.

I wrote a few wrong notes on purpose…Just so that it’s a little bit askew because I find that it perks up the brain of the listener just a little bit so that when the listener might get complacent, and think “Oh, I’ve figured out what he’s doing so I’ll just turn off and think about my grocery list.” Then I’ll just stick in a little something so it grabs the ear back and says, “He didn’t go quite where I thought he would go with that, so I better pay attention because he might go someplace else when I’m not looking.”

Also a favorite of Stephanie Blythe, she said, “I have always liked Kaj’s song. The melody is so nostalgic, simple and beautiful. It has always reminded me a little of an Ives song. The text is difficult because I can attach it to so many memories of my own—we all have to say goodbye to loved ones at some point in our lives.”
The words are of vital importance in this song, and require some effort to craft the natural language stress within the static melodic lines. The composer suggested speaking the text through to find the proper syllabic stress, and then let the emotion in the words create the momentum that moves the singer from one word to the next. Smith specified several phrasal breaths, though the lines did not functionally require it, he wanted the sound of the shortened phrases to stress the text.

Smith was very adamant that the voice not be too somber. He said he wrote the piano part to express the sadness, but the voice should stay youthful and sweet. He wanted a play between the colors of the piano (the rich sad warmth of A♭) and the sweetness in the voice (capturing the sound of a scared boy trying to be brave).

The connecting interlude and beginning of the second verse incorporate a key shift to f minor, as the boy boards the ship and looks out at his family.

Musical Example 4.9 “Kaj” mm. 17-19 The f minor tonality in the second verse intensifies the sweetness of the hymn tune. Also Smith directs the short phrase by inserting a breath mark between m. 17 and 18.

The minor tonality further emphasizes the sadness of the words, however Smith brings the tonality back to A♭ as Kaj steels himself to not cry in the final stanza. The postlude contains full bars of rest, that provide the time to contrast the anguish of leaving
his family behind with the determination for the journey ahead. Smith said that it was not important that those bars be counted exactly, but they shouldn’t be overly long either.

9. **Angelo Vacca**, born in 1896, emigrated from Italy in 1909, approximately age 12.

**Text:** When I saw the boat, I had never seen a boat before. I had never seen the ocean... Then I was separated from my mother and put in the men's section. I didn’t like that...

**Range:** D#4 - F#5 (transposition in higher key, Range: F#4 - A5)

**Tempo Marking:** $\frac{\text{♩}}{110}$

The busy right hand accompaniment inspires a picture of people running around like ants, mingled with the steady rhythmic churning in the left hand. This was likely the scene Angelo experienced as he was being pushed around the boarding station. There is a youthful charm in Angelo’s perspective that should not be confused with silliness. Told from a child’s point of view it has a rather short attention span, and certain lines lack context or depth of reason, but both contribute to the sincerity of the words.

Stephanie Blythe made the artistic choice to emphasize a strong comedic interpretation of the piece; more than Smith intended, and a music critic for the New York Times said in a review:

Mr. Smith goes for the easy humor when a text could be read as ambiguous: “Then I was separated from my mother and put in the men’s section,” an Italian man recalls of his journey to America at 12, adding, “I didn’t like that.” Mr. Smith takes a jocular approach to words that strike me as the baffled thought of a panicked boy.

In truth, Smith agreed with this critic, however he didn’t feel it was his music that gave the comic thrust but rather the interpretation. Though Smith’s music has a playfulness infused, he did not intend to diminish the boy’s sincere amazement at seeing...
the ocean for the first time or his concern that he was separated from his mother. For this reason the singer must embrace a child-like perspective in order to deliver the work with authentic sincerity.

A return of the familiar chordal harmonies built on fourths ascend and descend in mm. 7-12 as Smith switches keys from B major to e minor. This harmonic shift parallels a shift in the text from Angelo’s awestruck, “I had never seen the ocean”, to the anxious “then I was separated from my mother.”

Smith’s convention of the accentuating octaves appears in m. 6 on the word “ocean.” The vocal line falls a major third from D# to B, and then the same gesture is imitated in the right hand of the piano. This same leit motif is used to finish the song, and will reappear later within the cycle.

Musical Example 4.10 “Angelo” mm. 5-6. The lively bass outlines open fifths, to keep the steady pulse below the busy “ant” theme in the right hand. In m. 6 the piano imitates the vocal line to accentuate the text and this gesture will become a leit motif that will appear later in the cycle.
III. ON THE SHIP

10. Max Mason, born 1912, emigration from the Ukraine in 1921, age 8.

Text: On the boat that we took to America I had occasion to use the men’s room and for the first time I flushed a toilet and water started gushing and I ran. I ran because I was positive that I was drowning that boat. I never told anybody about it and I was waiting for that boat to sink.

Range: E3 – G5

Tempo Marking: \( \text{\textit{\text{\textbullet}}} = 80 \)

Smith continues to demonstrate his musical wit with Max M. by emulating the sounds of water as described in the text. In the opening measures he creates the sound of bubbles burbling up from the drain of a toilet with his cleaver rhythmic timing and staccato articulation. He imitates the sound of slow drifting air pockets that give way to a flurry of air bubbles perfectly. He also chose to use the low registration in both hands as it seemed the most like plumbing.

Smith knew he wanted to compose something in the cycle with impressive fioratura passages as Stephanie Blythe is an accomplished Handelian mezzo. He wanted to provide her with a medium to show off her spectacular vocal gymnastics and also use the opportunity to compose in yet another style which diversified the set further. This piece requires definite technical acumen, especially in the ability to sing chromatic coloratura passages with ease and accuracy. Another challenge is the registration which requires the transition from the lower passaggio up through the upper register shift.

When asked about the difficulty level of Max M., Blythe responded, “I learned the notes and PRACTICED the fioratura!” Though it is perhaps the most technically difficult song in the set, it is worth the work needed to sing it well. The text painting created with the melismatic lines furnish a thrilling experience.
The accompaniment also keeps the pianist alert with florid lines that pass a rapid succession of sixteenth notes from one hand to the other in a relay effect. Smith uses text painting in mm. 14-22, to evoke the flowing of water by having both the voice and piano demonstrate their agile skills.

Harmonically, Smith reintroduces his love of fourth-based parallelism in mm. 23-25 in order to underscore the last line of fioratura of the voice. This serves to keep a steady rhythmic pulse and also ground the tonal centers on each descending chord, so that the vocal line doesn’t get lost navigating the close chromatic passage. It should also be noted that this is the only place in the song where the right hand is voiced in the treble clef, allowing for easier discernment of the chords, aiding the singer.

Musical Example 4.11 “Max M.” mm. 21-24. Demonstrates the relay hand off of the sixteenth note gestures from the left hand to the right and then to the voice. In m. 24 the harmonic parallelism of chordal fourths descend below the vocal line to provide tonal stability.

Lastly, the composer wanted the final three measures in the piano to be in strict time, because the final bar is written a little unexpectedly. The off kilter rest on beat one sets up the low plummeting joke of the last word “sink”.

64
11. **Mary Cox Harney**, born 1896, emigrated from Ireland in 1925, age 22.

**Text:** *Up on the deck was a great place to go dancing. We had a great time. We used to go up there and dance all the Irish dances, the old fashioned dances... We saw that captain and shook hands with him... Yeah, we were greenhorns from Ireland! We didn’t know anything... I didn’t want to get off because I loved the blue waters...and the fog and the mist. I hated to get off. I said, “Oh, couldn’t we stay another couple of days...”*

**Range:** B♭3 – F5

**Tempo Marking:** $\frac{d}{4}=84$

Smith felt strongly about incorporating the flavor of various nationalistic and traditional folk music styles that represented the countries of origin. *Mary* inspires the sound of the country Irish fiddle which carries a strong association to the festive peasant dances of Ireland. A droning pedal tone in the left hand establishes the open fifths of G and D, which are identical to playing the bottom two strings of a violin or fiddle.

The melody tune is derived from an Aeolian modal scale built on G, which takes the listener out of time and place. Also known as a natural minor scale, the Aeolian scale has lowered third, sixth, and seventh scale degrees. It is not uncommon for folk music to be built on modal tonalities.

The rhythmic drive and 6/8 time signature give the impression of dancing music, which partners the gaiety and descriptiveness of the text. It is often difficult to establish an appropriate tempo in *Mary*, because the pianist will tend toward a faster pace, while the singer more slow, due to the characteristics of their individual parts. It must be considered that the vocal line has many words to deliver, with the majority of them set in eighth note values or less. The five bar introduction will always sound painfully slow until the voice enters in m. 6, establishing the subdivided pulse.
A short transition to B♭ major occurs in mm. 21-28, when the text describes meeting the captain. As if the commoners felt the need to “clean themselves up” for the introduction, the key shift from the peasant scale to this major modality implies that sentiment. The parallel fifths in the bass line double their previous rhythmic values, as the excitement of meeting the captain increases.

![Musical Example 4.12](image)

Musical Example 4.12 “Mary” mm. 19-23. Smith “cleans up” the key, moving into the major tonality of B♭, as the peasants ready themselves to meet the captain.

The vocal line must really capture the spirit of Mary. She is feisty and strong, and her identity is well rooted within the text. Her lines have a wide scope of atmosphere to create, and the singer must be able to color her voice brightly and forthright then contrast later with warmth and longing. “I didn’t want to get off because I loved the blue waters and the fog and the mist” inspire images of the wind blowing over her, imparting a tranquility never known before and fueling her desire to stay longer.
12. Regina Sass Tepper, born 1908, emigrated from Poland in 1923, age 14.

Text: Out in the middle of the ocean in January. Can you imagine the waves? We were sick, sick like dogs. Oh, we were sick. And when you are seasick, you wish you were dead. You absolutely do. Were you ever seasick? The most horrible feeling in the world is to be seasick.

Range: F#3 – E5

Tempo Marking: Nauseous $\downarrow = 100$

Smith delivers text painting at its finest in Regina, with his ability to make the audience aurally nauseous. From the onset, the left hand imitates both the heaving of the waves and the heaving of stomachs with quick ascending sixteenth notes that stop short and sit static on half notes before falling back down in mirror image. The right hand’s perfect fifths are dissonantly colored by minor seconds, adding an unsettled souring to the consonant interval.

The time signature is also designed to elongate the agony of endless rocking. Written in 6/4, each bar is two beats longer than a normal square 4/4 meter, and the regularity of the rhythmic pattern Smith establishes in the left hand, seems never-ending. The vocal line is rhythmically complex, with groupings of 4, set against the pulse of three in the time signature. These two rhythm systems fight against one another with a hemiolic instability that simulates an attempt to hold oneself upright as the ship rocks roughly among the waves.

The recurrent portamenti indicated in the vocal line conjure a picture of dry heaving on the smaller intervals, such as the F# leading to G in m.17, or even full blown vomiting as in mm. 12-13 where the voice jumps from B♭3 to E5. The voice emits a
long low groan in mm. 11 and 12 on the text “oh”, and the painful wailing makes it easy to feel empathy.

Musical Example 4.13  “Regina” mm. 11-12  The moaning sounds of the vocal line just prior to the largest portamento in the song which displays the unfortunate effects of seasickness.

Stephanie Blythe applies a tremendous amount of dramatic color and affect to her tone when singing *Regina* by removing the vibrato in the voice. The straight tone is extremely effective for creating sounds that are uncomfortable and even disturbing, thus enhancing the compositional mimic of seasickness. Blythe refers to straight tone as an optional vocal color. She explains, “there are places where it can be put to use in a variety of styles of music. The danger is when the use of a specific color, like a straight tone, takes over the voice. I don’t see any problem using it as part of the artistic palate.”
13. **Elizabeth Coyle Scott**, born 1892, emigrated from Ireland in 1915, age 22.

**Text:** *On the boat, I remember this one woman, an old woman, and she was standing there by the side saying the rosary... And she was standing there and she was getting thrown back and forth. She was old, very old I thought in them days, and she died on the boat because it was too much for her... I don’t know what they did with her. They didn’t let you see anything.*

**Range:** C#4 – D#4 (transposition in higher key, Range: F#4 – G#4 )  
**Tempo Marking:** monotone, almost whispered \( \text{♩} = 82 \)

Perhaps the most intense song of the cycle, *Elizabeth*, was described by Smith as, “one of the best songs I never wrote.” Referring to the composition’s scarce harmonic content, the song is comprised of a minimalistic six notes. The chords in the accompaniment are identical to the first chords heard in the *Prologue*, which plane downward by half step as they did in their prior appearance. The open fourth harmonies create a dreamlike atmosphere, though this time the insistent repetition hints at a darker tale. The hypnotic reverberation evokes a radio static, almost like white noise that your brain creates when it has been told something too upsetting to process. Smith also wanted a bell-like sound, that would serve to toll for the woman who died on the boat.

Elizabeth’s experience tells of a stark and harsh reality of hardship on the boat. The music seems distant and detached, and perhaps symbolizes the coping mechanism the passengers had to exercise in order to endure the journey.

With the accompaniment redundantly droning and the melodic content limited to a monotonic chant, the words become the only focus. Smith indicates in the score selective syllabic stress, but doesn’t give much direction otherwise. The vocal line diverges just once from its repeated C#, finally breaking the spell on the word “anything”, as it moves
up to D#. Smith states, “It is just plain and simple and paints exactly what the poem says.”

Musical Example: 4.14 “Elizabeth” mm. 1-4. The static steady drone of the accompaniment is repeated over and over in all 29 measures of the song. The vocal line is restricted to the monotonic chant on C# until the final sung bar.
IV. IN THE HARBOR


Text: We all ran out to see the Statue. Nobody knew about it... So one man says, “What is that?” Another man says, “Don’t you know? That’s Columbus!” So we thought it was Columbus. Who knows?!

Range: E4 – G5

Tempo Marking: Jaunty \( \dot{q} = 128 \)

When Dora was written Smith had in mind another “musical joke” for himself inspired from his childhood. Growing up in the 1960’s he remembered this catchy little television commercial for La Choy Chinese Food. The jingle sang, “La Choy makes Chinese food….swing American!” Though not sure why this melody came to mind when writing for Dora, Smith decided to play around with the vaguely pentatonic scale and invert it to create her theme.

The left hand brings out the busy sounds of industry and motion, as everyone scurries out to get a glimpse of the Statue. Simultaneously, the right hand remains linked to the vocal line in parallel motion, again utilizing fourth relationship harmonies. Smith plays with the bounce and stress of different articulations in measures 1-6, and chooses some interesting emphasis points, that at times are in contrast to the rhythmic stress he creates. In this regard he really challenges the singer to explore language and musical shaping, and not just be complacent with a generic sense of language inflection.

There is a slight jazz influence in the chord progressions that accompany the dialogue lines, “one man says, ‘What is that?’, another man says ‘Don’t you know?’” The left hand’s flatted and altered notes create the infused jazz flavor as the crowd dynamic follows the leader.
The final page of the song introduces several quick time signature changes that grab the listener’s ear, in the same fashion that the loud mouth man grabs all who will listen, convincing them that the statue was in fact Columbus. The final “who knows” implies a recognition of the naiveté of Dora’s youth, and Smith captures it with a silly carefree gesture, equivalent to a musical shrug. He provides the instruction of attacca, telling the pianist to go right on with no break between Dora and Estelle.

Musical Example 4.15 “Dora” mm. 15-17. The final whimsical moment returns the “La Choy-inspired” melody before giving the farewell musical shrug.

15. Estelle Schwartz Belford, born 1900, emigrated from Roumania in 1905, age 5.

Text: All of a sudden we heard a big commotion... and everybody started yelling that they see “the Lady ,” the Statue of Liberty, and we all ran upstairs... Everybody started screaming and crying, kissing one another. People that you didn’t even know before were along side of you... Everybody was so excited to see America and see the Lady with her hand up.

Range: A3 – F5

Tempo Marking: Sweeping \( \frac{\text{♩}}{\text{=}220} \)

The descriptive text, “all of a sudden we heard a big commotion”, inspired the composer to create a big uproar in the opening bars of Estelle. The seconds clash against one another as the line descends in a flurry of activity. There are two distinct atmospheres
created in *Estelle* that reflect the different ways in which people express themselves during emotionally charged situations. The first is a visceral eruption of emotion expressed as an elevated frenzied state. The second embodies an awestruck disbelief that sets the world in slow motion. Smith alternates between these two reactions by distinguishing the first as “tempo primo” and the second as “broadly”.

The first appearance of the “broad” music in m. 13, establishes a C major tonality, which signifies simplicity and ease. The words, “Everybody started screaming and crying, kissing one another”, seem contrary to the emotional state Smith establishes in the accompaniment, but like a finely crafted film scene, the excited world moves in slow motion to savor the thrill. The text setting is beautifully placed as the emphasis lands firmly on the primary syllable stresses in “Everybody”, “screaming” and “kissing”. The strong beat is also accentuated as the highest pitch in the gesture, and is elongated with a dotted rhythm, providing a glorious spotlight moment for the voice. Lastly, the piano articulation enhances the secondary atmosphere by gently rolling the chords in the left hand. The same rhythmic piano phrasing used at m. 21 will reappear in song 24 “Catherine”, however, there he creates a completely different mood with the gesture.

The very last measure already marked double forte, indicates a staccato sforzando on the word “up”. Smith envisioned that this upward gesture would be as if at just that moment she put her hand up into the sky.

Musical Example 4.16 “Estelle” mm. 22-23. Demonstrates the broad slow motion gesture that will reappear again in song 24 “Catherine”. Note the fourth based harmonies that move to the fifth based chords in the low registration.

**Text:**  *We looked at the Statue of Liberty.  When we saw it, we were surprised.  Number one, who did it?  Who put it up there?  That was the first question that came to a person’s mind.  But outstretched, I mean the whole thing gave you a feeling of relaxation, of something good... all our life we didn’t see that.  Nobody stretched out a hand to you.  Nobody said a good word to you.  We came from a war-torn... country...*

**Range:**  B♭3 – F♯5 (transposition in higher key, Range: C4–Ab5)

**Tempo Marking:**  Relaxed ♩ =132

This is the first of two songs that Smith set from excerpts of the Max Schnapp interview.  Strikingly, they do not sound necessarily like the same person, with regard to age or demeanor.  The first is far more introspective and emotionally exposed compared to the slightly comical narrative in song 21.

The rhythmic structure of this piece is very relaxed and Smith wanted to present a gentle rocking in three, however he wanted the rocking to have an unpredictable feeling and therefore asserted no time signature.  The unpredictability is a representation of human nature, and acknowledges that humans are not machines and therefore move irregularly.  Though remaining in three for the first eight measures, at measure nine Smith switches between beats of three, four, five, and six without ever patterning or foretelling what is to come.

Smith used the key of D♭ for its excessively warm color, which he felt connected with the text.  In the first measure he establishes D♭ on the downbeat but omits the third as to leave the scale quality obscured for a moment.  The second measure brings a jazz flavor with the introduction of the one seven chord.  Structurally and tonally it resembles
Eric Satie’s *Gymnopédie* which similarly was written in 3/4 and incorporated major seventh harmonies.

Though *Max S.* begins and ends in the warmth of D♭ major, the middle sections of the song journey to several new tonalities. From m. 15-19 Smith steps briefly into F major and then an abrupt and dramatic shift to F♯ major arrives at m. 23 to deliver “But outstretched”. Smith explains, “its like a 6/4 chord, in that the key change is totally unprepared, it functions in the same way that 6/4s are used!”

![Musical Example 4.17](image)

**Musical Example 4.17** “Max S.” mm. 22-26. The abrupt key shift in m. 23 functions similarly to a 6/4 chord creating an unexpected tonal palette.

Measure 33 ushers in a darker more serious tone and the rocking gesture ceases and is replaced by low register tolling chords. Sounded after the texts, “all our life”, “nobody stretched out a hand to you”, and “nobody said a good word to you”, these chords hearken back to a life full of trial and discord.

Smith wanted the final line of the voice to be deliberate and unrushed, yet his intention was that the voice cut off after the half note, and the piano strings linger painfully in the memory of the “war-torn country”.

75
17. **Martha Kallens Reininger**, born 1911, emigrated from Germany in 1924, age 13.

**Text:** *That was a beautiful day. I woke up during the night, towards morning, and I thought, “What is wrong?” We had just gone through a storm and now everything seemed so quiet. I got dressed and ran up on the deck. It was my birthday. I was thirteen years old that morning and the first thing I see is the Statue of Liberty. What a beautiful sight.*

**Range:** C#4 – D5 (transposition in higher key, Range: D#4 - E5)

**Tempo Marking:** Very hushed and very joyful $\downarrow = 46$

Quoting from the Stephen Foster melody “*Beautiful Dreamer*”, “*Martha*” is composed with simplistic beauty and exquisite timing. Having been long known as an admirer and arranger of folk tunes, Smith does not disappoint with his rendition, and Blythe divulged that this is always a crowd favorite. Underlying the familiar melody are triplets in the left hand, which Smith uses to suggest the gentle rolling of the ship on calm seas.

The text is beautifully innocent and demure, and is partnered perfectly with the arpeggiated chords that tiptoe up and down. The vocal line has the challenge of delivering the text with accurate syllabic stress, without disturbing the purity of the aural aesthetic.

Smith utilizes a triplet motif in “*Martha*”, which will also reappear in song 25 “*Anna*”. This broken chord triplet captures the innocence and youth of these two stories. Smith maintains his parallel planing in the broken chords of the accompaniment, which move stepwise down from the root of each chord. Twice in the score of “*Martha*” Smith inscribes “don’t hurry” guiding the artist to savor the language and embrace the artistic liberty.
Measure 19 delivers the vocal climax, which is not the dynamic peak but rather the high point of her sincerest and most joyful happiness. The composer’s directive here is “rallentando no crescendo”, to make sure the singer maintains the simple beauty and keeps the focus on the text. As the song comes to a close in a D major tonality, Smith intentionally inserted a wrong note in m. 20 at the second fermata in the piano. The clash of a major third, against a raised fourth in the bass, creates a purposeful dissonance which emphasizes the true beauty of this line. Smith wanted to express a magnificence that was so beautiful it hurt, and the quality of the raised 4th in the chord added a “shimmer quality, like sunlight on water.” The voice finishes the song with the echo of the lullaby tune from the prologue.

![Musical Example 4.18](image)

**Musical Example 4.18** “Martha” mm. 20-22. In m. 20 Smith writes the “painfully beautiful” chord with the second fermata in the piano accompaniment. The voice then re-enters with the familiar lullaby motif from the **Prologue.**
V. ON THE ISLAND


Text: We had to take a smaller boat to Ellis Island. Now as I was going down the gangplank there is a fellow coming up on the other side. He was my next door neighbor in Denmark! And I said, “Hello!” Oh my God, it was like a letter from home when I saw him. And we just said, “Hello.”

Range: A♭3 – D#5

Tempo Marking: Vigorously $\downarrow =132$

This song represents Kaj’s second appearance in the cycle, but unlike the sad static hymn of number 8, number 18 is full of vigor. It depicts the recognition of someone from another time and place, in an unexpected location and not quite knowing what to say. The song is told in retrospect, and hints of Kaj’s regret, wishing that another exchange had transpired. The realization of seeing someone from home is more profound in afterthought, however in the instantaneous bustle of the moment, only a banal conversation is exchanged.

Within the cycle as a whole, the fast tempo songs employ a common usage of music that inspires the bustle of industry. Smith uses the alteration of seconds and thirds here to create the tension and buzz of the activity on the crowded island. The articulation specifies a slur marking, in both the piano and voice, however it is also marked “non legato”. Though seemingly contradictory, the slur is used to blur the tonal field, creating more chaos than precision. At m. 4 suddenly the movement stops and the piano strikes an accented whole note that spans three octaves of E♭. The composer uses this freeze to
provide the moment at which Kaj sees his neighbor. It is short-lived as the motion sets off again, similar to a queued line.

Smith cleverly designed lines that imitate the text in m. 5, where Kaj utters “now as I was going down the gangplank”. Notice that the right hand and the vocal line contain octave intervals that are moving downward, while the left hand moves in contrary motion.

The voice should maintain a detached articulation so that the words are clearly understood, but also to give the impression of following instructions. Besides m. 5, the song does not stop or slow through the end of the piece. Wanting to give no cause to delay the disembarking process, Kaj’s music uses the short articulations to do exactly as he is told; to keep moving. Unable to “catch up” with old friends, Kaj continues on his way with a quick exchange. For this reason, the rests must also be adhered to in strict time. In m. 11 the beats following “and I said ‘Hello!’” should move right into the next thought, “Oh my God, it was like a letter from home”.

Musical Example 4.19 “Kaj” mm. 4-6. Word painting is created with the parallel motion of the voice and the right hand against the contrary motion of the left hand.
The final piano gesture outlines doubled octaves in the far outside registers and captures the self critical regret of Kaj, disappointed in himself for not saying anything more profound or meaningful to his countryman.


Text: Is my daddy going to find us? ...A big place like this, how is he ever going to find us? How will he know where we are?!

Range: E4 – C♭5

Tempo Marking: With wonder, no melancholy \( \frac{\text{j}}{\text{=}92} \)

One of the shortest songs in the cycle at just one page, “Allan” brings a childlike perspective to the cycle. When interviewed by Paul Sigrist he was already in advanced years, however the language that Mr. Gunn used to describe this particular memory regressed him to preadolescence. He starts, “Is my daddy going to find us?” This song had a special endearment for the composer because they share the same name, though spelled differently he always liked it.

Smith wanted the singer to “find the youngest part of [the] voice, not a childish voice, but a youthful one.” He also wanted the characterization to be full of wonder, and not sadness or fear. In wanting the audience to experience the emotional journey of these stories, he felt that if the singer and pianist are too emotionally indulgent, then the audience will never “fill it in for themselves.” The singer should be aware of the syllabic stress of the language and use natural speech rhythms, but also explore the dramatic intensity that can be found in the consonants. Smith particularly wanted the word “big” in m. 9 to have an elongated [b] sound, but not an explosive one.
Harmonically Smith employs several of his favorite compositional elements; falling minor thirds, planing 6/4 chords and the presence of the raised fourth, all of which lend a mystical color that supports the wonderment. The falling minor thirds, seen in the right hand of the piano hearken back to the lullaby theme in the Prologue, but do not develop into the full melody. They are ever present and rock gently from the first bar to the last. Smith used the D♭ again for its warm color, as previously seen in song 16 “Max S.” However, the 6/4 chords give the impression of having no root in the D♭ major tonality, which enhances the awe felt by the child looking around the enormous great hall.

The raised fourth, G♯, is applied right at the first voice entrance giving a timid uncertainty to the line “Is my daddy going to find us?” It is a beautifully crafted line set in the middle voice. The range of this song is very narrow, spanning E4 to C♭5, which can be likened to the limited range of a child.

In the final line of the song, Stephanie Blythe asserts a large retard and weighted pause at m. 17 and 18, “How will he know”…(breath) “where we are?” Smith liked this phrasing and even wrote dotted half notes, that wait on the voice, so that a purposeful delivery can be made.
20. **Irena Leonidoff Spross**, born in 1920, emigrated from Russia via France in 1929, age 8.

**Text:** I didn’t know what my father looked like. And I remember sitting on that bench and my feet couldn’t touch the floor, and I’m just sitting there in my new outfit and there was an officer’s sleeve... and he said, “Here comes your father.” And this man is twelve feet tall and he picked me up and hugged me.

**Range:** B♭3 – E5 (transposition in higher key, Range: D♭4 – G5)

**Tempo Marking:** Quietly \( \frac{\text{march}}{\text{quarter note}} = 54 \)

A nostalgic C major tonality backdrops the childlike perspective in *Irena*, where Smith depicts a child meeting her father for the first time. The opening gesture resembles the intake of a restless breath; it rushes in quickly, suspends momentarily, then releases. Like a child watching strange faces passing and wondering “is this him?”, the breath-like melody evokes the apprehension and anticipation. At the peak of the phrase, the raised fourth, with its shimmering quality, is prominently displayed in this central motive.

Harkening back to Smith’s love of German Romantic music, the 6/4 chord appears in m. 16 and builds toward the climax. The endearing line “and this man is twelve feet tall and he picked me up and hugged me” is broadened to provide the joyful arrival of the long awaited moment.

Smith is masterful at setting the scene and he captures the impatience and excitement of a child by rhythmically alternating triplets (which surge forward) and duplets (that drag painfully slow). In m. 8, after delivering “and my feet couldn’t touch the floor” the vocal line sustains an F# for two measures conjuring up an image of the child’s feet dangling off the bench, swinging with boredom. Crafted in a similar fashion, the moment of arrival comes in m. 16 when the text announces, “Here comes your father.” As before, the vocal line sustains an impatient eight beats before he arrives at her side.
Due to the tessitura in this phrase, Smith suggested that the piano move through mm. 18 and 19 to aid the singer with breath flow, as seen in Musical Example 4.20. Additionally he authorized delaying the crescendo until m. 19, again serving to elongate the breath.

Musical Example 4.20 “Irena” mm. 17-20. A technical challenge in Irena is the sustained breath line that crescendos and rallentandos at the tail end of this long phrase. Smith suggests two helpful techniques: first the piano should move through mm. 18 and 19 with increased expectation, and secondly the singer should delay the crescendo until m. 19.

Text: Ellis Island was packed, packed with people. And there was a table where a commissioner sat. He was a very nice man and anyone he talked to he tried to relax them. He made a joke with them... He was very easy going... and anybody that came back from him came with a smile on their face because before they were all scared, scared, scared! ...The doctor was joking with me... He said, “It is Prohibition. Your name is Schnapps. You’re not supposed to come in!”

Range: A♭3- A♭5 (transposition in higher key, Range: B♭3- B♭5)

Tempo Marking: Boisterous =164

The second appearance of Max Schnapp is set to a fun samba, because Smith wanted the audience to experience what a great time Max must have had retelling this story. The playful rhythms and lively atmosphere reinforce the text’s whimsical nature, giving the song, perhaps, the most lighthearted sound in the cycle. It is the only song in the cycle that is titled using both the immigrants first and last name, because it references a joke found within the text at mm. 39-43. Recalling a conversation that he had during his physical inspection, Max reminisces “The doctor was joking with me… He said, ‘It is Prohibition. (spoken: Your name is Schnapps). You’re not supposed to come in!’” The only spoken text in the cycle appears at m. 43, and Smith envisioned this line to be delivered in complete “belly laughing” fashion. At m. 46 a fast portamento up to B♭5, like a cackle of laughter suddenly escapes to conclude the song. This slide gesture is also found in m. 17 when Smith paints the word “relax”, to soothe the anxious immigrants who are meeting with the commissioner.

The relaxed feel of the song though, does not imply vocal ease. Smith admitted that this song sits in an uncomfortable tessitura for mezzo voice. However, he wrote it specifically with Blythe’s capabilities in mind, and he wanted to give her a vehicle to
demonstrate her upper register as well. This aspect of the cycle does make it less universally adaptable to any voice, as Blythe’s extended range and both lyric and agile competencies are not widely common in every voice.

A fifth relation pedal point of B♭ and F anchors the downbeat in the first twelve bars. However, deceptively the song is not merely in B♭, as Smith substitutes A♭, or the lowered seventh scale degree, defining the Mixolydian modality. The right hand chords are comprised primarily of fourths which contrast to the major fifths of the bass.

A key shift to C major (the universally “easy” key) occurs in m. 21 to highlight the text “he was very easy going…” Much like other composers Smith uses key selection to create mood or atmosphere, and is conscientious about key relationships at pivotal modulations. The next key shift at m. 27 steps up the minor third to E♭ establishing a Third Relation modulation. Smith commented that, “like Schubert I have a fondness for this key relationship and I use it a lot”.

The language is easy to deliver in Max Schnapp because of the feisty rhythms and scripted articulations. Wanting to maintain Max’s exuberant storytelling that ignored grammatical accuracy, Smith retained the misuse of the word “face” at m. 29-30. However, when performed by Blythe, she will often edit this sentence to use proper English and sing “faces”. Smith wanted to emphasize the second iteration of the word “packed” in m. 7 even louder and stronger than the first. Similarly in m. 32 the word “scared” is repeated three consecutive times and requires variation of the word stress and emotional level.
VI. IN AMERICA

22. Morris Schneider, born in 1910, emigrated from Poland in 1920, age 10.

Text: New York looked like what I knew a fairy land was supposed to look like... It looked like something I had never dreamt of. I could never picture it... I had no knowledge. I had no schooling. I didn’t read books. I had no pictures to look at... I had nothing to compare it to. So it was all a fairy land, a make-believe world. If my eyes could have popped, I guess they would have popped at the sight.

Range: C4 – E5 (transposition in higher key, Range: Eb4 – G5)

Tempo Marking: In awe

Morris draws in the listener immediately with the mystical quality of the broken I6 chord that planes into the broken major second. Smith’s recurrent use of the raised fourth is meant to establish a fairytale world. He uses the broken articulation to create a delicate melodic dance, not wanting the weighted quality of block chords. One of the reasons Smith selected F# major was so the left hand plays all black keys, creating a pentatonic scale that “shimmered and sparkled”.

Smith restricts the melodic material at m. 10 “I had no knowledge. I had no schooling. I didn’t read books” to keep the focus completely on the text. He also keeps the accompaniment sparse to enable the singer to be heard in this lower middle tessitura.

Musical Example 4.21 “Morris” mm. 11-14 Smith pairs down both the vocal line and the piano accompaniment so that the text can be prominently heard.
The key shifts in m. 7 to G major, planing upward by half step, it maintains the identical chord structures from the previous key. The C# functions as the raised fourth in G major, therefore perpetuating the fairy music.

Smith wanted to give the singer a cadenza-esque closing in Morris. At m. 25 the piano finishes its final flourish, then allows the singer to have an exposed acappella moment in which to express a final vulnerable reflection.

23. **Jack Tellalian**, born 1913, an Armenian who emigrated from Turkey in 1921, age 7.

**Text:** When we were coming to America... one old lady came to my grandmother and said, “I understand in America they shovel gold off the sidewalks. Will you please send me a shovelful? But when we came to America, we didn’t find any shovels of gold on the sidewalk.

**Range:** C₄ – E₅

**Tempo Marking:** With abandon †=164

A bold and lively polka gives form to the cycle’s twenty-third song, Jack. The polka was an exuberant folk dance originated in central Europe in the mid-19th century and was associated with the music cultures of Sweden, Poland, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, and Russia, though it also filtered into most of Europe. The name polka was derived from the Czech word *půlka*, which translates to “little half”, referring to the short half-strides, used in the dance. Smith’s composition strongly characterizes the style, using representative “um pah pah” rhythms.

*Jack* is the only fully tonal song in the cycle, with its standard I-IV-V-I chord progression. The F major tonality complements the anticipatory and positive outlook that the text provides, “in America they shovel gold off the sidewalks.” However, in m. 33
the jubilant major tonality turns somber, where the music is marked disillusioned, and an f minor key emerges to reflect their disenchantment with America. Smith wanted to write something that sounded like “musical pouting”, culminating in mm. 39-40 with the chordal climb through the tonic triad inversions.

When considering artistic elements, a slight vocal coloring can be used to distinguish the old woman’s voice in m. 17, in contrast to the narrator voice of Jack. Blythe uses a slightly nasal and aged sound when quoting that line, and then switches back to her normal rich resonance.

Musical Example 4.22 “Jack” mm. 16-20. For artistic diversity a vocal color can be applied to distinguish the vocal timbre between the old lady and the song’s narrator.
24. **Catherine Gaetano Gallippi**, born 1914, emigrated from Italy in 1922, age 8.

**Text:** When we came here to America, my mother complained, “My God, I thought America was supposed to be something great. They have gaslights here. We had electric lights in Italy.

**Range:** D4 - G5  
**Tempo Marking:** Grand $\frac{1}{4}=42$

Though the shortest song of the cycle at a mere twenty-one bars, *Catherine*, is small but mighty. Smith wanted a sense of grand music to represent the imposing force of Catherine’s mother. His concept of her was either a very tall and large woman whose physical presence was looming and imposing, or a tiny woman 4’8” whose personality was enormous and who dominated everyone in her path. He leaves it to the singer to decide which to invoke.

Parallel major chords climb up the scale doubling the voice in mm. 1-8, and score a wall of sound which personifies the mother’s forcefulness. Smith also fortified the bass with octave leaps that create a pedal point to further reinforce the drama.

There is no time signature indicated in the score, and the measures vary between two beats per measure to six. Smith wanted to create the grandest sound possible, and by extending time he could simultaneously craft the mother’s controlling and annoying nature. Musical Example 4.23 shows the grand entrance music of Catherine’s mother.

Musical Example 4.23 “*Catherine*” mm. 1-8.
Demonstrates the grand entrance music of Catherine’s mother.
When Blythe performs this piece she designs an accelerando to ascend the first scale and tends to condense the longest bars, Smith however, prefers it slower and as written. He did concede that, “when you have Stephanie Blythe and Warren Jones doing your music, you can be only so picky! Would they listen to me about it? Absolutely! But its just not that important to me.”

In m. 10 Smith created a grating quality with the falling 7ths that accompany the text “My God, I thought America.” The angular interval serves both to make the listener uneasy and the mother sound put out. Smith’s clever lines accomplish both.

The song concludes with a tag of Italian vaudeville music, marked as “jaunty”. Trying to recreate the sounds from their homeland, Smith wrote a stereotype of what might be heard in the street back in the old country. With her resentful claim, “we had electric lights in Italy” the song ends with the mother appearing to feel as if life were better before they came to America.
25. Anna Zagar Klarich, born 1902, emigrated from Yugoslavia in 1920, age 18.

Text: I came in my mother’s apartment and she had lace curtains. We didn’t have that in Europe. And I was just admiring these lace curtains. They were so beautiful. And my mother said, “There are cookies in the kitchen. When you want, you just go and help yourself...” And she gave me her nightgown, a big nightgown and I put in on... I got up at six o’clock in the morning and then went into the kitchen and I got myself four big cookies and I put them on my lap... And I’m eating my cookies and admiring those curtains and my mother peeked in my bedroom... And I was so embarrassed that I had these cookies in my lap and I was so hungry for cookies. She said, “Don’t be embarrassed. Just eat them. Eat all that you want...” I was in Heaven.

Range: B3 – E5 (transposition in higher key, Range: C#4 - F#5)
Tempo Marking: With childlike joy $\frac{\text{♩}}{\text{♩}}=68$

The penultimate song in the cycle, “Anna”, is a beautiful narrative about a young woman joining her mother for the first time in America. Smith’s delicate music sets her vulnerable insecurity impeccably. Anna’s theme music appears in m. 2 with the left hand crossing into the treble octave. It beckons back to Clara’s sad and pining theme in Song Six m. 2; however this time, Smith inverts the melody to evoke a sense of childlike wonder and hope.

The final two songs in the cycle both contain texts from Anna Zagar Klarich. The final piece Smith labeled an epilogue, therefore he called “Anna” the actual last song of the cycle. In this final display Smith incorporates many of the elements that define his distinctive compositional sound; from the key selection of the warm D♭ major, to the soothing triplet figures, the shimmer brought about by the raised 4th, and the post romantic usage of the 6/4 chord with an extended postlude. Essentially Smith is providing the firework finale for the cycle by spotlighting all these elements here at the end.

With the piano part primarily set in triplets, m. 15 asserts contrasting duple figures in the vocal line. Smith wanted this hemiola to drag slightly but not disrupt the movement
of the phrase. Rhythmically he also alternates between 6/8 and 9/8 time, but with both signatures being compound, audibly there is little difference. The variation, however, forces the singer to prepare this song with accuracy.

A key shift from Db to C major occurs at m. 14, however Smith’s first draft of the song omitted an interlude bar (now m. 13). It was Blythe’s idea to give a little adjusting time to transition from the first atmosphere into the second. Smith obliged and inserted one additional vamping bar to bridge the gap. The key shifts establish a difference between when Anna is internalizing thoughts or emotions and when the outside world (i.e. her mother) interacts directly with her.

Another musically dramatic moment occurs at “and my mother peaked in my bedroom…” Smith creates a stark key shift that eventually implies a minor, however, the first bar of the modulation is a transitional cluster comprised of F#, G#, C#, D# and E. Meant to create an abrupt shock on the downbeat of m. 36, the cluster chord is sustained into the subsequent bar of recitative. Then, three unaccompanied measures function like a vocal cadenza giving the voice the complete focus. The score instructs “recited, quickly, breathlessly” and gives the singer permission to explore vocal coloring, however Smith wanted the full voice engaged again with “and I was so hungry for cookies”. The absence of the piano allows the text and voice to vulnerably connect with the audience.

Text painting is found m. 23 where six repeated notes toll in the right hand before the text “I got up at six o’clock in the morning”. Appearing twice within the cycle, Smith cleverly devised these clock strikes to offer a beautiful and haunting stillness.

The mystical sound of the 6/4 chord is again utilized in two deliberate places. The first arrives at m. 32 simultaneous with the text “and I’m eating my cookies”. It reflects
her utter happiness and inherent human joy, brought by the simplest of pleasures. The second 6/4 continues the theme on her final line “I was in heaven”. Smith intentionally set “heav’n” as a single syllable word, associating it with his upbringing in the Baptist church where many hymns condense heaven to one note. When Blythe performs “Anna”, however, she articulates a second syllable for the word and places it on the downbeat in m. 49.

“Anna” is the only song which has an extended postlude in the cycle. Her childlike hope theme reappears in transposition at m. 49 in the C6 octave of the left hand. A repeat of the theme in m. 51 changes the figure slightly and raises the final note to A#, intimating that her joy is beyond anything she’d known before as shown in Musical Example 4.24.

![Musical Example 4.24](image-url)

**Musical Example 4.24 “Anna” mm. 50-53** The “Anna” theme is heard in the postlude and repeats three times. However, the final two modify the gesture by raising the last note a major third to A#, signifying her happiness is above anything she’s experienced before.
26. **Anna Zagar Klarich**, born 1902, emigrated from Yugoslavia in 1920, age 18.

**Text:** *This is my life and that’s how I lived it and that’s how I came here and that’s it.*

**Range:** C4 – D5

**Tempo Marking:** Simple $\downarrow 42$

The cycle closes as it opened in what Smith described as a mirror image. The *Prologue* begins with voice and the piano follows, contrary to the *Epilogue* which starts with piano and is joined by the voice. The final bars of the cycle, identical to that of the opening, deliver the haunting falling minor third lullaby. This phantom melody recedes as it entered, softly and without intrusion, lingering in the air long after the final note ends.

The right hand of the piano and voice alternate the lullaby melody from the *Prologue*, while the left hand walks lushly up broken intervals. Smith wanted the consonant cut offs to be exactly in time with the passing off of the melody to the right hand of the piano part. The alternation between 6/8 and 9/8 time increase the challenge for the singer to keep track of the number of beats at each cut off. When Blythe performs this song she has added extra length to the word “it” in m. 12, however Smith prefers it to be delivered casually and without elongation. Smith recreates the ethereal accompaniment from the *Prologue* with his fourth derived chordal harmonies which descend by half step. *This leit motif* appears throughout the cycle and its mild dissonance evokes a dreamlike state, leaving the piano part sounding unfinished. As the sustained chords drift to nothingness, they pass the initiative to the voice, to complete the song.
In her simplistic summation “this is my life and that’s how I lived it, and that’s how I came here and that’s it.”, Anna represents the voice of all the immigrants whose stories were contained in the cycle. Wanting to create a medium for commonality Smith set the piece in C major, the most accessible key. This simplistic key choice exemplifies her final thought, “that’s it.”

**Musical Example 4.25 Song 26 “Anna” mm. 11-20** The final page of the song cycle concludes with the unaccompanied sound of the voice in the haunting lullaby that is recapitulated from the opening strains of the cycle.
EPILOGUE

Though a lesser known living composer of the twentieth and twenty-first century, Alan Louis Smith is an extraordinary translator of the human spirit; his music, both accessible and multifaceted is worthy of great acknowledgement and heightened profile. This document serves to introduce his compositions, and specifically bring light to the beauty of *Vignettes: Ellis Island*, which is representative of his distinct compositional style. So that other scholars might in the future compare and contrast the evolution of his compositional traits and note changes in his style, below is a summary of identifying characteristics, specifically related to the period in which Smith wrote *Vignettes: Ellis Island* summarizing his major hallmarks:

- Use of the falling minor third
- Quartal and quintal harmonies
- Frequent use of the raised 4th interval
- Use of 6/4 chords as unexpected cadence points
- Harmonic planing
- Use of mixed meter, and omission of time signatures
- Use of polytonalities, and omission of key signatures

Smith wrote two other cycles that he deemed *vignettes*. The first, *Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn from the Private Papers of a World War II Bride*, was commissioned by the Tanglewood Music Center in 2002 in dedication to famed singer and teacher Phyllis Curtain. These songs offer an exposed glimpse into a husband’s intimate love letters written to his bride during a time of war. The second, *Vignettes:
Covered Wagon Woman: from the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850, delves into the courage and strength of a woman who made the pioneer transcontinental journey from Illinois to California. When Smith selects topics to set to music, a common thread seems to be strength of the human spirit. Resulting in works that are highly engaging, they deliver genuine portrayals that powerfully impact the audience. Another commonality in his writing is that he composes for specific muses. Inspired by his close friends, colleagues and mentors, his songs capture an authentic and honest reflection of his love of friends and that of collaboration.

Beyond his musical faculty, his talent in word setting and text painting are tremendously powerful. Understanding the voice and its functional needs, he is able to craft songs that allow the voice to freely express the emotion, unhindered. Despite his immense gifts as a teacher, coach, pianist, and composer, he possesses a humble and unassuming demeanor which further enhances the genuine nature of his compositions. When asked which of his many roles he most enjoys he carefully considered and revealed:

They are all rewarding in different ways. Let me put it this way, if I never taught again, I would absolutely die. I would miss it. If I never performed again, I would absolutely miss it. If I never composed again, I would feel very good about everything I have done to this point. And I wouldn’t die.

It is the author’s belief, however that the catalogue of modern vocal literature is greatly enriched with Smith’s contributions, and the profile of his work must be heightened so that the power of his music can be experienced by wider audiences.
APPENDIX A
COMPLETE LIST OF WORKS BY ALAN LOUIS SMITH

Five Psalms of Jonathan to David for Countertenor and Piano, on original poetry
Written May, 2008. 17½ minutes.

Written August, 2007. 4 ½ minutes.
Premiered November 2007, Newman Recital Hall, USC, Alexander Suleiman, cello;
Alan Smith, piano.

Adagio Romantico for Violin and Piano.
Written May 2007. 4 ½ minutes.
Premiered, 24 September 2007, Newman Recital Hall, USC, Janna Lower, violin;
Alan Smith, piano.

He’s Gone Away: An American Folksong, arranged for voice and piano
Written May, 2007. 4 minutes.
Hall, New York, Stephanie Blythe, mezzo-soprano; Warren Jones, piano.

Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman, from the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850;
for mezzo-soprano, violin, cello, and piano
Written 2007. 38 minutes.
Commissioned by Music Accord for Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.
Premiered, February 22, 2008. New York City at the New York Society for Ethical
Culture. Stephanie Blythe, mezzo-soprano; Ani Kavafian, violin; Priscilla Lee, cello;
Warren Jones, piano.

Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn, from the Private Papers of a World War II Bride for
soprano and piano [5 songs]
Written 2002. 17 mins.
Commissioned by the Tanglewood Music Center Premiere: July 20th, 2002, Tanglewood
Music Center. Reviewed by New York Times and Boston Globe
West coast premiere: Fall 2002, University of Southern California with Elizabeth Hynes,
soprano. Recording in the collection of The Eisenhower Presidential Museum and
Library; Abilene, Kansas.
Vignettes: Ellis Island, A Song Cycle in Six Parts for voice and piano [26 songs]
Written June 1999.  30 mins.
Premiere: 2000, USC, Stephanie Blythe, mezzo-soprano, and Alan Smith, piano
New York premiere: 2001, 92nd Street Y, Stephanie Blythe and Warren Jones
Recorded for New York public television, November 2003 Stephanie Blythe, mezzo,
and Warren Jones, piano  Aired January 2004, sponsored by Opera News
Requested for and placed in the permanent collection of the Museum of Television and
Radio, 2004
Recording of the performance from the opening night of the Chamber Music Society of
Lincoln Center, 2007, in the permanent collection of the Museum of Anthropology of the
People of New York [2007].

Under the Harvest Moon, a song for voice and piano
Written 1996.  4 mins.

Lady Moon, a song for voice and piano,
Written 1995.  2 mins.

Among of green, a song for voice and piano,
Written 1995.  1 min.

May He Who Brings Flowers, a song for voice and piano,
Written 1995.  2 mins.

Rose, a song for voice and piano,
Written 1995.  2 mins.

A Lesson in Music, a song for voice and piano,
Written 1994.  4 mins.

Song, for violin and piano,
Written 1989.  3 mins.

Four Folksongs, four arrangements for soprano, viola, and piano,
Written 1988.  12 mins.
Published September 2003 by Alfred Publishers.

Sing of the Gardens, a song for voice and piano,
Written 1988.  5 mins.

Music Stole In, a song for voice and piano,
Written 1987.  3 mins.

Songs of Wandering, a song cycle for voice and piano [5],
Written 1985.  20 mins.

Merry Maudlin Me, a song for voice and piano,
Written 1983.  5 mins.

99
**Love’s Crown**, a song for soprano, baritone, oboe, and piano,
Written 1983. 10 mins.

**Have I Done This?** a song for voice and piano,
Written 1981. 3 mins.

**The Buried Life**, a song cycle for voice and piano
Written 1981. 22 mins.

**Take My Heart to Yours**, song for voice and piano
Written 1981. 4 mins.

**To Bring You Here**, a song for voice and piano
Written 1981. 5 mins.

**Appreciations**, a song cycle for voice and piano [5],
Written 1980. 20 mins.

**Three Wedding Songs**, for soprano, baritone, and piano,
Written 1980. 10 mins.

**Fünf Gesänge**, five songs for voice and piano,
Written 1979. 20 mins.

**When I Break the Bonds of Trivia**, song for voice and piano,
Written 1977. 2 mins.
**Alan Smith, pianist/composer**

**EDUCATION**
- D.M.A., Piano Chamber Music and Vocal Accompanying
  - The University of Michigan, 1989
  - Rackham Dissertation Fellow
  - Karl Haas Scholar
  - Regents Fellow
  - Eugene Bossart Scholar
- M.M., Piano Performance
  - Baylor University, 1981
  - Pi Kappa Lambda Music Honor Society
- B.M., Piano Performance
  - Baylor University, 1979

**PRINCIPAL TEACHERS**
- Chamber Music and Accompanying
  - Martin Katz, The University of Michigan
- Piano
  - Jane Abbott-Kirk, Baylor University

**Additional Masterclasses and Coachings with**
- Elly Ameling
- Margo Garrett
- Dalton Baldwin
- Adele Marcus
- Leon Fleisher
- Geoffrey Parsons

**TEACHING EXPERIENCE**
- The University of Southern California
  - 1989-present
  - Professor of Keyboard Collaborative Arts
  - Chair of Keyboard Studies
    - 2003-present
  - Acting Chair of Keyboard Studies
    - 2002 (Spring semester)
  - Director of Keyboard Collaborative Arts
    - 1990-present
- Tanglewood Music Center
  - 1989-present
  - Faculty Coach-Accompanist
  - Coordinator of the Piano Program
    - 2006-present
- Marian Douglas Martin Master Teacher Chair
- Coordinator of the Vocal Program
  - 1998-2001
- Baylor University
  - 1989
  - Brown Visiting Professor
  - Musical Director to the Opera
  - Individual coaching of art song, arias, and chamber ensembles
- The University of Michigan
  - 1986-1989
  - Teaching Assistant to Martin Katz
  - Song Literature
  - Italian, French, German diction
- Howard Payne University
  - 1981-1986
  - Assistant Professor of Music
  - Applied Piano
  - Piano Literature
  - Song Literature
  - Musical Director of Opera Theater

**MENTORING AWARDS**
- The Ramo Music Faculty Award
  - 2008
- The Dean’s Award for Excellence in Teaching
  - 2005
- Thornton School of Music, USC
- Inaugural Mellon Mentoring Awards Certificate of Recognition
  - University of Southern California
  - 2005
ADDITIONAL
President, Pi Kappa Lambda, Thornton School of Music, USC

AWARDS
Eta chapter 2008

PERFORMING
Engaged as Coach and/or Accompanist to

AND COACHING
Experience
Thomas Stewart, bass baritone
Leslie Guinn, baritone
Lorna Haywood, soprano
Martha Sheil, soprano
Stephanie Blythe, mezzo-soprano
Donald McInnes, viola
Ed Barker, double bassist
Leslie Guinn, baritone
George Shirley, tenor
Barbara Bonney, soprano
Janna Lower, violin
Eudice Shapiro, violin
Elizabeth Pitcairn, violin
Faye Robinson, soprano (coaching)
Michelle deYoung, mezzo-soprano
Christine Brewer (coaching)

Richard Todd, horn
Frederica Von Stade, mezzo-soprano (coaching)
Rodney Gilfry, baritone
Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, official pianist, Orange County
Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, official pianist, San Bernardino County

Opera Coach
Tanglewood Music Center 2000-2003, 2005
Assistant Conductor 2003
San Francisco Opera Center 1986
Western Opera Theater

Masterclasses Given
Baylor University
Manhattan School of Music
UC Los Angeles
UC Irvine
Western Carolina University
Eastman School of Music
Azusa Pacific University
University of Arizona
University of Florida
Tanglewood Music Center
California Institute for the Arts
Minnesota Opera Young Artists Program
Orange County High School for the Arts
University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music
Classical Singers Association, Los Angeles, annually
Esther Honens Calgary International Piano Competition, 1996
National Association of Teachers of Singing
San Diego, CA chapter (multiple appearances)
Los Angeles, CA chapter
Santa Rosa, CA chapter

Teaching Residencies
The University of Michigan
The University of Florida
The University of Nevada, Las Vegas
The University of North Carolina, Greensboro
The University of Minnesota
Ohio State University
Miami University of Ohio
**CONDUCTOR/ASST. CONDUCTOR**

Stravinsky *Credo* [in Russian], Tanglewood Music Center 2005
Conductor, Tanglewood Vocal Fellows
All-Stravinsky Program

Assistant Conductor, Tanglewood Music Center
Robert Spano, conductor

Conductor, Tanglewood Music Center
Concert performance with piano four-hands

**ADJUDICATION**

**INTERNATIONAL**

Esther Honens Calgary International Piano Competition 1996
Tanglewood Music Center Auditions 1994-present

**National**

Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Salt Lake City 2006
Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, San Bernardino 2003
Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, San Antonio 2002
Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Tucson 2002
Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, San Diego 2001
Savannah Music Festival 1999

**Regional**

The Classical Singers Association 2006
Scholarship Auditions Award Finals, LA Music Center
MTNA Solo Piano Competition 2005
Tuesday Musicale of Pasadena annually since 1992
MTAC Solo and Concerto Piano Competition 2004
Pasadena Fine Arts Club Young Artist Competition 2001
Pasadena Arts Council Young Artist Competition 2000, 2001
Pacific Symphony Concerto Competition 2000
Redlands Symphony Concerto Competition 1996
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| **Sung Diction** | **English, German, Italian, Spanish, Latin, Russian, Swedish, International Phonetics Alphabet** |
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW WITH ALAN LOUIS SMITH

July 23-24, 2008; interview recorded at the Tanglewood Music Festival in Lenox, MA, between Tamara Regensburger and Alan Louis Smith.

**BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS:**

Tamara Regensburger: First, thank you again for meeting with me during your summer session here at Tanglewood; I want to begin by discussing your life and how you got here to gain an overview of how you ended up where you are and perhaps the different phases along the way. So let’s begin with where were you born? And where did you grow up?

Alan Louis Smith: I was born in McAllen, Texas, south Texas, tippy, tippy south.

TR: You grew up there as well?

ALS: Yes, I grew up there the first seventeen years of my life until I went to Baylor University in Waco.

TR: How far is Waco?

ALS: Waco is 400 miles north of McAllen.

TR: Sorry I don’t know my Texas geography….

ALS: McAllen is…if you can imagine the tippy tippy part, McAllen is almost in the tip but slightly west of the absolute tip.

TR: So it’s on the Gulf [of Mexico]?

ALS: It’s about an hour from the Gulf if you drive and about three miles from Mexico. It is way down there.

TR: So I guess there was a high Spanish speaking population there?

ALS: Yes, my high school class was about 80%.

TR: OK, so did you speak Spanish then?
ALS: Yes, because when you are in elementary school you have to study Spanish three years. It is very practical down there because if you get a job down there many of the jobs require you to be bilingual.

TR: I think that is fantastic! Language skills are sorely missing today, and especially with bringing along young singers. I would like for Americans to become routinely bilingual.

ALS: It’s true. Absolutely, sure.

TR: What’s your birthday?

ALS: My birthday is October 21st 1955.

TR: OK. Now tell me who were your parents, their names, and what they did for a living?

ALS: My father’s name was Raymond Smith, and he was a nursery man. He grew [it’s a very high citrus area down there] so he grew citrus and things like tomatoes and watermelons. And was wiped out a couple times by freezes, because it freezes down there. And he was killed when I was three years old. He was hit by a beer truck, a drunk man driving a beer truck. It didn’t kill him, he just broke his leg, but in those days they didn’t give blood thinners automatically, and he was in the hospital and a blood clot let go from his leg and went to his brain and killed him. [small pause] And he sang….amateur, like in the church choir and things of that kind. And my mother, her name is Dorothy Smith, she grew up in Texas. And she is a nurse by profession, WAS a nurse by profession, she’s retired now. And ended up being director….head of a school of nursing down there in McAllen. And she also sings, and all growing up she sang all the time. She used to sing me and my brother to sleep; I have an older sister as well. But we would sing around the breakfast table, there was a......Do you know what Cream of Wheat is? There was a Cream of Wheat jingle when I was a little kid. First we’d say a prayer and then we’d sing the Cream of Wheat song and then we’d eat our Cream of Wheat. And the Cream of Wheat song ends with “and makes us shout hurray!”, so we’d all shout “Hurray!” So there was always singing in my home. My mother’s parents, both grandparents were also amateur
singers and they used to when they were young….they would go with a Methodist preacher who would go from church to church, in a very narrow geographic area, and the preacher would preach and my grandmother and grandfather would sing duets, unaccompanied.

TR: Hymns?

ALS: Hymns, yes! So there was ALL this singing going on [in my family]

TR: So lots of singing…how about playing instruments, was there a piano in the house growing up?

ALS: Ah, well my sister started piano first, and we were given a piano by a great uncle who was a dentist and his hobby was restoring pianos. So he gave us a piano and my sister started piano lessons. And I really wanted to start partly because she did it and she was kind of one of my heroes so I wanted to do what she did, but also it just looked like a lot of fun. But my mom wouldn’t start me because she was afraid…there wasn’t a lot of extra money in our household…and she was kind of afraid that I would start lessons, take a year or two, and the money would be wasted, then I’d quit and it would be a waste of time. But I kept begging and begging and begging, so my mother actually was my first piano teacher. She plays the piano well enough to play hymns but she showed me which notes on the page went with which notes on the piano. And just painstakingly…. she would cry and I would cry and she’d say “this is that note”, and I’d say “no it isn’t”, she’d say “yes it is!” So by the time I started piano lessons I was already kind of at an intermediate level because I figured it out. But it’s been great for my sight-reading because it was so painstaking for my mom to teach me those notes that now I’m a pretty good sight-reader.

TR: OK. So tell me where your siblings fell as far as order?

ALS: Well I’m the middle one, my sister is the eldest and she is a beautiful singer, she is a beautiful pianist, and she plays the harp, none of those professionally.

TR: What does she do professionally?
ALS: She is the front person for a photography studio in McAllen, TX. My brother was the least musical of the three of us, in terms of his own talent and skill. But he loves music; he loves the music of Wagner and he loves Bach. So he listens to it a lot.

TR: I think that people that love Wagner, who really aren’t associated [with music]… have a visceral reaction. There’s something about Wagner that draws that crowd. It took me a long time to learn to like Wagner, I think because I went about it not from just listening and loving but by…well hearing all this noise going on and…

ALS: You knew you were supposed to admire it somehow….

TR: Right, right! OK, now you said your mom was your first piano teacher but when did you formally begin to take piano?

ALS: Well, when I was nine, when I was nine years old, which is late for a pianist. Most pianists who really achieve a lot start pretty much when they start to read, so around five or six. But like I said I started earlier with my mom, like around seven. But I started formal lessons when I was nine.

TR: Ok, so tell me about your first piano teacher, was this someone who carried you far or….

ALS: Yes, I studied with her my entire time, from the time I was nine until I went to Baylor. And she was the local church pianist, her name was Mildred Allen, and she is no longer living. But she had just an entire…. I don’t know how many students she taught; I think she had around sixty. And she would see us all for a half hour. She was just a lovely and fun [person] and had kind of a big personality, and she was a very happy person you know. When it was time for your lesson she’d say things like, “now get on in here”. I don’t know she was just great, and I fell in love with her; she was one of my heroes. My sister studied and she would go in for her lesson. We’d drive to Mrs. Allen’s house and all sit in the living room, me, my mom, and my sister. My sister would go and I could hear her lessons, then I’d go in for mine and we’d go home…grab a hamburger along the way…
She was trained in Louisiana; I think she was from Louisiana. That’s really what she did, she just taught all the time, and her husband was a CPA or something. Anyway she was just a lovely person.

TR: Was it always classical music you studied, did you do jazz, or did you play any other genres?

ALS: It was almost always classical but from time to time if there was a popular piece on the radio or something she would give me the sheet music to try and I always loved that. My own bent was toward classical so I wasn’t as interested in that as other students were.

TR: I think there is a calling for some toward classical music, I never liked pop much either. First time I heard opera that was it.

ALS: And plus I would hear my sister playing these harder pieces and I wanted to play the harder pieces like she did.

TR: How much older is she than you?

ALS: She is two years older

TR: And how much younger is your brother?

ALS: He is only fourteen months younger.

TR: Did you play other musical instruments growing up or was piano the only one?

ALS: No, piano was the only one, but I studied voice. I started that in high school. Plus, in the church choir, the church where I grew up, which was a Southern Baptist church, they had little children in graded music programs. They [the music programs] were really good, they were more than just come and sing a pretty song. They taught note reading and rhythmic theory and other things. Also, when I was 8 or 9, [chuckling] they would offer food or a piece candy if you could figure out a note on the staff; you know F A C E and Every Good Boy Does Fine? So I was motivated very highly by candy. Then along with those church programs, the elementary school and high school that I attended, had awesome, excellent music programs.
You wouldn’t think that in a little town in south Texas they would have this kind of stuff going on. But from elementary school all the way up through high school, the choral programs were outstanding, so I sang all the time in choir, at church and at school, and in high school programs. For example, when I was in high school our choirs would go to these little competitions and get the highest ratings every year so our directors stopped taking us to those and instead we raised money to hire members of the San Antonio Symphony to come and we would do things like Vivaldi Gloria or Schubert Mass in G or something like that. Now that I look back on that, I am just stunned that these people that taught in the elementary and high school programs were so good and so totally aware. In high school I took a theory course that was an elective that was taught by an excellent theoretician and I had lots of Kodaly and lots of rhythmic reading and things like that. Since I was a little ahead of my colleagues he gave me these exercises written by Nadia Boulanger, and you had to sing solfege and play with both hands at the same time and they’re in different clefs. They are not in typical clefs that we know and I found this very, very hard and I can’t say that I was stunning at them but he really pushed me that way.

TR: Do you think that might have been a coaching realization that young because that’s also kind of what you do now? You have to play your part and you have to watch your singer’s part simultaneously?

ALS: I hadn’t really thought of it that way, but you’re exactly right, that coordination certainly is the same. You’re exactly right!

TR: So, with your sight reading at that age, did you find that is when your strength in reading and thinking about music compositionally occurred or was it high school when you really started that or did that start later?

ALS: Well, I remember that when my sister started college, a couple of years before I did, she was in this local college all female singing group and they did things like the Britten’s Ceremony of Carols with the harp and everything like that. I remember thinking at that time, “Oh, that’s such a beautiful sound and I think I’m going to arrange
something”, and I don’t remember what it was, but it was a four part women’s voice [piece], not very long. One thing that I did when I was in high school, in particular, I would take hymns, very familiar hymns and I would arrange them for voice and piano and sometimes multiple voices and piano. So I really started with arranging and I found this very gratifying. Also, growing up in a Southern Baptist conservative religion like that, I learned of the power of words combined with the power of music. It had a very powerful moving force in my life. I talked once to Margo Garrett, the vocal coach and pianist, and she grew up similarly, I think it was a Baptist church, in North Carolina. We talked about how when you are singing “nothing but the blood of Jesus” and you feel all this fervor, it’s not all that far from a song of Schubert or Fauré in a different language and time period. But the magic and the power of words and music are the same. Maybe it doesn’t have a religious overtone to songs by Fauré or Schubert, but the idea is there, and that’s significant to my upbringing.

TR: When did you first begin composing?

ALS: I really started there, at university; I was a solo piano major as an undergrad and also a solo piano major for my masters. And one of the things …it was either an elective or required at the junior level to take composition. It was either that or conducting. [laughing] I guess I didn’t want to waggle a stick so I decided to compose. There was a very kind man, his name was John Gibson, he’s no longer living, but he had studied composition with Honegger, the French composer. Mr. Gibson would give us these assignments, like we had to write a piece for our own instrument and we could write anything we wanted. So I wrote some pieces for voice and piano. And every assignment I would hand in, he would hand it back with very kind words on it and it would either say A or A+ and believe me, it wasn’t because the compositions were so good because I’ve looked back at them and they weren’t. But his kindness and his belief sparked me to think for the first time, “Oh! Well, I wrote this down on paper and somebody liked it!” And it didn’t occur to me then that I was going to become a composer, but I thought it was nice and that maybe I would write something from time to time. I had a voice teacher, when I was studying voice at Baylor also, and his name was John McFadden, he’s also no longer living, actually he died
young. And anyhow I showed him my songs and he loved German song as I did, especially Strauss. And the vocal parts [of Smith’s early songs] sounded much like Strauss and Wagner. They’re actually very pretty and people have sung them from time to time.

TR: What was your text?

ALS: There was a poem of Goethe, there was a poem of Gurst, gosh, I can’t even remember who the other three were, but, he, my voice teacher, liked them and he liked singing them. And he recorded them on a reel to reel tape just so I could [have them], I asked him if we could record them, and he said sure. And he was a fantastic reader. So I still have that recording, I wish I had it here to play for you some.

TR: Tell me about your process of composing.

ALS: I don’t struggle over it the way some do. It just comes to me. It’s more like taking dictation than it is making something up. I continued to play in the voice studio of my voice teacher whom I was no longer studying with (because as a minor I studied voice maybe my freshman and sophomore year) and then continued focusing on my major which was piano. But I played for other singers and I loved doing that. I had a very good friend, a baritone, who was named John Gary Tharp who was giving one of his recitals and I wrote a set of five songs in English for Gary that was written on poetry by Gary.

TR: Wow, that is really a beautiful thing, was this a gift or did he commission you to write them?

ALS: It was not commissioned, we just talked about and we did it. This is really a significant aspect of my composing: I almost always write for a person that I know, for a voice that I know well, for a spirit I know well and usually for someone that I love a lot; like my voice teacher, like Gary, like Stephanie Blythe, we’ll get to her, I’m sure. [Laughing] So I don’t just compose theoretically.

TR: Do you only compose for voice? Or have you written for other instruments?
ALS: I’ve written pieces for violin and piano, cello and piano and the most recent composition, the commission for The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center was a piano trio with violin, cello and mezzo-soprano. Also Karen Peeler commissioned a piece which was four folk songs for soprano, viola and piano. So, I do have pieces that blend instruments. That’s the piece that was published by Alfred Publishers.

TR: I know that we’ve spoken a little about Strauss being a very influential composer, do you identify with others that you use in your compositions or are your favorites? Who were/are your primary influences that shaped you as a composer? Who are your favorite composers to just enjoy?

ALS: I’ll tell you, Samuel Barber songs I just adore, as someone who writes in American English. Aaron Copeland, also…. Samuel Barber, I just think, has such an ability to capture the overall color of a poem and then to set the words just specifically and a voice exactly where you need it and the piano accompaniments are so beautiful. Copeland, similarly, like in the Dickinson songs, he has the same gift. Of course there are [composers] in any language that I can think of, there’s Strauss, of course, in the German language repertoire, Wolf is the total pinnacle of perfect word setting. In French I adore Fauré, Debussy.

TR: Do you adore them for their word setting? Do you adore them for the piano parts?

ALS: For two things: One is the beautiful way they set the words and also the aural beauty is very important to me, just the sound. This is one of the things about Strauss that appeals to me is that not only does he set words well, for the most part, but just the harmonies and the textures are so beautiful, so rich.

TR: To me, the Strauss element that just captivates me is that he does this, it’s like handing off a baton, like a relay race, and he transitions from different instruments, different lines, and soars into someone else’s, there’s just this magical connection between everyone that’s playing.
ALS: Exactly right! So, when I hear some of my music sometimes, usually when I’m working on something, I’m not aware that it might sound like something else. When I first started composing like those early German songs, I was trying to copy that sound, make it my own, but still copy it. Then I went through a period for a little while, after that, where I thought, “I don’t want to sound like anyone else; I just want to sound like me.” Now when I hear those compositions, I think, “Well, it does sound like me.” I heard someone say one time, I think it was Martin Katz, in Poulenc you can hear three chords and it can be two miles away, but if you hear those three chords, you know exactly that it’s Poulenc. And sometimes I can hear in my early music the same sounds and they still tweak me today. So then, I was very aware of trying not to sound like anyone else, and really in the Vignettes Ellis Island, I know we’re not there yet, but I’ll just say it, I didn’t worry about [that] at all. I didn’t try not to sound like somebody else and if it did sound like something else that I knew, I thought, run with it. And in fact, in Ellis Island, I tried to put in some popular sounding music like these people would have heard when they came here. And you know there was this song Kaj, “...the day I left my mother said to me...” and that is very much like a hymn (of course), with a few wrong notes on purpose. And it occurred to me maybe a year after I wrote it, that it really sounds very much like Ives.

TR: So by wrong notes, you mean you go from this chordal very tonal center and then you intentionally throw in a couple *whanks*?

ALS: Totally! Just so that it’s a little bit askew. Because I find that (I find this also in word setting) that I want the text to be clear, so the stress and non-stress of the English is very, very important to me. And it needs to be clear, but I do find that from time to time, in a 30 minute cycle for instance, maybe in two or three or four places I’ll set the words a little bit so that the stress is not..., so that it works against the words sometimes, because I find that it perks up the brain of the listener just a little bit. When I write, for instance, for Stephanie, like the Ellis Island and the most recent commission, she adores words. And she adores making words sound like language. So I am very spoiled because I know that whatever I write, she will turn it into
the fullest meaning possible. So getting back to those little, what I call wrong notes (in Kaj for instance), which are just a little bit off so that just when a listener might get complacent, and think “oh, I’ve figured out what he’s doing so I’ll just turn off and think about my grocery list”, then I stick in a little something so it grabs the ear back and says “he didn’t go quite where I thought he would go with that, so I better pay attention because he might go someplace else when I’m not looking”.

TR:  
I’d love to go through some theoretical specifics in Vignettes to understand what you are actually doing harmonically. As a twenty first century composer, how much of the old school counterpoint do you still stick with? Because your music is tonal, and your music is very melodic and the vocal lines have beautiful melodies, but piano, the accompaniment is extremely interesting but not necessarily in a key center.

ALS:  
Right. Sometimes I don’t even write a key signature because it’s not so important to me. I was very aware of it when I was writing before writing Vignettes, because I thought well I needed a key center, I need a key signature. But now I am more willing and ready to NOT put a key signature at all and just put in the accidentals in whatever measure that it calls for, because it allows me the freedom of going anywhere I want to tonally. So that is something I have noticed [with writing this set]. And another thing, something I did in Vignettes that I actually I borrowed from [Samuel] Barber, for instance in Hermit Songs, there are no meter signatures. I found that also very freeing. I’m not rabid about that, the no time signature, because time signatures are very helpful (so are key signatures), but I have found by omitting time signatures altogether and switching from 6/8 to 7/8, 3/4 or whatever, that two things happen: One is that there is no time signature that bunches up at the bar line and makes you think that “oh this is a new thing”. It’s like; if notes are cows then you remove the fences and the cows can go wherever they want. But also I think as a performer, if a singer or a pianist is learning [a piece] for the first time they have to go, “oh they’re not the same number of beats in this measure as there were in the last one”. And again, it kind of gets people involved, early on in the process, because I didn’t feed them what the meter is so they have to figure out what that is.
TR: That’s interesting you say that because I experienced this moment that was really funny between Michael Lester and I when we worked through them [Vignettes] the first time. From a pianist’s mindset a lot things are structured and consistent, and so he was reading along and suddenly he said “wait a minute, this is different”, because he realized that you switched your pattern from a triangle circle [bar of 5/8 with the grouping being three then two beats], to a circle triangle [bar of 5/8 with the grouping being two then three beats], and you inverted your pattern. When he played it a second time it sounded totally different after the recognition. Well me being as a singer, I’m so insecure rhythmically, I was almost hyper aware of the counting of these bars, that they didn’t make sense to me either. It was like we [Michael and I] were on completely different ends of the fence [laughing], with him he was just reading along expecting it to be normal, and me completely expecting it to be different every bar.

ALS: I had this same discussion with Stephanie when it gets to that one in 5/8… [singing the piano melody] what are the words there I can’t remember what they are?

TR: “…and be a good worker…” it’s from Emma, the first piece after the prologue.

ALS: Yes, and I wrote the piano part rhythmically so that the last note is always short [demonstrates the melody again with the clipped final note], but the voice part doesn’t do that, it just does what it does. And I remember Stephanie pointed out to me, before the world premiere, she said “you know we don’t have the same articulation there. Does that bother you?” and I said no, that’s exactly what I want, not the same articulation.

TR: Yes, because there are a lot of pick-ups where the vocal line has a pick-up into the next bar and has more of a stressed eighth note, where you [the piano part] have the staccato.

ALS: Well that’s great that you picked up on that.

TR: It was perhaps a little subconscious maybe, but I did feel that something was making me feel a little disoriented and I
needed to figure out what it was so I wasn’t “spooked” by it.

TR: OK so now let’s talk about text a little bit, where do you go for finding these topics? Because you do seem to set things that have this very strong personal, human spirit connection...

ALS: Well, you answered my question. I look for texts that do exactly that. I look for texts that move me emotionally, largely. As a person, I am emotional first and rational second. So I choose texts which are that way too, by and large, emotional first and rational second. And so, well for instance the German songs that I set are about...well a lot of German poems are about love, but also meeting and ecstasy and sort of Wagnerian in that way. The poems that Gary wrote are very personal in an insightful psychological way. I remember one of the poems starts, it says... “I’ve seen you from across the street and you don’t know I’m watching”. Already that’s just so gripping and it makes you want to know more and say where’s this going? [Continuing to quote the poem] “You strike your pose, you suppose, there’s no other way to make your really fine living.” Anyway, so I choose poetry that just speaks to me. And here’s another thing about MY composing, first of all I don’t need to compose to make a living, so that’s very freeing in some ways. Another thing is that I don’t compose to impress anybody, well that’s not true... early on I did, I composed to impress my voice teacher, and I wanted Gary to like the music I wrote for his poetry, but now and with Ellis Island and even before I don’t care to impress anybody. My goal is to be honest. Musically honest, textually honest, emotionally honest...This is another thing where my association with Stephanie Blythe is so important, because she is that. When she sings it's totally honest.

TR: I love that word; the word I kept coming back to was genuine.

ALS: Yes!

TR: I kept thinking the texts are so genuine... Understandably since they were actually being spoken by the people who went through that, but I cannot also help but notice that the
settings of them are extremely genuine, too. You take things that match exactly…but honest I love that word.

ALS:

When I first started writing, like the German songs, I over composed. The piano parts were huge and beautiful, and the vocal part was huge, and beautiful. But then with *Ellis Island*, another important thing happened; I became very aware of when my writing would help illuminate the words and when I needed to get out of the way of the words. This was the first time I was consciously aware of the need to stop over composing.

TR:

You know that’s kind of a meeting of the German lieder versus French melodie. French melodie is very focused on the beauty, of the melody and the lines, while in German the “star” is the text. And so this really does mesh these two ideas together.

ALS:

Yes.

TR:

The collaborative equilibrium in this piece, in particular, but also I thought in *George to Evelyn: Letters of a WWII bride* is very, very balanced. The voice has beautiful; interesting things to do, while the piano also has beautiful and interesting things to do, was the intention to challenge both the singer and pianist? And does this come out of your background as a pianist and a singer?

ALS:

Being a pianist, I appreciate how in the piano part, how it feels and what sounds beautiful to my ear and then having studied some voice I have some understanding of what it feels like to make that sound. I think that the integration of it having been both, I can’t say having been a singer, but having studied singing and having sung a lot in choirs gives me an appreciation for what that feels like. My favorite composers like Barber and Wolf and Strauss, they integrate the vocal and piano parts so beautifully that one cannot exist without the other. While I’m thinking about honesty, and your word genuineness, I’m thinking [when composing] also just like I mentioned with Barber…aural beauty.

TR:

Ok.
ALS: I think of beauty, and I actually heard Phyllis Curtain say one time, in talking to young composers, because sometimes they are writing all this gnarly stuff, for them it’s very honest, great for me, it’s not so beautiful but I remember her saying to them one time, she said do you ever just think of beauty? And she wasn’t saying for any reason, she wasn’t chastising whatever; she just asked them “Do you ever think of beauty”? And I don’t think she meant tonal beauty, but rather she meant beauty-beauty. I had already written a lot of things by the time I heard Phyllis say that, and it occurred to me when thinking backwards, and at the same time thinking forwards, “oh yeah, that is really an important thing for me”. I am a composer who happens to believe that in tonal music, that not everything has necessary been said that can be said. And there are infinite ways of putting together all of those twelve tones and it can be beautiful. I gave a little talk at the University of Irvine, in May. Their voice department did all of Ellis Island with twelve singers and one pianist. I gave a little talk before [the performance] for the singers’ friends and parents. Not musicians, or anyone related to classical music, and I said to them “You don’t need to worry because my music is purdy”. I sounded like a Texan, I said, “I write purdy music.” And that is important to me. Is my music sometimes dissonant? Absolutely! But that sense of beauty is very important.

TR: The dissonance that’s in Vignettes is very closely linked to the emotional anxiety levels that are happening. None of it came out as ugly in the least, it’s all very honest.

ALS: That is what my goals was.

TR: As a pianist, you’ve probably sat behind the keyboard and have played dull things, for instance if you have a singer performing Puccini, it’s not all that interesting for the pianist because you only get to double the vocal line and its sort of just letting them soar. But I really feel like your music allows the pianist to do something very interesting and autonomous. Is that a consideration you make when you are composing? To give your pianist friends something interesting to work on…

ALS: Yes, and to give myself something to do. I knew that if Ellis Island were ever performed (and I never knew that it
would be when I gave it to Stephanie as a birthday present)... Really the writing of it and giving it to her was my completion. That was my “whatever”. And I can tell you honestly that if it had never been performed, then my job was done and that my artistic expression was complete. Then the fact that she liked it and wanted to perform it has been glorious. You ask me something, and I have just totally lost track of what you asked me…

TR: We were talking about pianist….

ALS: Oh yes…when I wrote Ellis Island I just thought well I’m going to do something that is fun for me too. So you know there’s that one that goes…[sings a portion of “Martha”] “they have roast ducks and roast pigeons”. So you know that’s a real killer and pianists that play the cycle they always practice that one the most because it’s a real killer kind of piece. It does fit under the hand in a certain way, it is pianistic, but it is not easy. And there is a difference…I always try to make my writing pianistic, that does not mean that it is easy to play, but that it feels right. Just like vocal lines feel right. So yeah, I thought this would be fun for me to play. And also in my own playing I like to explore in a lot of colors, even like in “Kaj” that A-flat piece, it’s very simple, but it’s an opportunity to make all sorts of colors in the piano part. So I do think of how it feels and how it sounds in the piano part. I like to challenge myself.

TR: Especially the “Kaj” piece strikes me because you go from something totally different, much more complicated and much more active [referring to “Theresa”], and then suddenly to this very, very simple hymn. But sometimes simplicity is the most beautiful thing you can have.

ALS: I agree.

TR: It works so beautifully because you create diversity [in this work], the entire piece front to back, is new. Every new setting, every new piece has something different.

ALS: This is something that I think about, I think about contrast from song to song. I want there to be contrast, in dynamics, in tempo, so then an audience is having some sort of journey. Making a song cycle for me is kind of like planning a meal, you want salad, you want meat, you want
carbs, and you want something really good for dessert. So I think of that while I’m planning it. So for example in the latest song cycle, *Covered Wagon Woman* I was very aware of contrast from piece to piece. And it happens a lot in *Ellis Island*. And I think there is really something that keeps the ear alive.

**TR:** I think it’s forty minutes long from end to end, and as I was listening to it for the first time I never got bored.

**ALS:** Well that’s good!

**TR:** Now let’s back track a little bit, can we discuss your educational background? You did your undergrad at Baylor, from there did you go right into your Masters program?

**ALS:** Yes. Well when I was at Baylor, in my senior year, I left school and traveled with an all male Christian singing group all around Texas. And I did a lot of arranging for that. And it was a lot of fun, I’m not sure why I did it in my senior year, but something in me needed to go away and come back. So then I came back and finished my degree, my bachelors, and went right into my masters.

**TR:** At [asking which school]?

**ALS:** At Baylor, same school, same teacher. I just loved my piano teacher, Jane Abbott Kirk. And then I played a concert for…well there used to be a Christian singing duo, and they were both opera singers, Robert Hale and Dean Wilder. Robert Hale is still singing, and I still see his name. So I played a concert for them at a very tiny school that’s about an hour and a half away from where Baylor called Howard Payne University. And I was at Howard Payne for five years. I got a job teaching there, I taught solo piano, I taught diction, I was the musical director, I did the opera, I taught music appreciation once, I taught beginning German once. So I was just there, and I just kind of thought that was where I’d spend my entire life. Then my friend Cheryl Parrish, who’s a soprano, had been singing with Western Opera Theatre and the San Francisco Opera. They had had a pianist drop out of the Western Opera Theatre tour. They tour all around the Northwest, with a bus and scenery and put on an opera. And so Cheryl
Parrish said “You need to call Alan Smith because he plays like Horowitz!” So they called me and said they needed me for a month, so I took a month leave and did that. And while I was doing that, I had such a good time being in San Francisco and meeting all these wonderful singers, Deborah Voigt was one of the singers, Tracy Dahl, (god who else traveled?), anyway it was a remarkable experience.

TR: So they were all young artists at that point?

ALS: Absolutely! So people kept saying to me…”where are you? Where do you do your thing?” And I said, “I teach at Howard Payne University”. And they said, “Where is that?” A couple of them said to me, “You know you need to get out of there. You need to go move to New York.” I just had this sense that moving to New York was not for me. So I began looking at… I had always done accompanying, but I had never studied it, so I said well I’m going to start looking at some programs. And Karen Peeler was very instrumental in that she said, “Why don’t you look into a doctoral program somewhere?”

TR: Were you classmates at Baylor or was she on the faculty?

ALS: She was on the faculty when I was a junior at Baylor. She very kindly used me to play a couple of her concerts, one she gave in her hometown of Jonesboro, Arkansas. Maybe another time or two when she had off campus things…anyway we always just hit it off because she’s just so darling and so warm and so sweet to me. So she said, “Why don’t you look into a doctorate…” So I wrote [John] Wustman at Champaign Urbana [University of Illinois], I wrote Martin Katz at Michigan. You need to remember that this was 1985 when I was writing. Michigan, Champaign-Urbana, and USC were about the only programs offering that. And Wustman didn’t even offer a doctorate, I didn’t know that at the time.

TR: Ok, can you just back track a bit so I can get the time line right for these events. So when did you finish your Masters at Baylor?

ALS: I finished my Masters in 1981, and I taught at Howard Payne University from 1981-1986. And it was in 85-86 that I went to San Francisco for about a month at time to
travel with Western Opera theatre. And I just loved being on the bus driving all around the Northwest, because I had never been there…and Mt. Shasta and Idaho it was just great fun. And so I did. Anyway so I don’t think I ever wrote to Wustman because I saw that he didn’t have a doctoral program, but I wrote to Martin Katz, and I said I am looking for doctoral programs, and I heard your recordings and I would love to think about applying for your program. And he wrote back and said, “you would be perfect fodder for my program” [laughing], he used that word “fodder” so anyway he said “so why don’t apply and come play. So I went out and played and he accepted me on the spot and said “yes I want you, but I don’t know what I’ll teach you”, but he said I want you and you can come here on a full ride. So it was meant to happen.

TR: So when you toured with the Western Opera Theatre, was this your first delve into opera, or had you had experience playing it before?

ALS: Well I had always been an opera TA at Baylor and I loved it.

TR: How big was the opera program at Baylor? Was it one of the super star programs or was it under funded?

ALS: No, it was under funded. We’d meet in the warehouses that no one else wanted because it was full of cockroaches. And you know they would paint an old refrigerator box and make it look like a trellis in a Spanish garden. But they really made…. everyone involved, included John McFadden (who was at one point my voice teacher ) and Karen Peeler had a strong hand in it for a time and they really made their best effort of it. We would do scenes and an opera every semester. When I went to Howard Payne I was the music director for the opera there, and that was even lower on the totem pole.

TR: As the musical director were you responsible for selecting the shows?

ALS: I was helping to select but I was just out of school and there were people who were more experienced teachers that I always just deferred to them.
TR: So now you’re touring, and you’ve done a few years of that, you’re now investigating trying to get accepted to the University of Michigan. So you spend how much time there?

ALS: I was there for two years, well really three years, but in my last semester I was invited back to Baylor to be the music director of their program. And Henry Butler was going to be there as their stage director and he was an actor in the Adams Chronicles. This is long before your time, long before you were born. But he also wrote, he was one of the co-writers on Morning Becomes Elektra. But he was a very knowledgeable stage person as an actor and as a theatre person in general. So I finished my doctorate and the position at Tanglewood became open and the position at USC became open at the same time, so I interviewed for both of them and I got both of them.

TR: Did you do any international studies? Did you do any travel abroad?

ALS: Not until after I was at USC. As part of my audition tours for Tanglewood I went to Paris, to the Hague, and Amsterdam. I have very little overseas travel or experience.

TR: What were your career goals during those periods in your life? As an undergraduate, what did you think you were going to be doing?

ALS: I thought I was going to be Horowitz. (laughter)

TR: Now going into your masters, where did you think your career would take you?

ALS: In my masters I had kind of a crisis, not like a serious crisis, but like a thing that made me doubt. Whether the road to being Horowitz was first of all possible and second of all what I really wanted. Because as an undergrad, I had done a lot of accompanying, and as a master’s student, I did even more accompanying, so much that it interfered with my solo work, that I should have been practicing instead of playing another oboe recital (which I loved). So, of my two masters recitals, they were both ostensibly supposed to be solo, but you could do something else for one of them. So they allowed me to use my accompaniment of Pirates of...
Penzance, as one of my second recitals. It was kind of a tough time for me because I knew I should be practicing my solo music, but I was really drawn to playing and making music with other people. And I knew that my solo piano teacher was supportive of all of my collaborative work, but I was really there to do a solo degree. She was always supportive of me, but kept reminding me, if you’re here to do a solo degree that’s what you need to do. So I began to think, that my heart is drawn toward this collaborative thing.

TR: Does it feel different to perform as a collaborative artist than as a solo pianist? I mean you’re still performing, it’s still an element of performance, but how does that differ?

ALS: Well in piano of course, we have the issue of memorization, solo is almost always memorized. And collaborative work is almost always with the music. There are some exceptions, like Warren Jones, who memorizing almost everything that he plays collaboratively. But also, there is an awareness of responsibility that is different because when you are a solo pianist you have a responsibility to the composer and to your own reputation (I guess you could say) but when you are collaborating with other people, you have the same responsibility to the composer, and also a responsibility to the other people and they to you.

TR: I think the responsibility lies heavier on you.

ALS: I think it can be.

TR: Because you have the score in front of you, and if things start falling apart, it’s sort of like you have a road map, and you can get us back on track.

ALS: Especially if you are dealing with singers who have their part memorized, like in a piano trio, like if you have violin and cello, they have the part in front of them, so it’s a different kind of exchange. But certainly with singers you become a kind of net, so that you can catch them if they fall because after all, you have the music in front of you. So yeah, it’s just a different kind of experience.
TR: So now, after your masters, you’ve had your crisis, and now you’ve had a reconciliation that this collaborative artistry is what you want to do. Now moving into your doctoral program, was the same realization accomplished through that higher degree?

ALS: Yes. There is the doctoral program and my major is accompanying, and so finally for the first time in my life, threads are coming together. My vocal study, my languages, my love of collaborating with other people, and so one of the things that I got from my study in the doctoral program was…First of all I should say, I was much less interested in getting a doctorate than I was in studying with Martin Katz.

TR: Was he wrong, did you learn from him? [Referencing back to previous point in interview, Martin Katz expressed concern that he had nothing to teach ALS]

ALS: Oh my goodness! Yes! He was totally wrong in what he had to offer me. I learned tons from him, one of the things I learned form him, that he helped me identify, cause he’s really good at that sort of thing, is why was I already good at collaborating, what was already good about it. Because I honestly, didn’t know. You know you hear things like you breathe well with a singer. And I knew I did, because I was a singer, but he helped me know why that worked mechanically and acoustically and all that kinds of stuff – that sounds boring. It wasn’t boring, when I learned it from him, it was fascinating. About balance issues, he helped me know how I was already good at that, and where I needed to be better at it. I already had, just a huge repertoire when I got there and he helped me build and guided me where I needed to go. But when I studied with him, I had on my repertoire list, one violin sonata and so a lot of my doctorate was spent exploring string repertoire – Like you can’t believe. So, I just learned tons from him, repertoire, style, he’s great at style, he is very strong on languages and diction, and so it really just made me do all of those things to the n°th degree.

TR: Are you still in contact with him?
ALS: Absolutely! Yes, I was just on sabbatical in the spring and he came to teach my students for one week. I had six guests and he was one of them. He is also coming here in August to give a master class for us here. No, I totally adore him, I absolutely love him – and I did at the time too…I just loved him. I was scared of him, I was in awe of him, but I also just generally loved him – but this is another pattern with my major teachers. I’ve always fallen in love with them. And I don’t mean romantically, I mean, I just fall in love with them. I’m so in awe of them and I think they’re amazing, and I’m still in love with them, every teacher I’ve ever had I’m still in love with. It does carry over into my composing. The love that I feel for Stephanie, they love that I’ve felt for John McFadden who I wrote those German songs for. The love I felt for Gary when I set his poetry to music. And I had a wonderful experience two years ago, the Baritone at Cincinnati, Mcgraw, sang these songs on Gary’s poetry.

TR: Are these published?

ALS: No, they are not published. The only things that are published are the folk song arrangements. But anyway, I knew that Bill was going to program these songs, because his pianist Donna Loewy called me at the end of the summer and said the concert was going to be in November. So immediately I called Gary and said can you come to Cincinnati in November. He’s a psychiatrist and very busy, in little rock Arkansas. And he said, OH BOY, I really want to be there, but I don’t know if I can do it. And even a couple of days before I’m not sure that he knew, or that I knew he could be there, but he got there. And it was such a moment of love, cause there was Bill singing the music so gloriously and the pianist Donna Loewy was playing it so beautifully and there was Gary whom I loved, and still love, and the love the music and it was just a moment of tremendous love.

TR: Who were your largest mentors?

ALS: Well Mrs. Alan who was my first teacher, and Jane Abbot Kirk, who was my principal piano teacher at Baylor. She was a tremendous mentor, and she taught me so much about touch and tone and how to create the most beautiful sounds and still in my teaching at USC, when I have a
pianist who is spectacular and has just totally blown me away in the most heart moving soul stirring way. I call Jane and I tell her, you won’t believe what just happened in my studio. And I trace it back to her it’s a lineage and I’m very aware of that. Martin Katz is just the pinnacle of all teachers, he’s like a white hot ember of musicality and knowledge, and things like that. There are so many I could mention to you, even being an elementary school kid at the First Baptist church, there are names that wouldn’t mean anything to you. But there are people I can see along the way and you know I mention John Gibson who was a composition teacher, even though our influence was very fast, he was an important mentor. Until this very moment I’ve never really thought of him in that same category.

TR: How about idols?

ALS: Well, Samuel Barber as a composer, and of course Strauss. But Samuel Barber was someone that I was alive at the same time as, because he died in ’81, and I was 26 years old. Pianist, there is a Israeli pianist named Elana Vered, she’s not so famous in this moment, but she’s a beautifully pianist. She’s gutsy and romantic. And gosh, singers I adore would include Bryn Terfel, Renee Fleming, Stephanie Blythe, Christine Brewer, and singers no longer living like Nicolai Gedda, and George London, I was a huge fan of Sills when I was younger and when she was younger. Southerland, let’s see, Mezzos, Horne for her coloratura, Judith Forest just for the beauty of her sound. There are so many.

TR: Did those cultural experiences of traveling abroad influence your Vignettes? Were you intentionally using nationalistic themes? And folk songs, things like that?

ALS: That’s a really interesting question…and I’ll say in general, no. But, there’s that Irish fiddle one, “Up on the deck, we used to go dancing we Had a Great Time”, I had that Irish fiddle in mind, but of course, I didn’t need to go to Ireland for that, it would have been nice if I had heard one in Ireland, but I just made up one from the stereotype of the Irish fiddlers in this country. And that one where she talks about, her mother says, “I thought American was supposed to be something great, they have gas lights here” and I wrote that (sings a motive) as a kind of Italian vaudeville.
So that just really came out of my head. And it didn’t come from any time being in Italy, or hearing that. It was a stereotype really.

TR: What about in the piece, “shovel gold off the sidewalks”, where you wrote, (sings motive) where you climb up the minor arpeggio. I think that to me it invoked a very nationalistic idea.

ALS: I wasn’t aware of that when I wrote it to be honest with you. The beginning of that song (sings a Strauss Waltz pattern) I was thinking of something European and heavy and I didn’t want the lady that was talking to sound to dainty. I thought she needed to be bold and gutsy, so I made music that was bold and gutsy.

TR: We have discussed you composing a set of German lied, have you composed in other languages?

ALS: No, isn’t that an interesting question. No, after that first initial set of German ones, no.

TR: Any specific reasons?

ALS: Yes. It’s because in my own language I can be clearest. And also, if you think of Schubert, yes he wrote some Italian songs, but he just cranked it out, in his own language, which he knew best. So I like to stick to things I know best because I feel I can be most genuine, and most honest about them.

TR: What have been your most profound or memorable performing experiences? In which do you find your greatest strength lies? What has been most rewarding?

ALS: Yes I do. Well a couple of them. One is when Stephanie debuted Ellis Island, because it was just a blow away moment. And I played, she sang, that connection was just so great. And as a composer, or any performer, you just don’t know how an audience will respond. If you are singing a very famous song by Strauss for instance, “Befreit”, you have some clue that the audience is most
likely going to be touched in some way about it. But when it’s my own music, it’s trotting it out there for the first time and no one’s ever heard it before in the world, except for me and Stephanie, you don’t know if it’s going to work or if people are going to get it, or whatever. And the response was just unbelievable. How people’s lives were touched, people still talk to me in Los Angeles about that moment. Another really wonderful moment was with another soprano named Cheryl Parish, who studied with Karen Peeler at Baylor. And Cheryl and I were in the same class level and I played- Well Cheryl’s senior recital was very special and very beautiful. She did Mozart Alleluia, some beautiful songs Robert Ward, and I don’t remember what else. But Cheryl was invited back after we were already grown in the late 80’s maybe early 90’s to give a recital at Baylor. She asked me to play for her, and she did those three really early songs by Strauss called “Rote Rose” and “In Wachete Rose”. And I can’t remember the other one, “Wegetnum” maybe? She sang my song cycle on Rilke poetry. Everything about that recital was easy, because I loved – no it wasn’t easy to play – but the communication between me and Cheryl was great and the audience was totally with everything that either of us did. Cheryl sounded great, I sounded great, the poetry, the choice of music was great. So that I remember being very, very, special.

TR: Of all your multiple careers, performer, composer, teacher, coach what have you enjoy most?

ALS: That’s a really great question. They are all rewarding in different ways. Let me put it this way, if I never taught again, I would absolutely die. I would miss it. If I never performed again, I would absolutely miss it. If I never composed again, I would feel very good about everything I have done to this point. And I wouldn’t die. I probably would miss it a little bit, but not as desperately. Coaching I sort of lump in with teaching. I just love that interaction. The administrative side of teaching is not so fun, but I’m one of those people that are very organized, like you. And I’m a people person, like you and so if you are those two things, if you are organized and a people person, pretty soon people are going to want you to administer something. And so, I do a lot of it currently [administration] at USC. I’m the director the keyboard collaborative arts program.
And I’m also chair of the entire piano program. I feel like this is my moment to make my contribution to USC and to myself for how I grow and what I learn. And so I feel like this is my moment to do that, now for how long I’ll feel that way, I don’t know. I’m not going to feel that way for twenty more years, but who knows how long that will last. Also my mother was a teacher and was a director of a program, so I think maybe seeing her do it, or maybe there’s something genetic about it (laughs)? So if that aspect of my teaching disappeared I would be delighted! Did I cover all the things you asked about?

TR: We’ve discussed a little about your previous teaching posts, so now can we discuss your teaching at USC? What courses are you currently teaching and what have you taught over the years?

ALS: Well there I teach primarily pianists to be collaborators, collaborative pianists. So I have in any semester 12 to 14 to 15 majors at a master’s and doctoral level that are studying with me, specifically the craft of collaborative piano. I also teach solo piano there. The other course that I teach every semester is a course in song interpretation. And it’s a joint course for singers and pianist so I have typically 6 singers and 6 pianists, all graduate level. But, upper-class undergraduates can apply to get in there, and I’ve had a number over the years.

TR: So you restrict enrollment to be limited?

ALS: Yes. Only six and six because that’s the number I can work with well. It’s worked out very, very well that way. So, those are the two things that I’ve taught all the time that I’ve been at USC. When I first was as USC I also taught Song History which is the history in books, recordings, and lecturing and things like that, and I loved doing that. But I got too busy with so many individual students so that got passed to somebody else. A course like that is a lot of work, but also very gratifying.

TR: Do you still actively perform?

ALS: Absolutely. I performed several times on campus and various parts around the US. I have a violinist friend Jana
Lauer that I perform with in Florida and I perform there with her, and she comes to USC. I do a lot of adjudicating kinds of things, doing the Met auditions in Seattle in October and I do that usually every year and every couple of years someplace. Gosh, I give master classes at University of Michigan, Cincinnati, different places that I do that. I do less performing now, than I did when I was younger and more master classes, teaching, and lots of traveling. I did perform here at Tanglewood just a couple of weeks ago. It was a chamber music piece of John Harbison. It was a piano quartet.

TR: So this is your 20th year at Tanglewood? What’s your role or do you have an official title?

ALS: At this moment and for the last 3 years, I am full time on the voice faculty and I’m also the coordinator here of the piano program. I’ve been on the voice faculty, this is my twentieth year and it’s my third year being the coordinator of the piano program. So I kind of have one and a half positions. Full time on voice, and half [on piano].

TR: Are you teaching voice or coaching?

ALS: Coaching. Right. Phyllis Curtain is really the only one who teaches voice. In that context, just as you saw this morning (observed a master class), we also have other singers on the faculty, Dawn Upshaw who is here part time, and Lucy Shelton who is a new music specialist and Dawn and Lucy both coach singers. And then the biggest part of our voice faculty is pianists. Me, Kayo Iwama, from Bard College [Conservatory of Music in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY], Ken Griffiths from Cincinnati, Dennis Helmrich from Champaign-Urbana, Howard Watkins from the Met, Linda Hall from the Met, Lucy Arner from the Met.

TR: Are they here in residence all summer long?

ALS: No, the only ones that are in residence all summer long are Me, and Kayo, everyone else is in and out. Well, also Phyllis, who lives in Great Barrington. That’s where she lives full time.
VIGNETTES: ELLIS ISLAND QUESTIONS:

TR: OK, now let’s get into your song cycle Vignettes: Ellis Island. First let me ask a little background. Obviously you’ve visited Ellis Island, can you repeat for me the story of your visit? What were your impressions, tell me about your experience?

ALS: Well first of all, I was in New York for something, and I had a good buddy Todd Sisley, who is a pianist that I had known at Michigan, he was doing his master’s while I was doing my doctorate. He lived in New Jersey, and one of his good friends was Paul Sigrist, who was the oral historian at Ellis island at the time. So Todd said, let’s go to Ellis Island, if you’ve never seen it, you’ll love it, and I thought, that’s great. I’d never seen the statue of liberty. And so we took the ferry and because Paul was working there we got to maybe see some insides of it and go to the room where you listen to the tapes of the interviews and I was really undone by going there because I imagined that I could sense something of the people that had gone through there. There is that exhibit where you see their suitcases piled high, and is that the same exhibit where they have things that were left behind at Ellis Island? The rooms that have quotes around the tops of the walls, and the computer rooms, that giant hall…you go into the rooms where they may have slept over night or where the medical examinations were. It really was so gripping to me because this was an actual place where people actually came and then when you read that some of them were sent back. And one of the songs in Ellis Island where the lady died on the boat, it brought those things home to me. It made them real to me. To be in that space was a sacred moment in my life.

TR: And it’s a beautiful building. And the size is immense.

ALS: Yes. It’s beautiful.

TR: What is your family heritage, where did they immigrate from?

ALS: German. My mother’s family is German. I’m not sure about my father’s heritage; I suspect there is some British
or Scottish in there somewhere. But my strongest association – I didn’t know, as I told you my father died when I was young and didn’t know either of my paternal grandparents, who also died, I think both of them before I was born. It’s just this German heritage that I’m aware of, and they came by boat through Independence, Texas; which is near Galveston.

**TR:** Let’s talk about how the project itself got its start.

**ALS:** Well Paul is just the most delightful person to know, and Todd is too. Paul is inquisitive and interesting, funny and kind and he’s a singer also. He sings a lot of Gilbert and Sullivan and is just extremely personable. Friendly and funny. So after the visit, I was back in LA and I received an envelope in the mail and it was probably about 30 sheets of paper and a letter from Paul that said “I thought you might be interested…I went through these written transcripts and took the ones that sounded most musical to me, and maybe you might be interested in setting some of them to music some time”. And I thought yeah right.

**TR:** So you hadn’t talked about that when you were there?

**ALS:** No, we never talked about it. The song cycle really is his [Paul’s] brainchild, not mine. It started with him and so I read them…and I didn’t even really read them thoroughly, just sort of flipped through them and thought, “Well this is nice, it was nice of him to do that, it must have taken him a long time”. And I thought it was very nice. And so I put them in my bedside table drawer and didn’t really think about them anymore. It’s funny how life is. So then Stephanie was having an important birthday. It was her thirtieth and Stephanie had been a fellow here at Tanglewood and we just had an instant soul connection from when she was a student. She was here for two years, and after she was a student, she was a Met young artist and we kept in touch. We would write back and forth. You understand, internet existed, but not everyone had it. Cell phones existed, but not everyone had one. It’s kind of hard to remember, even for me, that time. But it really wasn’t that long ago. We would write back and forth, actual cards and I still have them all. We just kept up this correspondence and when she won the Met Competition, I flew to New York and saw her at that. We just kept up this
and of course I would still be at Tanglewood every summer and she would come out to visit. We would have a great time just being together and hanging out. So, it was going to be her thirtieth birthday, and I thought gosh, I’d love to write something for her. And so I thought, what can I use for texts? Then I thought of those texts that Paul Sigrist had sent me...so I went to my bed side table and there they were. I thought, well I’ll write her one song. Something charming from one of these quotes [Paul had sent me]. And so I started reading them through, and I don’t know, the project just took on a life of its own. After that point, I can’t really say I did anything except follow the instincts that came to me. Partly I had said, and I really believe, I know it sounds a little bit spooky, partly this people were calling out because they still needed a voice. It sounds a little spooky, but I’m not really that crazy, that’s just part of it. The other part of it was my love for Stephanie, wanting to do something for her, and my love of words. My love in the power of words. So, I started reading through these many pages of quotes and made stars by ones that jumped out at me. I thought well, there are several here that I liked, and then there were a lot of them here that I liked. I wish I had them to show you, I still have them all…but they’re not any longer in the form that Paul sent them. Because, what I did was, I took from the ones that I had starred; I took a pair of scissors and cut them into strips and I pasted them on other pieces of paper. At first they were just strips, everywhere around my apartment. Every flat surface had strips of quotes on it. And then I began to notice that these [strips] were from still in Europe and these [strips] were on the boat, and these [strips] were in the harbor, these [strips] are on the Island. So I started taping them onto pieces of paper and putting them in the same pile. So that happened really kind of by accident. They ordered themselves really. And then I had many more texts than I actually ended up setting. I had starred many more. So then I thought, I don’t need twelve texts about on the island. Four or three would do. So then, it was kind of tough after that. This person needs a voice, but this person speaks more to me. So I began to make a hierarchy, and the way did was whoever spoke to me most immediately. It was completely subjective. That’s why I say I am emotion first and I am rational second. So I just went with it, and this was a new thing for me. Not to edit myself, not to over think. The music itself also, I did not over edit. I don’t know how-
don’t remember what the first date is and what the last compositional date is but it’s something like- [tries to remember]

TR: It’s June 3rd through June 10th 1999 - so just one week. That’s phenomenal.

ALS: Yes. Seven days. I think it’s phenomenal too.

TR: Is that normal for you?

ALS: Yes, it is. That’s the way I write. Once I get going, I just keep going and going and going. Often when I’m composing I don’t stop to eat, I don’t stop to take a shower. I’ll be up till three or five in the morning then I sleep for a few hours, then I go back to it. I don’t shave, I’m in my bathrobe and it wouldn’t be a pleasant time to see me because I’m not very nice looking. I have very little awareness of time. I will write till three in the morning, and the last time I looked at the clock it was nine pm.

TR: So, going back to the selection of texts…

ALS: I ordered the text like that, they sort of ordered themselves. These voices called out to me, I cut them in strips, they ordered themselves. I had to leave out some and even when I had to sit down and start composing, I had a few more excerpts on the sheets than I actually ended up setting because otherwise it would have been an hour long, which is way too long.

TR: At forty minutes, it makes for a really good recital and still allows time for an accompanying set.

ALS: So I feel they are a perfect length. They create a beautiful arch. So that’s the way the text ended up coming in. Within a paragraph of text, that I had stripped out, not all of the paragraph was fascinating. So I would edit sentences out.

TR: I did notice that in the beginning of the score, the original text is listed and when it was set to music, it was altered slightly.

ALS: Yes, only minor edits though.
TR: What was the timeline for this entire process, the cutting of
the strips and pasting on the paper, all the way until the
point of sitting down at the piano to begin?

ALS: It was probably about a week, but not a week of every hour
doing that. It was a week of one hour reading, one hour of
cutting strips, putting them all over the apartment, and just
kind of mulling them over, just letting my brain think about
it.

TR: With the text taken directly from immigrant testimonies,
did you get to actually hear the interviews or just see the
transcripts? If you heard them, did the voice inflections
influence the way you set certain texts?

ALS: No. The only ones I ever listened to were the ones I heard
while on Ellis Island [with Paul and Todd]. And then Paul
sent me also a recording of some of them, but I didn’t listen
to them very much because I didn’t want the sound of their
voice in my ear, because they were already elderly. I
wanted a youthfulness to come through.

TR: When I started looking at the timeline from when the oral
histories were being recorded, I realized that these people
would have been elderly, probably in their seventies or
eighties and yet, they were recalling stories of when they
were twelve or five. I actually hear, in your writing, the
appropriate age for what was being said.

ALS: And that’s what I wanted. In regards to the voice
inflection, I would like to be able to say yes [I did use the
recordings], because it’s the perfectly logical and rich thing
to do, but I didn’t.

TR: As you were refining the emigrants and rounding out the
song cycle, did you consider any other factors besides the
poetic quality of the text? For example, equal male to
female perspectives, age, countries of origin, positive vs.
negative experiences etc?

ALS: Absolutely not. I went totally by instinct. If I accomplished
any evenness, it was totally by mistake.
TR: Did you research any of the lives of the subjects of your cycle?

ALS: No. I took it totally by instinct. But here’s something about me too. Some people are frustrated by - And I got it from my mother- I tend to be friendly, I’m very interested in people. I tend to deal with people how they are, in this very moment. I’m interested in where they came from and what their goals are. But, for instance I have other friends who will say to me, “Well, did you see so and so?” And I’ll say “yes”. “Oh how are they”, and I’ll say “fine”. They’ll say, “did they end up going to Hawaii” and I’ll say, “I don’t know”. For me the immediacy of who that person is, in the moment, is more vital to me than knowing all those other things about them. Now somebody that I know for a long time, I do know those things, but not because I ask them. And I got that from my mother. So anyway, the way it relates to these people is I just wanted to relate to them in a snapshot of their lives. It’s like a photograph (ka-chick) and there they are!

TR: As indicated in the score, you composed these pieces from June 3-10, 1999, tell me about your compositional process, did you sketch them out first or literally write one at a time sequentially to the end?

ALS: From beginning to end. Isn’t that embarrassing?

TR: No! It’s amazing you can do it that way.

ALS: I didn’t sketch them out ahead of time and I wrote them by hand. Also George to Evelyn I did by hand. Then for the new Covered Wagon Woman, I learned the Finale computer program. Because I knew that it was going to be performed, it was a commission, and I knew people needed a beautiful score to read from. So I just learned Finale so that by the time I finished composing it, it would look like actual music. A friend of Stephanie’s and an acquaintance of mine took my manuscript and created a type set score in Finale, and his name was Mark Armstrong. He did a brilliant job.

TR: Let’s discuss the performance of this work. So you premiered this work with Stephanie at USC and then it was also performed at Lincoln Center. Can you talk about these two performances?
ALS: The premiere of the work was at USC with me playing but the Lincoln Center was with Warren Jones. That performance of opening night of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center was the season opening concert, and Stephanie and Warren were the entire second half [of the program]. It was an advertisement or a precursor to the premiere of *Covered Wagon Woman* in January. That was a joint commission for both Stephanie and Warren. Not just for Stephanie, for both of them.

TR: So when you wrote *Covered Wagon Woman*, did you have Warren specifically in mind for the piano part.

ALS: Yes. And Warren I know and love too.

TR: When did you meet Warren Jones?

ALS: I met Warren first here at Tanglewood, way long ago in the late ‘80’s early ‘90’s. He came for a couple of weeks, for a couple different summers. He’s a brilliant man.

TR: Does he come in for master classes at Tanglewood still?

ALS: He hasn’t been here for a very long time because he’s so busy on the west coast with Academy of the West. So he’s not really available anymore.

TR: Let’s move on. Last night we discussed that these pieces have not yet been published. Why not? Are you going to pursue that?

ALS: My dream would be to have a volume that would have all three [*Vignettes: Ellis Island, Letters from George to Evelyn, and Covered Wagon Woman*] Americana pieces in them. All three are called *Vignettes*, and that would be my dream. And I’d love to have a recording someday that would have all three of them.

TR: You have many more unpublished pieces; I think there needs to be an Alan Louis Smith Songbook.

ALS: That’s a great idea! Works for me!
TR: What is the process for getting songs published?

ALS: One way is that you just send your stuff all around to publishers and they say yes we like it, or no we don’t. I had done that back in the 80’s when I was a very young composer. I didn’t get any nibbles because nobody knew who I was and that’s totally understandable. And now that famous people like Stephanie and Warren perform my music, and you’re writing a dissertation topic on it, and the piece has been performed a lot, a publisher would be much more interested in that. So I just have to decide whether I want to go through the effort of marketing it again and sending it to publishers. Or as I’m thinking with Covered Wagon Woman, some publishers going to hear this and think, Oh we’d like to publish that. And it has a lot of cache behind it just with Stephanie and Warren singing Covered Wagon Woman. It has the chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center as a commission, a world premiere in New York, so that’s the kind of high profile that publishing companies are interested in. It’s not lucrative for them to publish Art Song volumes. Yes if it’s Strauss or Brahms or Schubert, yes. But a composer that not a lot of people have heard of, that’s a different story.

TR: Maybe with this thematic idea, it might be more likely they could promote an Americana songbook.

ALS: It’s VERY possible. So, I’m not worried about it, because in my life, all of these things have come at the right time, and it will be the same way with the publishing. I said it here, it’s on tape, you can replay it.

TR: I know that it’s not out of any personal pride; your ego has nothing to do with it. I really feel these are so beautiful, and they need to be out there. Now, as a teacher and educator, I want to make sure my students have access to them. I love that you now have online reprints, the music is available, and out there, but I still feel these need to be in published volumes.

ALS: You know, someone pointed out to me too; I could set that up myself.

TR: I read about an opera scenes program at the University of New Hampshire that performed these pieces as an
ensemble cast in April 2007. And additionally they were performed at University of California Irvine. How did these two projects come to fruition? I also understand that they were orchestrated by a professor at UNH; did you have input into the orchestral realizations? Did you hear them performed at UNH?

ALS: Well at New Hampshire, there was a woman named Judith [last name not remembered] that came out to Tanglewood. We did a performance [of Vignettes] with multiple singers and multiple pianists, I think we had six singers and six pianists and I think Judith was at that concert. She asked for a copy of the music so I gave her one. Then she decided she wanted to program it herself, so she came to Tanglewood one summer and coached it with me for a couple of days. Then she gave them in concert in New Hampshire somewhere, maybe she was even from that University? David Ripley [director of Opera Workshop at UNH] heard them and fell in love with them and wanted to do them with his opera scenes program. He had a particular man who was an orchestrator that he liked, who orchestrated them, I’ve never heard them.

TR: I would be interested to hear his orchestrations and find out whether or not his preferences of instrumentation matched your ideas. He might not have had the same instinct that you had in mind.

ALS: When he asked me to do that [allow his opera scenes program to perform Vignettes], David Ripley asked me…well there was a little bit of confusion because he had asked me and I said yes, and he had a particular orchestrator in mind.

TR: The orchestrator is someone on faculty at University of New Hampshire?

ALS: Yes, but the confusion came in that the Vignettes program was tabled for some time because this composer [the intended orchestrator] had something really big come his way to do. And then it came back around a year or two later, it came back around and it kind of surprised me, because by then it was off my radar screen. So I wasn’t able to attend the concert because of scheduling issues and plus I wanted more input into that, getting to hear the
orchestrations and such. Since I had given my approval for it, two years earlier, or whenever it was, I didn’t feel like it would be very nice of me to say, “no you can’t do it, because I didn’t have any artistic control over it”. So since they had planned on it, and I was thinking of these people, these immigrants, I thought that it really wasn’t my right to stand in the way of them getting an expression through another performance. And so I told them they could have my permission to give the performances for the opera studio, and then after that, that was done. That was the end of it. It was not completely friendly between me and David after that. I felt kind of like it [the Vignettes program] had been shunted and shunted and then was made a big deal, and I’m grateful to everyone who was involved, but then I didn’t want to let it go out of my hands and not have artistic control over it.

TR: Do you think it would be something you would want to orchestrate in the future?

ALS: Absolutely! Stephanie has mentioned that she would like to have an orchestration of it. I don’t feel really qualified to sit down and do all of the orchestration myself: I can get started on it, and have someone come in who is really proficient at it. And I have lots of friends who are good at that.

TR: What’s next, are you working on any current or future projects?

ALS: Well of course I just had the Covered Wagon Woman...

TR: Which I imagine was the bane of your existence for quite a while?

ALS: Well, it was great. It took a lot of study just to select the texts, writing it was a new combination voice and piano trio [with violin and cello]. Well just in May I finished a set of five songs on my own poetry.

TR: Wow are you a hobby poet or….

ALS: No, not at all. It just came out of nowhere. These poems came to me, there was a series of events that I could point to that were working on my brain and my creative sense. I
had never intended to write any poetry and suddenly they just popped out. I got sprinkled with a lot of the ability just to follow through. If it seems like the right thing to do I try not to edit myself…it’s been very successful.

**STEPHANIE BLYTHE QUESTIONS:**

TR: Let’s talk about Stephanie Blythe. When did you first meet her? Tell me about her during her student years.

ALS: I first heard her in a Tanglewood audition. She was auditioning to come to Tanglewood and it was upstairs in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. And she came in and she sang “Men of Verchivi” by John Duke. Blew me away! Not only the sound of the voice which was very impressive, but just total understanding of the text. And I wrote on my pad, where I kept my notes, “THIS IS IT!” And I wrote it in all capital letters. You just hear that and then it’s clear, that this is it.

TR: How old was she at this time?

ALS: Well let’s see…she was 30 in ‘99, so in ‘93 she would’ve been 24. She had been an English Major and then studied voice with Pat Misselin. And I guess got a degree in voice. Maybe she didn’t finish her degree in English, I’ll have to ask her someday. But anyway…so then she came to Tanglewood and I described to you, our souls just connected. She was a glorious singer, glorious with words in whatever language she was singing. And also she was very vulnerable, very tender. It was a very attractive side of her to me and so we just came to be great friends. There was an age difference there, but whatever difference, I was the teacher, she was the student. She lived on the East coast, I lived on the West coast. The soul doesn’t care about that though. So we just became great friends after that.

TR: What about this voice inspired you to write for her specifically? Can you describe the qualities about it that interest you?

ALS: Yes. Her voice is beautiful in all registers, so the lowest to the highest. It’s a beautiful voice. And there is a very warm timbre to her sounds. It’s a large voice, but in
addition to being large, it’s warm, which I find very appealing. She has a tremendous range, so the cycle [Vignettes: Ellis Island] is range-y. It’s like having the giant box of crayolas, not just the small box but the giant box and you can use whatever color you want. I’m spoiled, as I explained to you last night, that I’m spoiled in writing for Stephanie because she can make meaning out of every word she sings. It’s vital to her to do that and it’s an immediate thing with her. A lot of singers have to think about it, how I would like to color this word, and with her [it comes naturally]. I’m sure she thinks about it…but part of it I’m convinced is innate. She either thinks about it at some level, or has thought about it, so now it has become innate, or seems like it’s innate. There was an interesting panel discussion before the premiere of Covered Wagon Woman with me, Stephanie and Warren. Stephanie talked about this issue, of text, and how important it is to her. She said something about how both Warren and I jump on her in the most loving way. She said she didn’t think about it [the text] and Warren and I said how is this possible? So I’m sure at some level she thinks about it or developed the ability to think about so now it seems immediate. So that I enjoy about it. Her soul comes through her sound.

TR: Do you think it’s her person that made you write these for her? If she had not had the superior sound, would you still have written them?

ALS: Yes. Oh absolutely I would have written them for her anyway. If she didn’t have a glorious voice I would have still written them for her because she has a glorious soul.

TR: When you write for a specific voice are you crafting the pieces in any way to highlight their strengths and balance their weaknesses? Not that Ms. Blythe has weaknesses, she is really brilliant singing these, but I’m curious if you write them independently of her vocal requirements, or take them into account?

ALS: Yes. For instance, mezzos in the top passaggio, I didn’t want her hanging around up there. Can she? Absolutely she can. But would I want to make her suffer like that? No. Below the top passaggio and down is like a gem for her, a total playground, she can do anything in that range. But also she has a glorious high range and I wanted to give her
a few high notes for her to show that off. So I wrote a few high notes. Another thing is that she’s a great Handelian. She has great runs. So that’s why in the flushing the toilet one, I wrote some of these great runs. For her that’s a piece of cake so I thought about that for her also.

TR: Now, I understand for the premiere performance she was sick.

ALS: Well, she had bronchitis. And she probably felt sick, but she sure didn’t sound sick.

TR: Some of the tempos from the recording from that performance are pretty quick. Did her illness play a role in those tempo choices?

ALS: It’s a been long time since I listened to that performance, so I don’t have it in my ear to answer that exactly. The choice of tempos in relating to her bronchitis, were less an issue than certain places where the phrase just simply needed to move. For instance, “he was very easy going and everybody who came back from him…” [continues to sing with more movement] That needs to move because of air. She doesn’t move it in the same way now, partly because she doesn’t have bronchitis now and partly because it’s just in her voice in a different way. Also, the “here comes your father” is another place. The way Stephanie’s air works now, which is eight years later, is much more controlled. It absolutely is different. I wrote that song “when she came to America”; that we did move through because of the bronchitis, and I like it slower. But Stephanie and Warren always do that fast. And, it’s not something that I agree with as a composer, but when you have Stephanie Blythe and Warren Jones doing your music, you can be only so picky. Would they listen to me about it? Absolutely they would. Would they care about it? Absolutely they would. But it’s just not that important to me. Warren and Stephanie have memorized the music, and I’m not sure how often they look at the score anymore to see what the actual markings are. I don’t say that as a criticism.

TR: I noted a couple of word changes on the recording that Stephanie made, which could have been due to an “in the moment” performance slip, but I just wanted to confirm that you didn’t ask her to substitute several words?
ALS: No, I suspected that was probably the performance thing. But Stephanie does have a real gift, if she has a brain fritz of what the music is or what the text is, she just makes it up. I remember at the end she said that’s how I came here and that’s how I lived it. She switched those two. But to her credit, she saved it. That’s the way her brain works. There is something very brilliant about that.

TR: Did she struggle with any of the pieces in Ellis Island?

ALS: Let me try to remember back… The thing about Stephanie is, she is a great musician. I do remember that we had to tear some things apart in order to look at it together. The thing about Stephanie is, when something’s not working she doesn’t work it out in front of me, probably anybody, she will say, ok what’s the deal? And sometimes she seems kind of pissed off at herself. Right? But then the next time you meet, it’s fixed. Rarely does something come up a second time. RARELY. And she’s different than a lot of singers that I have worked with at that really extremely high level because, for instance, if I contrast it with Christine Brewer. Christine likes to do the tiniest bit of music over and over and over in many repetitions. I think this would make Stephanie insane to do that. But other singers love to do that sort of thing.

[Before the premiere] She had just come from a huge concert of singing Lucrezia [Lucrezia Borgia by Donizetti] at Carnegie Hall with Renee Fleming and was flying out doing the concert four or five days later. With bronchitis… She was absolutely phenomenal.

TR: How much rehearsal time did you have with her?

ALS: I would say we rehearsed for probably 2 hours a day for four or five days. But because she had bronchitis, I didn’t want and she didn’t want to sing a long time. She sang with the music, and also she sang with my manuscript. That was what I sent her for her birthday was two ring bound copies of the handwritten manuscript. Photocopied, I didn’t give her the actual one. Not everything was perfect, but it was perfect within short order. And not everything was perfect for me either. We got into the rehearsals and I said damn this is hard. Who wrote this? [laughs]
Tell me about the process by which the recording was added to the National Museum of Television and Radio archive.

F. Paul Driscoll was the editor of Opera News Magazine and there was a television program in New York that’s on public broadcasting, but it’s not PBS, it’s just a local New York broadcast. And every now and then they would have an interview with an opera singer or something and have them sing a few things.

It’s like the bell telephone hour?

Kind of, yeah. So F. Paul Driscoll loves Stephanie, and he loves these pieces and so he thought what a great project it would be for this public television thing to record Stephanie and Warren doing Ellis Island. So it starts out with a little interview with me, and then Stephanie and Warren do it. Stephanie started in an arm chair in black out with a shawl across her lap and sang the opening. And then gradually the lights come up and she stands from the chair and goes over to the piano and sings the cycle. And I think at the end she went back to the chair. She put the shawl over her lap and I think the lights went out again. So that’s how that happened. Then when the Museum of Television and Radio heard about it they wanted a copy for their archives. And that happened also with the September inaugural concert of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center where Stephanie and Warren did Vignettes: Ellis Island. I had a request from the Archeological Museum of the People of New York, who asked for a recording of that September concert for their permanent collection.

I understand you composed another cycle for Stephanie which was premiered earlier this year, Covered Wagon Women, are there others?

Last year for her birthday I gave her an arrangement of a folk song, “He’s Gone Away”. It’s so beautiful. I have a copy, I'll play it for you. She and Warren premiered that on the Marilyn Horne foundation recital this year. That harkens back to my arranging days, because that’s just the same process.
TR: We have discussed several singers that you’ve composed for previously, but are there others we’ve not mentioned?

ALS: Well, John McFadden, Gary Farr, Cheryl Parish, I wrote two cycles for her for soprano. Actually, you should have those, especially the one on Malcolm Arnold poetry, which is called *The Buried Life*. So for Cheryl I wrote the two sets, *The Buried Life* and the one on the Rilke poems called *Songs of Wandering*. For Karen Peeler I arranged the folks songs. The *George to Evelyn* actually were commissioned by Tanglewood to be written for Phyllis Curtain’s 80th birthday but I didn’t know who was going to sing them, and it ended up being this very talented lady from Canada but I didn’t know what her voice was like. So I wrote it [*Letters From George to Evelyn*] for Elizabeth Heinz’s voice, and Elizabeth and I premiered them in the Fall in LA. I can tell you secretly that I do plan to write something for Christine Brewer. I’ve been looking and keeping my eyes open and the right thing hasn’t come along. I’ve sort of tired to force my brain to think about the issue, but I know better. Don’t tell her.

TR: Do you have any other words of wisdom or anecdotes that you’d like to add to complete this interview?

ALS: More important than writing for the voice is writing for the person. There are some inside jokes, we didn’t talk about that, in the music. One of them is Mozart’s “Eine Kleine Nacht Musik” in the stamp collection he goes [he sings the famous melody in demonstration]…I put a little tiny bit of that as an internal joke for myself. The other one is, you’re much too young, but have you ever heard of La Choy Chinese canned food. You are too young for the commercial they used to have on television. The tune went “La Choy Makes Chinese Food…Swing, American!” [he sings the pentatonic melody from the commercial] And somehow my brain put that in there in the one “We all ran out to see the statue”…that’s upside down La Choy and the accompaniment is kind of like the commercial. So that’s another joke for me. The one about Manny where he goes “Ellis island was packed”, Stephanie and I, in one of our recitals at USC, had done the Montsalvatge, *Cinco Caciones Negras* and the last one is [sings mambo section], so I was thinking of that music when I wrote that one, the cross between Cuban and Leonard Bernstein, so I thought
about that. It was very important to me the interval of the falling minor third because people that are musicologist and ethnomusicologists say that every musical culture on the earth has this falling minor third as a natural part of their harmonics. And that so fascinated me, someone said to me it’s like when you say “yoo-hoo”, it’s a falling minor third. And so many things that we say are that falling minor third. So I wanted the cycle to start off with a falling minor third. And I used it again in From George to Evelyn. I didn’t use it Covered Wagon Woman, because [I thought] that was pushing the envelope. A student that did a lecture recital on Ellis Island, said to me, Do you realize that every time you speak about mothers it’s a third interval and whenever you talk about fathers it’s a fourth interval. Of course that was nowhere in my thinking but you can look and see if you think that’s there. And another thing he talked about that relates to math is that he found that at the point of the Golden Mean, some sort of emotional peak, so whatever the Golden Mean is [in the cycle]…Joe can tell you, it’s like 1.66 something, but that was not in my thinking. I did consciously use it in Covered Wagon Woman, so that the peak of the cycle arrives at the point of the Golden Mean. [pause] Well I can think of nothing more to say…

TR: I think a perfect way to end this! I am looking forward to writing the section on the “inside jokes”! Thank you so much for sitting down with me to discuss your life, career and work. It has been such a pleasure!
APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW WITH PAUL SIGRIST, FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORIES PROJECT

Phone interview conducted on October 3, 2008 between Paul Sigrist and the author. This interview has been excerpted to include only information of interest to the author and pertinent to the document topic. The interview in its entirety lasted 4 hrs.

Tamara Regensburger: First off, Paul thank you so much for agreeing to this interview, I very much appreciate your time and your contribution to my document. I read you have degrees in Voice, American Studies, and a Masters degree in American civilization, with an eclectic background like that, what did you plan on as your career goal?

Paul Sigrist: My life like so many other people’s lives has sort of taken these odd little twists and turns and has ended up in places I never expected it to. The Ellis Island Oral History Project is just one example. I was always a professional singing actor during that time. I came to NY in ’89 the job was open at Ellis Island; however, at that point it was just the Statue of Liberty. I have been a professional performer since I was in my early 20’s. The Oral History Project was a total accident it was just one of those odd little twists and turns.

TR: Let me ask about your background as a historian, and how you came to your position with the National Park Service at Ellis Island?

PS: My expertise was actually in furniture history a subset of art history. I was initially brought to Ellis, The Statue of Liberty, actually, although at that point they were
beginning to renovate Ellis Island. Do you know the artist colony Yaddo? It’s where Ned Rorem wrote a lot of his music. It’s in upstate NY a very famous artist community Truman Capote wrote “Other Voices, Other Rooms” there. So anyway, the reason I’m bringing up Yaddo is that in my mid 20’s, I would have been 23 in 1983; I had catalogued 23 buildings worth of their entire furniture and art collection. That is sort of how I ended up at Ellis Island because they needed someone to identify the furniture that they were finding stuck away in various rooms. At Ellis, it is a very large island, although it was originally 3 acres but when they started excavating subways in NY at the turn of the century, they were barging the excess dirt out to Ellis Island. I think now it is something like 17 acres. When the complex was built at the turn of the century it was it’s own little city, hospital buildings, office buildings, staff housing and when it shut down in 1954 it was kind of like everyone just got up and left and left everything in situ. They needed someone to come out and identify the furniture and that’s how I got the job. I moved to NY with my partner at the time, Todd Sisley, a pianist.

TR: And that’s how you know Alan?

PS: Yes, that’s how I know Alan, of course! Todd had met Alan at the University of Michigan. So Todd and I moved to NY in July, 1989, and I was told to report to the Statue of Liberty to identify the furniture. It was a temporary 3 month thing, summer job. Prior to that I had been living in Saratoga and dealing in antiques which I had been doing my whole life, performing I did a lot of Baroque Opera in those days and Gilbert and Sullivan, which I still do, church work and the kind of scrabble work that all musicians do. Anyway, 3 months went by that summer and the boss, Diana Pardue, liked what I was doing but the money they had for this furniture and household project ran out, it was only for 3 months. She asked if I wanted to stay and I said, “Sure!” It was also the first time I had a full time, 9-5 job. She asked if I had ever done any oral histories. And I hadn’t, but I knew what it was and she said we have this big Oral History Project that has been sitting around for years in boxes that someone should organize. At that point, active interviewing was not even part of it. The Oral History Project had begun in 1974 by a woman by the name of Margo Nash who is still around, actually. I even
interviewed Margo as one of the interviews in the process about how started the project. Margo was a park ranger at the Statue of Liberty when Ellis Island was just an abandoned hunk in 1974. Anyway, they let her just go around and interview old people that just happened to be visiting the Statue of Liberty. They didn’t pay for it and there was no budget or anything but she just brought her tape recorder…..and if she saw an old person crying at the Statue of Liberty, she would go up and start talking to them. And that’s how the Oral History Project got started. They then allowed her [to take] a more detailed approach. Somewhere along the line, she actually started conducting official oral history interviews. The project has almost over 2,000 interviews at this point and maybe more. Anyway, Margo ran around with this tape recorder and captured some really interesting people, again, as far as I know, she had not real training, they just kind of let her do and didn’t pay much attention to it in that kind of odd Government way and she began what was the start of the Oral History Project. She did that throughout the late ‘70’s and then did nothing, I guess Margo left and the interviews that she did were not even transcribed, they were all on rickety cassette tapes and were just put into a box and stuck somewhere.

Flash forward a few years, now in the mid ‘80’s and the Ellis Island/Statue of Liberty Foundation, which is a whole different organization than the National Parks Service [which runs Ellis Island.]…the Ellis Island/Statue of Liberty Foundation, is a privately run fund raising machine, Steve Burganti, was the head of it while I was there [that organization was integral to the Oral History Project]. Anyway, in the mid ‘80’s they were trying to raise money for the renovation of the Statue of Liberty. She was approaching her centennial and was a wreck and so this foundation was started [to fund the renovation]. So the foundation was not only raising money for the restoration of the statue and for Ellis Island. And they thought of this really cool idea probably one of the greatest fundraising ploys in the history of development work by offering to have a name engraved on a wall that would be erected on the grounds of the restored buildings at Ellis Island. You would pay your money and if you were the old person that came through, you would have your name, your family members names and you could give it as a gift. So in exchange for money you would get your name on a plaque on Ellis Island so anyway it was just a stroke of genius. So
the money started rolling in. The Statue of Liberty was restored and [with the remainder of the funds] ultimately most of the money that restored Ellis Island, (at least the main building), was privately raised. The Government did not use any of the taxpayer’s money to do these renovations. In the mid ‘80’s, part of that money was to be used for the second stage of the Oral History Project. The Margo Nash days were for the most part forgotten. So then the foundation decided, “Let’s start an Oral History Project!” which they did. These interviews are what are referred to as the AKRF interviews and I believe there were 200 of them, if I’m not mistaken. And these were the interviews which were done by mostly untrained interviewers. Oral history is one of those kinds of disciplines that everyone thinks they can do, you know ditch digging and interviewing people go hand in hand in people’s imaginations. So you get this rather dramatic spectrum of interviewing ability.

TR: Was there a set script that people would go out with?

PS: I believe they did. I don’t think that Margo did in the ‘70’s; I think she was more of a ‘70’s free spirit. This was much more akin to what Janet [Janet Levine, current director of the Oral History Project] and I did. We did not use a script, either, in fact, that’s how I used to train people to do interview. I used to say, “Use your imagination and your own curiosity to guide you”. We needed to hit their whole history in their own country, getting on the boat, we needed to hit those touch stones. For example, at Ellis Island, did you listen to the recorded immigrants and did you see the movie? These recordings were all taken from AKRF interviews. Those were the interviews that were used extensively by the foundation for marketing. They are the ones that for the most part are on the telephones that you pick up out in the museum. Those were the interviews that gave the Ellis Island Oral History Project a higher profile, temporarily. Ellis, as a museum opened in September of 1991, and I had already been there two years, at that point. The AKRF are then them themselves forgotten, stuffed in shoe boxes, although they had been transcribed, anyway. As it turns out, some of Margo Nash’s interviews had been transcribed, as well, we just never found them, because they had been done on typewriters. They were packed away, and we didn’t find them until years later. So we now
have two chunks of this project that existed apart from each, and were both packed away by the time I got there [Ellis Island] in 1989. So my boss, Diana Pardue, asked me if I could organize the archived materials for the Oral History Project. This became phase three of the Project. It was from that phase that my colleagues and I turned from a bunch of stuff in a shoe box to an internationally famous Oral History Project. In fact we even had people for Europe coming to base their oral history libraries on our design.

So the first things that had to be done, of course, were organizing everything and finding stuff. I think even Margo’s interviews were in different places. We’d find five over here, and a few in a drawer somewhere.

TR: Were there storage rooms housing these items, or where were they kept?

PS: That a good question, because as you see, the museum was not open, it’s abandoned, and they’re working on it, it’s like a construction site over there. Our offices, I will never forget, were housed in one of the abandoned hospital buildings. Because when they opened the museum, they rushed to get the public parts opened, but took their time with the office part.

TR: The oral history library is now housed on the third floor of the museum, was this the location you moved to once the renovations were complete?

PS: No its in the same place… That room, where the study carrels are, that room was always supposed to be the Oral History Libraries, designed from the plans created in the 1980’s.

TR: Can you describe for me the process by which the interviewees were chosen to participate in the Oral History Project?

PS: I got the October 1989 and I conducted my first interviews in 1990. At that point I was just me, and I had to come up with a way for finding people. I wasn’t about the go traipsing all over the Statue of Liberty all day. So I invented this form, the so-called “Ellis Island Oral History
Form”. And they ended up all over the world, and we would get them back from the damnedest places! Which we had people distribute at the Statue of Liberty, or through the mail, the Foundation gave us their mailing list. So all the people who were contributing money to have their names placed on the wall of honor [they all receive this mailing]. It was a simple form that had their name and address, and what year they came, how old were you, give me a couple impressions of Ellis Island, if you came through there. Ellis Island was not the only immigration station in the United States….Galveston was one of the major immigration stations when the big hurricane hit in 1900. Philadelphia, Boston, Savannah (I believe), and you didn’t have to go through Ellis if you came second or first class. Prior to 1924 you didn’t have to come through Ellis if you came second class. And a lot of the Northern European countries: Sweden, Norway, the Danes, and Irish the English…we have a hard time finding these people because they often saved up enough money and came second class. So were those who came through Ellis Island, for lack of a better word, were the steerage class. Third class passengers took anywhere from two to three weeks, depending on where you left from. Ten days if you were lucky.

TR: So let’s get back to how they were chosen to participate?

PS: The forms were sent out, and we actually started getting them back. And I remember being so excited “OH MY GOD! Someone sent one back!” And by spring of 1990, they started coming back, and I had something to work with. In the meantime, I had been organizing the AKRF interviews, which were not quite in the disarray that Margo’s interviews were in, which were like finding tapes under tables, everything was in pandemonium. I was also transcribing. But by the spring of 1990 we actually could start doing interviews. I had a student intern, and the photographer for the island were very important to this initial process. During the interviews I was always very specific to note who’s running the recording equipment, and who was conducting the interviews, where is it taking place.
TR: Did you have specific criteria, when you were beginning to assess the forms, what criteria did you see that made you interest in pursuing them?

PS: Well initially that was different. At first I didn’t care at all, I was just excited that there were people out there. The form also underwent several revisions, you know I changed it a number for different reasons. Of course at the time I left in the late 90s we were being very picky, I shouldn’t say very picky but much more picky about whom we would interview. We were trying to find people who were born in the earlier years, rather than later, because we just figured… In the beginning it seemed like I had my pick on anyone, and I might pass over someone who was only six or seven at the time, when they came through.

TR: There were about half of the immigrants from Vignettes that I could not locate their ship manifest records within The American Family Immigration History Center (AFIHC) database, or found some slight discrepancies on dates of birth or dates of arrival. I assume some reasons could be name spelling changes, or memory lapses due to the age at the time of the interviewees…and thoughts about that?

PS: A lot of people who think they came through Ellis Island really didn’t come through Ellis Island. And names were not changed at Ellis Island! Names were not changed to the LEGENDARY amount that is believed. I’m sure it happened occasionally but mostly names were changed in the port of departure because the shipping companies that owned the ocean liners and got the immigrants over there, made lots and lots of money on their third class passengers. Tons of money. It was very important for them to make sure that these people were not sent back because they would not make any money. In a sense, they had to pay for the return passage of anyone who was rejected. I don’t know how that actually manifested itself if it was more abstract and it meant that they just couldn’t fill a bunk for a return trip or if they had to actually pay money to the federal government or what? But I don’t know. So it was in their best interest to make sure by hook or by crook that every single immigrant who was traveling third class and going through Ellis Island, got through Ellis Island. So one
of the ways this was done, and there were some rather nefarious ways as well, but one of the easiest ways was to make sure that the names were relatively easy to pronounce or to read so that the immigrant did not have to stand in front of the inspector for any longer than was necessary. So that he would not have time, they had been trained to look for certain problems, for instance she might be hiding her right hand. And he was trained to see that she was hiding her right hand, and you must have a deformed hand. So the idea was to get them in front of the inspector and away from the inspector as fast as possible. So if an inspector is going to sit there and stumble over a name, it would give him an extra twenty seconds to study this person. So the names were generally changed in the port of departure. So the shipping companies set up these huge Ellis Island like complexes at the ports of departure where the immigrants were inspected, hosed down, washed, fed, before they got on the boat to get them looking nice and healthy before leaving.

TR: Do you have any favorite interviewees that you recall? Alan mentioned that he thought you really enjoyed speaking with Manny, I believe?

PS: Well for instance, I think it was Max Schnapp who said, “We were all scared, scared, scared”, on the interview, which was part of what Alan set. I remember Max telling me about this, he talked about the uniforms. I think he came from Roumania, and he was an adult, I think 18 or something. So he would have been old enough to actually know that kind of fear, that these guys [military personnel] could do you harm. Whereas a kid might be a little more oblivious than that.

TR: Paul thank you so much giving of your time and contribution to my project. I feel privileged to be working on it, and I look forward to sharing your work with the world.
Stephanie Blythe, Internationally renowned mezzo-soprano and singer who inspired Alan Louis Smith to compose *Vignettes: Ellis Island.*

Interview conducted through email correspondence October 2008 between Ms. Blythe and Tamara Regensburger.

Tamara Regensburger: First, thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my research and offer your expertise and perspective on performing these pieces. If you can begin by telling me how you met Alan Smith and how your friendship developed over the years?

Stephanie Blythe: *(unanswered question)*

TR: What did it mean to you to get this gift of song from Alan, what was your initial reaction to the gift, and to the pieces themselves?

SB: It was a complete surprise. I was just sitting at home in Manhattan around the time of my 30th birthday, when a package arrived from Alan- inside was his birthday gift to me- a song cycle that would become a major part of my performing career. The words and music spoke to me instantly, but it wasn’t until a month or so later when I saw Alan at the Tanglewood festival, that I would first sing through the songs with Alan. I will never forget that evening with him- reading through those songs and first discovering how they each felt in my heart and my voice.

TR: I asked Alan “When you write for a specific voice are you crafting the pieces in any way to highlight their strengths and balance their weaknesses?”… Did these pieces accomplish this for you and how?

SB: *(I don’t know how to answer this question- this is really a question for the composer. All I can speak to is that Alan wrote these songs in such a way that they were right for my voice. The range fit, the tessitura was comfortable; the music fits the words and illuminates the text.)*

TR: Can you compare for me the experience of preparing and premiering a composition that’s never been sung before
with singing something that is well performed and needs no “inventing”.

SB: There is no difference for me. Any work that I approach for the first time is a personal invention. The difference lies with the audience, as they have nothing with which to compare my performance.

TR: When preparing these pieces, did you try to tap into each immigrant’s age and identity, or sing them more from a narrator perspective?

SB: Not particularly- that was something which grew and continues to change with each performance. Each song does have its own age, as some feel like the character in the present looking back, and some are told very much as if the story is in the moment and happening right now. All of them are extremely personal and none feel as if a narrator is telling the story. Each immigrant is his or her own voice.

TR: I saw an interview you gave in the May/June 2008 Journal of Singing where you said, “He [Alan Smith] has also written some of the most beautiful music I have ever sung. What it did for me was to teach me how to sing. I will never be able to overestimate the power that the art song had over me.” Can you expound on this statement, with regards to your singing what did it teach you specifically?

SB: That statement is really referring to the importance of the art song in teaching the voice- and idea that really rings true in my vocal education as a student and as professional. The ability to sing through the text is one of the most important components of singing song. I have always felt that if we can really be expressive in the macrocosm of the song, our expression in the microcosm of opera can only be made better.

TR: There are some difficult rhythmic places in Vignettes, such as the mixed meter in Emma “The morning that I left..”, the fioratura in Max M. “On the boat that we took to America I had occasion to use the men’s room”, the barred quads in Regina “Out in the middle of the ocean…”, the mixed meter in Max S. “We looked at the statue of liberty. When we saw it, we were surprised…” Any tips or experiences with these you’d like to share?
SB:  I just learned the notes and PRACTICED the fioratura!

TR:  There were also some wonderful dissonant harmonies which occasionally made it tricky to find notes, as in Theresa “the next day it went down”, Clara “And when I left, she went part ways with me”, Regina “were you ever sea-sick”, did you have any difficulty navigating those spots?

SB:  Not really. Though in some performances I sang those spots better than others.

TR:  Vignettes can be diverse and challenging both musically and emotionally. Were there any other places that you found demanding during your preparation of these pieces?

SB:  (unanswered question)

TR:  Within the groupings (I. Preparing to leave for America, II. Boarding the Ship, III. On The Ship, IV. In The Harbor, V. On The Island) do you have a favorite set, or favorite piece that sticks out to you? If so, why?

SB:  I have always liked Kai’s song: “The day I sailed...” The melody is so nostalgic, simple and beautiful. It has always reminded me a little of an Ives song. The text is difficult because I can attach it to so many memories of my own- we all have to say goodbye to loved ones at some point in our lives. That is one of the reasons that this cycle has proved so popular with the audiences who hear it- it is very easy to put yourself in the shoes of these immigrants.

TR:  When I interviewed Alan he said that composing for you was like “having the giant box of crayolas (crayons), not the small box, but the giant one”, he continued saying, “I am spoiled writing for Stephanie because she can make meaning out of every word she sings, and it’s vital to her to do that.” How do you go about preparing your texts so that they are intensely connected to the emotion? Is this something you spend a great deal of time on, or do you have an innate gift with language?
SB: Warren Jones once told an audience with whom we were having a question and answer session, that the reason I am easily understood when I sing is that is extraordinarily important to me that the audience understands the words. He is right. I find that if I sing through the text and try to make myself clear at the same time, the words connect themselves to the emotion. I don’t try too hard to emote, I just let the words speak—when you try too hard, it just sounds affected and insincere.

TR: In “Regina” you employed a vocal color and affect of straight tone to evoke the sensation of sea-sickness; this seems to be the greatest vocal risk taken perhaps in the set. Do you agree or disagree, and is this a difficult production for you when perhaps the majority of your operatic repertoire requires good vibrancy?

SB: Straight tone is just a color. There are places where it can be put to use in a variety of styles of music. The danger is when the use of specific color like a straight tone takes over the voice. I don’t see any problem using it as part of the artistic palate.

TR: How many times have you had the opportunity to program Vignettes in recital? If Alan has these orchestrated, would you use them in that form as well?

SB: I think I have performed Vignettes at least a dozen times—enough that I have lost count. I would certainly perform them in an orchestral setting—though I think some of the intimacy would be lost in some of the songs.

TR: Are there any other stories or experiences dealing with the creation and performance of Vignettes that you’d like to share or add? Such as interactions with Warren Jones, Alan, or preparing or singing them?

SB: One of the great assets of this work is Alan’s writing for the piano— an instrument that he understands both as a technician and an artist. He has created a real landscape of color and texture with his instrument, as well as a real sense of immediacy with the text—this is an extraordinary gift.
Each time I return to these songs with Warren, I feel as if I am coming home to something very special. The last few times, Alan has been there for the performances, and it has been even more of a blessing. It is wonderful to sing something that has been specifically written for your voice, and to have the added joy of the piece being written by a mentor and friend- I don’t think it gets better than that.

TR:

Stephanie, thank you so much for contributing to my doctoral research and writing. The perspective of the singer and creator of the role is of tremendous interest to me and I am infinitely impressed with your artistry. I am grateful for your generosity and candor, and based on the wonderful things Alan had to say about you, I hope our paths cross again sometime. Many blessings to you, take care and good health!
This appendix contains a database of the immigrants whose interview texts were selected for use in *Vignettes: Ellis Island*. Created by the author, this listing includes information found on the American Family Immigration History Center website and the Alexander Street Press online journal, *North American Immigrant letters, Diaries, and Oral Histories*. From the information found within the database, several graphical studies were conducted to demonstrate the demographic distribution of the immigrants with regard to sex, age at immigration, year of immigration, and country of origin. When selecting the text for this cycle Smith stated that he made his decisions based solely on the strong impression various texts had over others, therefore it is interesting to note the approximate evenness of the demographics as described above.
**Distribution by Gender**

- **Female**: 60%
- **Male**: 40%

**Distribution by County of Origin**

- **Germany**: 16%
- **Austria-Hungary**: 5%
- **Denmark**: 5%
- **Ireland**: 16%
- **Italy**: 11%
- **Poland**: 11%
- **Roumania**: 11%
- **Russia via France**: 5%
- **Scotland**: 5%
- **Turkey**: 5%
- **Ukraine**: 5%
- **Yugoslavia**: 5%

- **Austria-Hungary**
- **Denmark**
- **Germany**
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- **Italy**
- **Poland**
- **Roumania**
- **Russia via France**
- **Scotland**
- **Turkey**
- **Ukraine**
- **Yugoslavia**
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<th>Year of Emigration</th>
<th>Age at Emigration</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ship Name</th>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>Not remembered</td>
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<td>The Hamburg</td>
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<td>9/29/1995</td>
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<td>The Rotterdam</td>
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<td>The Leviathan</td>
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<td>11/17/1991</td>
<td>91</td>
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