DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THREE ONE-ACT OPERAS

BY SEYMOUR BARAB

DOCUMENT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Doctor of Musical Arts in the
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BY

Heather Joy Parr, B.A., B.S., M.M.

*****

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Reading Committee:
Professor Mario Alch
Professor Paul Hickfang
Professor Jerry Lowder

Approved by

Adviser
School of Music

Mario Alch
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VITA

April 25, 1945 . . . .  Born - Akron, Ohio
1968 . . . . . . . . .  B.A.; B.S., University of Akron, Akron, Ohio
1970 . . . . . . . . .  M.M., University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky
1974-75 . . . . . . .  Faculty of Muskingum College, New Concord, Ohio

(Recital Programs following)
RECITAL I

Heather Farr, Soprano

Debbie Ingraham, piano

Vado, ma dove?
Chi sa, qual sia?

W.A. Mozart

Les Proses Lyriques
De rêve
De grève
De fleurs
De soir

Claude Debussy

The Poet's Echo (Pushkin)
Echo
My heart
Angel
The nightingale and the rose
Epigram
Lines written during a sleepless night

Benjamin Britten

Das Bächlein
Die Nacht
Ständchen

Richard Strauss

Given at Indianola Presbyterian Church, Columbus, Ohio.
RECITAL II

Heather Parr, Soprano
Jack Peterson, piano
   Assisted by: Renee Show, violin

Aria from "Almira"
   Liebliche Wälder

Scene and Rondo
   Ebben si vado

Eight Songs (1974)
   Bee, I'm expecting you
   The pedigree of honey
   A single clover plank
   A bee, his burnished carriage
   Of silken speech
   Bees are black with gilt surcingles
   We, bee and I live by the quaffing
   To make a prairie

Quatre Poèmes de Catulle

Frühling übers Jahr
   Anakreons Grab
   Elfenlied
   Agnes
   Ich hab in Penna einen Liebsten wohnen

Given at Hughes Hall Auditorium, Ohio State University.
RECITAL III

Heather Parr, Soprano           June 22, 1978

Jack Peterson, piano
  Assisted by Marsha Jaeger, oboe
  Claudia Jensen, flute
  Marshall Burlingame, clarinet

Parto! Ma tu ben mio
  from La Clemenza di Tito
  W.A. Mozart

Genügsamkeit ist ein Schatz
  from Cantata 144
  J.S. Bach

Ha! Ha! Wo will wi hüt
  G. Telemann

Le Rossignol
  F. Delibes

Le maître en droit
  Monsigny

Seven Blake Songs
  Vaughan Williams

As It Fell Upon a Day
  Copland

Given at Hughes Hall Auditorium, Ohio State University.
RECITAL IV

Heather Parr, Soprano

John Evans, piano

Renunciation
A very short song
I can't be talkin' of love
Men

Seymour Barab

Now at liberty
Ultimatum
Wisdom
One perfect rose

Gypsies in the wood
Social note
Song of perfect propriety
Frederick the Great

Three Arias
from A Game of Chance
The Third Knitter (Money)
The Second Knitter (Fame)
The First Knitter (Love)

Given at Hughes Hall Auditorium, Ohio State University.
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GLOSSARY

Although modern music frequently eludes traditional analysis, there is an architecture to be studied; an order and organization to its shapes and sounds. Therefore, the following definitions are utilized:

Aria - A tune or melody sung by a single voice either with or without an accompaniment; generally consisting of two or more contrasting sections and ending with a repetition of one or a variation of a preceding section.

Cross-relation - The use of a note and its chromatic alteration in different voices, either simultaneously or in immediate or close juxtaposition.

Drone - A note or notes, usually in the bass, sustained throughout an entire section.

Enharmonic - Notes which are identical in sound, yet spelled differently.

Form patterns - Arrangement of material within a composition; as aba, ABA, etc. A mark of "'" after a letter (as A') indicates a modified repetition of the formal unit.

Fugato - A short fugal passage or fugal exposition. (Fugue is a composition based on development of a single short theme or subject in imitation)

Harmonic rhythm - Movement of music as marked by a succession of changing harmonies.

Heterophony - Simultaneous sounding of a melody and an ornamented form of it.

Homophony - Texture in which all voice parts move in the same or nearly the same rhythm.

Imitative - A closely following restatement of a melody or phrase by another voice or voices in a contrapuntal texture. If the restatement is exact, it is termed "exact"; if not, it is termed "free".

Inversion - Substitution of a higher note for a lower one; a melody is inverted when an equally descending interval is substituted for every ascending interval and vice versa; two or more melodic lines are inverted when one of them originally higher, is placed in the bass.
Modulation - Harmonic movement from one key to another in the course of a composition.

Motive - The smallest unit of a musical idea; group of tones in a melody that have identifiable rhythmic and melodic character.

Non-harmonic tone - A tone foreign to, and therefore dissonant with the basic harmony or chord with which it is sounding.

Oblique motion - Movement of two voices in which one remains at the same pitch while the other voice moves to a different pitch.

Ostinato - A short melodic figure repeated, usually in the same voice and at the same pitch throughout a composition or section.

Parallel motion - Two or more voices moving constantly at the same interval from one another.

Pedal point - A sustained or repeated tone, usually in the bass, which sounds through changing harmonies.

Period - A unit of two phrases (usually eight bars in length): first phrase called antecedent (terminated by a half-cadence), the second called consequent (terminated by a complete or half cadence).

Phrase - A unit, often four measures long, terminated by a cadence.

Polyphony - A musical texture consisting of two or more lines of melody, or melody and accompaniment, or chords. Here it is a general term including both contrapuntal and harmonic textures.

Recitative - A style of vocal writing based on imitating the rhythms and inflections of speech. It is characterized as possessing a minimum of symmetrical musical structure.

Rubato - A slight modification in the regularity of a beat or pulse; a performer uses it for the purpose of heightening musical expression.
Stretto - The portion of a fugal composition in which imitations of a subject occur at closer time intervals than in the original presentation of the subject; or - a closing portion, in quicker time, of a movement in fast tempo.

Texture - Character of a musical composition in terms of density, tone colors, and relative levels of activity in different voice parts.
KEY TO DIAGRAMS

N.B. Number or letter written within a box or triangle indicates which character is singing.

Aria
Solo section
Duet
Trio
Quartet
Recitative
Dialogue
PURPOSE
This paper examines three one-act operas composed by the American, Seymour Barab. *A Game of Chance, Chanticleer,* and *Not a Spanish Kiss* are considered using the following criteria: formal analysis; nature of the vocal line; characteristics of word placement; categories and demands of the various vocal scoring; and the motivations guiding libretto selection.

In other words, the purpose of this study was to provide greater awareness and understanding of these three operas, so often appropriate for production at the community and university level.
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF OPERAS
Descriptive Analysis of

A Game of Chance
A Game of Chance is a one-act opera with words by E. Draper and music by Seymour Barab, composed in 1960. The libretto was suggested by a play, All on a Summer's Day, by Ryerson and Clements.

Instrumentation calls for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings. The writer's analysis was made from a piano reduction of the score.

It is a story about the following characters:

First Knitter Lyric soprano  \( \text{Range} \ c_{1}-c_{3}^{3} \)
Second Knitter Soprano  \( \text{Range} \ c_{1}-g_{#2} \)
Third Knitter Mezzo soprano  \( \text{Range} \ a_{2}-f_{2} \)
Representative Bass-baritone  \( \text{Range} \ b_{b}-e_{1} \)

FORMAL VOCAL STRUCTURE OF A GAME OF CHANCE

piano intro.  \( \rightarrow \frac{1}{3} \rightarrow \frac{2}{3} \rightarrow \frac{3}{3} \)

\( \rightarrow \frac{1}{3} \rightarrow \frac{2}{3} \rightarrow \frac{3}{3} \rightarrow \frac{1}{3} \rightarrow [R] \)

\( \rightarrow [R] \rightarrow \frac{1}{3} \rightarrow \frac{2}{3} \rightarrow \frac{3}{3} \rightarrow [R] \)

\( \rightarrow \frac{1}{3} \rightarrow \frac{2}{3} \rightarrow \frac{3}{3} \rightarrow [R] \rightarrow [R] \)

\( \rightarrow \frac{1}{3} \rightarrow \frac{2}{3} \rightarrow [R] \rightarrow [L] \)

\( \rightarrow \frac{1}{3} \rightarrow \frac{2}{3} \rightarrow [R] + \text{coda} \)
The piano introduction attracts audience attention with five forte chords; then begins the tedium motive to be carried throughout the opera ("non legato, senza espressione"). (Ex. 1)

Ex. 1 (p. 1)

The trio is treated homophonically and supports the mutual dissatisfaction of the Knitters. The first five measures (p. 2) make up a binary phrase with the first section in f minor and the second in G major. This binary phrase is repeated, with a different text, this time in c minor and C major. The parallel period leads to a B section with a sequential rise in all voices; ending in unison on "a different dream," in D major (p. 4). The C section begins in unison until the word "three", then the voices divide and three parallel phrases follow; the first ending in B♭ major, the second on a vi chord of B♭ major, and the third on the tonic chord of B♭ major. The coda contains the following chordal progression: B♭ major: I - IV - vii⁰ - V⁷ - I. The accompaniment in this trio is quite independent of the voices, and is derived from the introductory piano measures con-
taining the aforementioned "tedium" motive. It uses a broken triad and repeated chords with major and minor seconds. The bass part in the trio, however, adds the dimension of alternating chords arranged in the interval of a fifth, also reinforcing the plodding of the ladies' situation. (Ex. 2)

Then using the introductory motive, we are led to the first set piece.

The third Knitter's aria (p. 6) which maintains the "tedium" motive throughout the recitative, is mostly in the key of C major, and cadences on V₇ of V, or G major. The main body of the aria is set in verses with inserts from the other two Knitters to aid action and also foreshadow their arias' subjects. The piano accompaniment is consistently independent of the vocal line and is written in a Charleston vamp style. (Ex. 3)
The emphasis of this aria is on the Third Knitter's dream of being rich and powerful - hence, we find the words "money" and "power" standing out in an a cappella setting.

All "A" sections are composed of three different phrases always punctuated by "There's nothing" (V/I). The phrases are modulatory, beginning in D major, going through E major, and back to D major. The B section (pp 10-11) begins in g minor and G major, and is modulatory also, using a descending chromatic bass beginning on the F♯ and takes us back to D major. The connective material in the piano (when the voice is tacet) is the Charleston motive with a combination of d minor-G major chords, E♭ major-A♭, and a a minor - A major chords. The voice echoes the interval of a fifth on the word "power", reinforcing this interval's use on "there's nothing". The piano accompaniment supports the vocal line in a delayed manner, usually a beat later. The coda, an ascending E major scale in the voice, cadences on a B♭♯5 chord leading to the final key of D♭ major.

The vocal dialogue remains in b♭ minor and B♭ major, as Barab takes advantage of the rhyming text to set the sections in speaking rhythm, as though reading from a catalogue. Knitter II has an ascending vocal line for each entrance, as if saying "Hmm?". The "alla marcia" section (p. 15) contains an ascending
phrase used more frequently as the opera progresses.

(Ex. 4)

Ex. 4 (p. 14)

The representative enters (p. 15) using this ascending outline as he questions the third Knitter. His "psalm toning" adds appropriate satirical effect to his character as the devil's advocate. Barab chooses to use a key signature in the Knitters' jingle. After the third Knitter's response on three short phrases (p.19) a common tone of E in the vocal line is used for modulation to the key of E major, as the Representative uses the ascending motive in each phrase (p. 20) outlining the key. A common tone modulation on B moves to a small fugal section plus stretto in the key of C major as the Knitters muse and end their thoughts independently and unaccompanied (pp. 20-21). The representative follows with a parallel period in which Barab leaves the vocal line in F major as the piano accompaniment modulates to B major; he then uses an enharmonic common tone of C♯ to return to E major. This section is an exact repetition of the Representative's text and music two pages earlier. It adds five contrasting measures in G minor, ending with an accompaniment pattern used earlier, which in-
cludes a descending seventh chord in the bass. The representative then sings the third Knitter out in E major. She exits to the Charleston vamp used in her aria, also in E major.

Using connective material from the introductory tedium motive, we are brought to the second Knitter's recitative and aria (p. 24). The preceding line consists of the first Knitter singing a nearly exact repetition of the second Knitter's line, up a minor 2nd. During an extensive and varied recitative, we see Barab's enharmonic modulation again, this time using the pitches of C♯-D♭ and D♯-E♭. The introductory motive is all pervasive in the accompaniment either in partial or varied form. (Ex. 5)

![Ex. 5 (p. 24)](image)

There is an insertion by another voice in this recitative-aria, this time by the first Knitter. Barab arrives at the aria's key by preceding it in the vocal line with a chromatic descending line ending on the pitch E, then sustaining an E in the treble of the piano. Here Barab chooses to use a key signature. The aria is generally A-B-A in form. The A section consists of a parallel period of eight bars in length.
The B section is binary; the first part modulatory and the second part in E major. The accompaniment in the B section consists of a variation on A section's accompaniment pattern and uses pedal point to indicate modulatory direction. The vocal line in the B section, with text as guide, consists of four-measure phrases (pp. 28-29). The first of these four-measure phrases is imitative with the second at the interval of a perfect fourth. The last two phrases do the same using a varied rhythm. Then Barab presents the main vocal line from the A section in the piano part, while the vocal line has four measures of writing based on the dominant. The A section returns in partial form (p. 30) with just the first three measures as a transition to the coda. The coda uses a syncopated bass line for contrast and a step-wise descending-ascending vocal line to return to the final "Fame" measures in E major. (Ex. 6)

Ex. 6 (p. 31)

The following dialogue has two contrasting accompaniment patterns. (Ex. 7)
The first anticipates the waltz tempo in Knitter I's love aria and remains in E major, whereas the second is in duple meter and has a contrastingly serious character, more appropriately played with the second Knitter's foreboding destiny in mind ("pesante" marking on p. 32). After two parallel periods, each 12 measures in length, Barab inserts the key signature of four flats, although the music is in $E^b$ major until the last chord. The voice and piano have been through temporary modulations in $B^b$ major and $g$ minor to this point. Now Knitter I sings a line reminiscent of one on page 15, when Knitter II warned Knitter III of the trouble she was getting into. Barab appropriately chooses to set the vocal line on an augmented triad ($E^b$-G-B), while Knitter I sings the words "overambitious delusions of grandeur" (p. 33). The next distinctive accompaniment pattern is seen when the Representative re-enters singing "Pardon me, Miss", on the same pitches
that he sang to Knitter III earlier in the opera. (Ex. 8)

Ex. 8 (p. 33)

He uses an ascending vocal line to his initial question. The accompaniment is then developed and the key signature eliminated (p. 35), as the Representative describes Knitter II's book. The agreement is again psalm toned (pp. 36-7) as it was to Knitter III, over a pedal point on the pitch of D. After four flats in the key signature is established, Knitter II exits to six measures of the "Fame" motive, cadencing in A major.

Knitter I's aria (pp. 39-45) has no key signature and is more freely composed than the other two arias. It is nearly a "sung stream of consciousness," as the text has no verses or poetic scheme similar to the two preceding arias. Perhaps the main factor that helps organize this aria is the "Tempo di Valse" marking in measure 24. We anticipate this marking via the two "piu mosso" sections earlier in the aria, both written in 3/4. Up to measure 53 could possibly be called recitative, or at least arioso, because of its halting
nature, with several fermati and tempi changes. After measure 33 there are no changes in the time signature and only two modifications in tempi. There is a ritard in measure 69 and an "a tempo" marking in measure 72, which a singer may have appropriately inserted anyway.

The accompaniment, although quite varied, does support the 3/4 time signature and "Tempo di Valse" marking by stressing the first beat of every measure. This in itself helps unify the main body of this aria. Because there are no real divisions in it, the aria must be studied through single word or phrase development. One recurring word, "together", begins in measure 42. The importance of this word is then clearly shown. Barab appropriately sets the stressed syllable "ge" on the stressed first beat of three consecutive measures. Each "together" is set up a minor or major second from the one before - i.e. sequential development. A similar setting of "together" is found in the last 16 measures of the aria - this time with the voice set above a rhapsodic accompaniment in a final modulatory section. The aria ends in F# major with Knitter I singing the third of the chord (p.45).

Barab also uses a recurring phrase to bind this aria together. In the arioso section the words "happiness for me is with my love" are sung, and just before the final "together" section, the words "for
only love is happiness to me" are sung. Hence, through
the text at the beginning of the aria, we are prepared
for the ending. In the arioso section, Knitter I lapses
into memories of the other two knitters (i.e. Knitter
III's money, and Knitter II's fame) before she settles
wholeheartedly on her daydream of love.

The aria unfolds using the following key arrange-
ments:

1. In measures 1-23, the first phrase cadences
   on a V chord in A♭ major, and modulates to D♭.
   This happens twice.

2. Measure 24 has the beginning of two partial
   scales in the vocal line, cadencing on a B♭
   chord in measure 31. This leads to four
   measures in e♭ minor, and enharmonic writing
   on the pitches D♭-C♯, ending in F major.

3. In measure 50 on "word", an E♭ chord contains
   the common tone (G♯) for the next section in
   A♭ major (measures 52-64). The C♯ and A♯
   are then used in enharmonic modulation to the
   keys of B major and g minor (m. 69-71), and
   A major in measure 77. Via an f♯ chord in
   measure 79, and a descending chromatic pattern
   used before in m. 79-80, we arrive at a section
   based on a G major seventh chord, with voice
   on the seventh. (Ex. 9)
After considerable modulation, the seventh becomes the final key - F# major; and voice sings a partial F# scale on the last phrase.

The Representative enters with his familiar greeting using the same pitches and rhythms sung to Knitters III and II. (Ex. 10)

This time the Representative stays on stage rather than leading his "victim" off. Knitter I sings three seven-tone scales (p. 46) above a C# pedal
point. The first scale is in A major, beginning on E; the second in d minor beginning on the pitch G; and the third continuing from A to F#. The final scale on which Knitter I exits contains eight tones with pitches from D major plus three half steps. This occurs over a rapturous waltz accompaniment, reminiscent of the last section of her aria, using the words "for only love is happiness to me". (Ex. 11)

![Sheet music image](image)

Ex. 11 (p. 46)

The Representative cuts off this ecstatic display from voice and piano with his entrance on an unresolved chord, an opera comique technic. His words probably give Knitter I a chance to change costumes. The three ladies then enter for a musical epilog.

The beginning of this epilog is an interesting contrast to the opening trio of the opera, in which all Knitters were mutually bored. The boredom was set homophonically. The epilog (p. 47) has all knitters mutually complaining, but separately this time, be-
cause of their unique experiences. Each knitter has four measures to sing a complaint in E major, followed by six measures of imitation. The order of imitation is the same as the order in which the arias were presented - Knitter III, Knitter II, and Knitter I. After Knitter I ends the imitative section on a melisma, she begins a 16 measure section in c# minor elaborating on her woes. This section has a "Tempo di Valse" marking as did her aria. Knitter II enters immediately in the key of a minor after Knitter I’s last note. Her sixteen measures follow the general contour of Knitter I’s melody. The time signature is cut time, and the accompaniment is reminiscent of the end of her "Fame" aria. The last measures however, are in a waltz tempo, and the vocal line sings of love. The Representative then interrupts before Knitter III enters. He has 16 measures in d minor, made up of three parallel phrases over an ostinato bass.

Ironically, for his character, the section ends with another "Tempo di Valse" marking. The Representative sings about all three Knitters, even though Knitter III has not sung her complaints yet. On his last note, Knitter III begins. Her section is written in cut time, using a jazz tempo reminiscent of her "Tempo di Charleston" in the "money" aria. The section ends with a switch to 3/4 time and with a key change from d minor to G major. Then with three unaccompanied pitches, Knitter III leads into a fugal section marked allegro,
which contains a new accompaniment pattern. (Ex. 12)

Ex. 12 (p. 52)

Knitters III and II sing 20 measures of imitative writing before Knitter I joins them for a stretto section on "I didn't ask for enough". The Representative then enters using the three-note pattern (p. 54) with which Knitter III began the fugal section, this time a half step up. (Ex. 13)

Ex. 13 (p. 54)

The accompaniment uses this pattern for purposes of imitation and modulation. It could be loosely called the fugal subject. Following the next ten measures there is a freely composed four-part contrapuntal section, in which the treble voices periodically sing in thirds, as the Representative maintains a steady bass composed
of one syllable per note. The Knitters' writing is then \textit{melismatic}, and, with the Representative, the four voices cadence in C major. The fugal subject follows with accompaniment and four voices in \textit{stretto} in an unprepared key change to $A^b$ major. The $A^b$ becomes the dominant of the final chorale in $D^b$ major; and a final accompaniment pattern is introduced. (Ex.14)

Ex. 14 (p. 58)
Descriptive Analysis of

Chanticleer
Chanticleer is a comic opera suggested by the Nun's Priest's Tale by Geoffrey Chaucer, with words by M.C. Richards, and music by Seymour Barab, 1964.

Instrumentation calls for flute, oboe, clarinet I (B♭ and A), clarinet II (B♭, A and bass clarinet), bassoon, horn I and II, trumpet, trombone, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings. The writer's analysis was made from a piano reduction of the score.

It is a tale about the following characters:

- Pertelote: Lyric soprano  \( \text{Range} \quad \frac{d^1-b^2}{b^2-d} \)
- Widow: Mezzo soprano  \( \frac{c-b}{b^1} \)
- Chanticleer: Tenor  \( a^#-f^#1 \)
- Fox: Baritone

FORMAL VOCAL STRUCTURE OF CHANTICLEER

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{piano intro.} & \quad \text{A} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{W} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{P} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{C} \\
& \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{P} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{W} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{C} \\
& \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{spoken} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{P} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{C} \quad + \text{coda} \\
& \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{F} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{P} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{C} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{F} \\
& \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{P} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{W} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{C} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{F} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{C} \\
& \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{P} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{W} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{C} \quad \longrightarrow \quad \text{F} \quad + \text{coda.}
\end{align*}
\]
Unlike A Game of Chance, Chanticleer has few recognizable "form patterns". This opera is literally allowed to unfold with a minimum of structural limitations, and there are few real beginnings and endings in the action on stage or in the music itself. Repetition as a unifying factor is not easily recognizable, particularly in the vocal line.

The discussion about the organization of such a composition must keep in mind that the libretto itself does not lend itself to set divisions. The Chanticleer text of this opera has been adapted from the original text or translation. It has been paraphrased and edited from the old English tale with its planned rhyme and line length. The operatic libretto has an inconsistent rhyme scheme at most. Rhyme occurs at the ends of lines, internally, and often not at all. Because the original is 95% narrative (one person describing action and conversation), an obvious change involves bringing those talked-about characters to life in conversational rather than narrative form. Also, the importance of each character (length of role) must be decided. In this opera, all action and comments revolve around Chanticleer, although the roles of the Fox, Pertelote, and the Widow are nearly equal in length. (The rather equal distribution of lines discourages any attempt to make it into a soloist spectacle for one character.)
In Chaucer's original work little is said of the Widow. Also, the Fox is not involved in the story as early as in the opera. Further, as is common in the Canterbury Tales, the tone of the story is far more serious than in the operatic version.

There is another important difference. The fact that this is an active plot with little or no narrative means that the characters establish their stage identities through short interactions with the other characters rather than through lengthy soliloquies, stage direction, or program notes. Even more than in A Game of Chance, Barab is concerned with a clear presentation of the textual drama rather than conforming to a predictable formal arrangement. Generally speaking, his choice of keys is meant to provide appropriate atmosphere and movement. They do not follow traditional schemes.

In the piano-vocal score, the opera begins with a piano introduction, which sets the farmyard scene and lends background to the upcoming stage direction. It consists of three distinct sections. Each begins with a syncopated treble interval, and an octave+fifth in the bass. There is always a dissonance of a major or minor second between the two initial chords in both hands. (Ex. 1)
The syncopation becomes more frequent as the scene calls for more agitation. The introduction has a key signature of three flats, but never really settles on E\textsubscript{b} major until the final measures.

The Widow sings her first word on a fortissimo pitch of E - an abrupt and definite key change to four sharps. Pertelote enters and sings four pages of clearly recognizable recitative expressing her hostility toward the Widow.

According to key arrangements, accompaniment patterns, and vocal line motives, the Widow's song (pp.7-12) can be divided as follows:

Introduction in E major
A section in D\textsubscript{b} major
Modulation to B major (key signature is three flats, but section is in key of F major, then E\textsubscript{b} major)
B\textsuperscript{1} section in E\textsubscript{b} major
Modulation via key of D major to G major

B section (again in F major though, key signature is three flats, and then to E♭ major)

A section as before in D♭ major

New material leading into Chanticleer's entrance (i.e. no definite stopping place for this aria, and appropriately so, for the text ends in a question)

This aria's introductory piano pattern now appears again as linking material and then develops into the initial accompaniment pattern for the ensuing section.

This section is all lead-in dialogue to Chanticleer's extensive aria. It appears as a "pseudo-trio", with the three involved characters (Chanticleer, Pterelote, and the Widow) each having solo passages. Pterelote and the Widow sing in duet at the beginning and end of the section. Chanticleer inserts comments to explain his behavior. The accompaniment patterns actually organize this portion of the opera, but only as far as how Barab intends to punctuate the audience's mood and perception of "action" on stage. Hence, one pattern moves through the key of d minor to b♭ minor, then another recognizable pattern in 12/8 time appears with no key signature, progressing chromatically, and arrives via pedal point on F to a less active but similar pattern in f minor and A♭ major. Using an ostinato bass, the pattern is then augmented in 3/4 time after a sudden modulation to f♯ minor. A common Barab practice shown here is having the bass dissonant with the melody, or
the bass chord in inverted position. Therefore a root feeling is never really established. (Ex. 2)

Ex. 2 (p. 21)

After enharmonic modulation using the pitches of $d^\# - e_b^1$, the composer moves to $D_b$ major, then on to $A_b$ major. Then using a common tone of $G$, the key of $G$ major is established, again with a dissonant bass and melody using seventh chords. The Widow returns to the musical scene, as she and Pertelote echo each other's lines, urging Chanticleer to begin his crowing. They end with a duet in the key of $e$ minor.

Chanticleer's aria is distinctly begun (p. 24) with a "Cock-a-doo-dle-doo" on the tonic of $A_b$ major, after a common tone modulation using the pitch $C$. The aria is divided as follows:

- $A$ section in $A_b$ major
- $A^1$ section in $A$ major
- $A^2$ section in $B_b$ major and $g$ minor
B section in $B^b$ major and $g$ minor

C section in $G$ major

$C^1$ section in $g$ minor and $G$ major

Common tone modulation using the pitch of $G$

D section in $A^b$ major and $f$ minor, ending on a $V/V$ chord

The aria ends (p. 35) with a cadenza-like vocalise and traditional $V_7-I$ coda in $A^b$ major.

Another Barab practice is illustrated particularly well in the A sections. A key signature is indicated, but the following measures either are not initially in that key (major or minor), or contain deceptive accidentals. Again, a key feeling is disguised.

A short section follows, in $F$ major and $D$ major, introducing an accompaniment figure that appears 50 pages later, periodically to the end. (Ex. 3)

![Ex. 3 (p. 38)](image)

Ten pages of conversation follow involving Chanticleer, Pertelote, and the Widow. Consistent development is made of two motives in the accompaniment helping to unify this section. There is some parallel melodic writing between Pertelote and Chanticleer, and a bit
of imitation in the Widow’s vocal line, but mostly, the section is a free and modulatory accompanied recitative ending in B major.

The Fox establishes his presence on stage via a distinctive accompaniment motive in B major. (Ex. 4)

![Ex. 4 (p. 48)](image)

Barab creates suspense here, with Pertelote’s chromatic vocal line (descending when gathering her doubts; ascending when being enlightened) and its accompaniment. A well-placed syncopation points up Pertelote’s insight about the Fox. A dotted rhythm accompanies the Fox chasing Pertelote. During the chase, the two speak their lines. Then Barab answers Chanticleer’s question, non-vocally, i.e. “What’s the matter, Pertelote?” is answered by the Fox motive in the piano.

Pertelote’s recitative answer, punctuated by rests because she is out of breath, is the beginning of a love duet between her and Chanticleer (pp. 58-63). It divides as follows:
Recitative in key of B major
Common tone modulation using pitch B

A section in E major and D♭ major
A¹ section in E major and D♭ major

B section in D♭ major and D major, using enharmonic modulation

A section in E major and C major

Coda in C major

The duet is very poetic and has much text repetition, as might be expected in this kind of static scene.

The following interlude sets up a versatile accompaniment pattern which Barab imitates, inverts, and uses contrapuntally in the vocal line, while Pertelote and

![Musical notation]

Ex. 5 (p. 63)

Action on stage between the Fox and Widow is not indicated in the music. Chanticleer is left on stage singing a short ditty in mock madrigal style as he busies himself with chores. An arpeggiated figure in the treble of the accompaniment introduces the section and then continues in the bass, as Chanticleer's line and the
treble are written with overlapping imitation. (Ex. 6)

Ex. 6 (p. 66)

After a repetition of a line the Widow sang in Chanticler's aria, (Ex. 7)

Ex. 7 (pp. 33 and 68)

the music moves to a very rhythmic section featuring the Fox. It is introduced by an interrupted accompaniment figure which appeared two measures earlier over a B pedal point. (Ex. 8)
In the Fox's attempt to seduce Chanticleer with his flattery, a song is introduced that uses some parallel writing as a method of organizing, but it never formally ends. This is partially because of Chanticleer's interruptions, but mostly because the Fox continues to make verbal slips in the descriptions of his background in music. The vocal line appears to be in A major, but the accompaniment possesses a D♯ often enough to consider E major — another Barab practice. There is some musical humor in this solo section also. When the Fox mentions that he attends the symphony, we hear the main motive from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, first movement. When he says he "attends the opera", 
we hear an operatic-like motive.

Pertelote interrupts the Fox's advances to Chanticleer. Under an ostinato bass (using the bass rhythm from the Fox's song), Pertelote, Chanticleer, and the Fox in trio, present three perspectives - warning, stalling, and urging flattery.

Chanticleer finally breaks up the confusion by acquiescing to sing his aria. He barely completes the first line (in the original key of A\textsuperscript{b} major) when a chase begins. The accompaniment is cleverly organized using the Chanticleer aria's accompaniment rhythms and modified vocal line, while the Fox sings new melodic material.

The next section in which Pertelote and the Widow panic about the abduction of Chanticleer facilitates the interval of a third. The interval ascends and descends repeatedly and serves as a developmental motive. (Ex. 9)
The accompaniment pattern for the next section between Chanticleer and the Fox is anticipated two measures before in the key of g minor. Chanticleer appeals to the Fox's ego with three parallel phrases in g minor and $b^b$ minor. Still using a key signature of two flats, Barab set the Fox's modulatory reply which ends on the pitch $E^b$, with a recitative leading to a short song in $E^b$ major. The song divides as follows:

A section in $E^b$ major

$A^1$ section, first half in A major

B section, a development of a motive in A major (Ex. 10)
I promise you a dish you'll savor
both light and dark meat, wings and drumsticks

Ex. 10 (p. 88)

A section in E♭ major, with some material from B section

As the Fox realizes Chanticleer has escaped,
Barab changes keys abruptly (appropriately amplifying the realization) and writes a distinctive accompaniment to underscore the vocal pleading above it.

Following is the back-and-forth captivity sequence, in which Pertelote and Chanticleer flee from the Fox, or the Fox flees from them, with help from the Widow. This ending is similar to the one in Chaucer's tale, but with more switching back-and-forth and a more comedic nature than a moralizing one. The twenty pages can be divided as follows:

1. Homophonic trio writing (with Pertelote, Chanticleer, and the Widow) rising chromatically and ending on a unison A♭ above a C chord with an added A♭. An andantino tempo is used.

2. Short unison trio in C major, using vivace tempo.

3. The Fox is added to the trio, with no tempo or key change, and a four-part imitation begins, as the piano adds a fifth part occasionally.

4. Ending on a V♭ chord of C major, the contrapuntal section stops abruptly as the piano introduces an
accompaniment motive that is used periodically to the end of the opera, hereafter referred to as motive X. (Ex. 11)

Ex. 11 (p. 98)

5. Unison trio in G major (Pertelote, Widow, and Chanticleer), divided into a binary A section; followed by an $A^1$ section and chromatic scale in the voice; then an $A^2$ section, cadencing on a V chord in b minor. This leads to a section in 3/4 time with two flats in the key signature, although it is initially in b$^b$ minor. Accompaniment motive X underscores this section.

6. As the time signature changes to 4/4, there is a duet in B$^b$, organized with two A sections, the second in g minor and F major. As the Fox gets the upper hand, we hear motive X again in the piano, with alternating measures in F major and a minor. The motive cadences on a V chord in F major. Following is a section in 4/4 time, in the key of A$^b$ major, after a common tone modulation on the pitch C.

7. As the Widow chases the Fox off again, motive X is used, in the key of B major (again through an enharmonic modulation using E$^b$ and D$^b$). There is however, no key change indicated by Barab.

8. The Widow then moralizes a few bars, above an accompaniment pattern used in a previous section. This pattern makes use of a triplet figure. (Ex. 12)
The section ends with motive $X$, again with alternating measures, this time in $D_b$ major and $E_b$ minor.

9. An abrupt change with no key signature begins a modulatory duet with Pertelote and Chanticleer, ending in $D$ major. A short coda is sung above motive $X_b$ with measures alternating between the keys of $B$ minor and $E_b$ minor.

10. The Fox intervenes in a rhapsodic section in which his vocal line is in $B_b$ major and $F$ major, while the accompaniment stays modulatory even after he stops singing.

11. The opera ends as the four characters form a tableau on stage to sing a homophonic, chromatic quartet. This prefaces three measures of unison in $E$ major, and four-part harmony to the end of the opera.

In *Chanticleer*, analysis is dependent upon pointing up the recurring factors used in organizing it. These factors include accompaniment patterns, any melodic references used more than once, the relationship between piano and voice (as far as keys go), and cadential practices. No single factor, however, is regular or significant enough to say that it is the main factor in organizing this opera. The opera "scheme" in *Chanticleer* is conversational and free-flowing and therefore eludes set definition.
Descriptive Analysis of

Not a Spanish Kiss
Not a Spanish Kiss is an opera skit (one-act) with words and music by Seymour Barab, written in 1976.

The writer's analysis was made from the piano-vocal score – there is no instrumentation.

It is a story about the following characters:

- Betta: Soprano
  - Range: b-a^2
- Piero: Tenor
  - Range: c-a^1
- Crispin: Baritone
  - Range: c-f#1

FORMAL VOCAL STRUCTURE OF NOT A SPANISH KISS

piano intro. → P → C → P → A

→ P → P → P → C → A → B

→ P → C → P → C → C → C

→ C → B → P → C → B → P

→ C → P → C → B → C → P
Not a Spanish Kiss is a short one-act opera based upon a "partial tune", that is an incomplete melody with unfinished rhyme until the end. The tune always occurs in 6/8 time in the key of C major over a mock Spanish guitar accompaniment. Until the end, it is always interrupted by recitative.

The piano introduction (written in octaves, with the treble and bass three octaves apart) consists of seven measures freely composed in g minor and similar in style to accompaniments of Spanish Flamenco dancers. As Piero enters miming playing the guitar, Barab presents six measures of "the unfinished Song". The vocal line always ends, unfinished, on the pitch B - leaving the listener open for several possible modulations. In this first attempt at finishing the song, one finds an E major chord below the word "glow", followed by a III chord in E major and leading to an e minor chord with the pitch D in the bass. The recitative is a combination of G major and D major, cadencing on a V7 of D major to a I chord. Then using D as a common tone, there is a modulation on a V7 chord of C major back to C major, ready for another attempt at "the Song". This time, after an unsuccessful verse, Barab moves chromatically to a D9 chord in Gb major. Tone painting on the Gb (on the word "long" tenuto) reinforces this choice of key, although the last measure of the recitative is in Db major. Taking F as a common tone, Barab then inserts
a $V_7$ chord in C major after the fermata in the vocal line, and once again appear five measures of "the Song". This time they conclude with a chromatic descending bass over a vocal line of three falling imperfect sequences, ending in F major. Crispin enters and sings two rhymed but unmeasured phrases of recitative. This is followed by a chromatically ascending vocal line leading to a section in 4/4 time with an ostinato bass. (Ex. 1)

![Musical notation](image)

Ex. 1 (p. 6)

The bass maintains the pitch F, while the vocal line goes on in $B^b$ major for eight bars, then modulates using a common tone of $B^b$, to the key of $B^b$ major. Again Barab inserts a $V_7/C$ after the vocal line stops, and just before Piero attempts another verse of "the Song" in C major. The five measures end on a $B^b_9$ chord in $B^b$ major.

After several lines of nearly unaccompanied recitative, the music proceeds to another section with an ostinato bass in B major, and then to G major as Piero lists Betta's beauteous physical features. The section abruptly ends on an $F^\#$ chord, and Piero tries another verse in C major using Crispin's last lyrics. Piero is cut short by Crispin, accompanied by a $C^\#_7$ chord.
He continues with four measures of two parallel phrases, then two measures of "cataloging", ending on a high A. Crispin finally sees that the woman in question in Piero's verse is his wife! An "anger figure" - (Ex. 2)

Ex. 2 (p. 10)

in the accompaniment is then used for two and a half pages while Crispin and Piero argue. The key of B major is indicated at first with a pedal point feeling on the dominant. Piero's line runs through D major and D♭ major, with a pedal point of C. Dialogue continues while the left hand in the piano "embellishes" the anger figure. These flourishes are not always indicative of the vocal line key, as noted in the other two operas. The anger figure ends on the pitch C♯, and the action slows as the accompaniment returns to a modified "Habanera beat" while Crispin confronts Betta. This free and modulatory section hints at Betta's forthcoming aria, which employs a Habanera accompaniment without rests interrupting the figure. (Ex. 3)
Betta figuratively sings her lead-in line using octaves to underscore the text "My dear, this time you've really hit the nail right on the head." The aria consists of a double parallel period that is repeated. The key of D major predominates with temporary shifts to F♯ major before each "punch line" of the verses. The aria ends as in Carmen. (Ex. 4)
Piero continues with recitative over a chromatically descending bass line. There are "Habanera" motives in the treble.  
(Ex. 5)
The chord progression is as follows: $I_4/D$; $iv_6/D$; $V_4/F$; $I_6/F$; contrary motion passing chord to a $G^2$ major chord. Tone painting occurs when Piero sings an F natural on the word "hope", instead of an F♯.

Crispin and Piero continue in modulatory dialogue. That leads into a short song from Piero, above a "Flamenco" accompaniment. (Ex. 6)

Ex. 6 (p. 19)

The song divides as follows:

Section A in C major
Section $A^1$ in D major
Section B in C major
Section $A^2$ in E major.

After Piero and Crispin bargain for money and a kiss in recitative, Betta has a short solo in 6/8 time, going through the major keys of $B^b$, $E^b$, and $G^b$, ending in D major. Then Piero and Crispin agree on terms in recitative that lead to Crispin's song and a
new accompaniment figure.  (Ex. 7)

Ex. 7 (p. 19)

Crispin then expresses his discontent over the situation in a short solo section in which his initial vocal line is in unison with part of the accompaniment.  (Ex. 8)

Ex. 8 (p. 26)
This measure continues as an ostinato bass, alternating between g minor and G major. The vocal line has no repetition. The section ends on a $V_7$ chord in $B^b$ major.

It now becomes apparent that the grace note figure in the bass seen earlier is the "kiss" motive, found in octaves for the next recitative. (Ex. 9)

\[ \text{Ex. 9 (p. 27)} \]

Crispin has another short solo section in $b^b$ minor, with a different ostinato bass (resembling a "bullfight" motive). Again there is no organizational repetition in the vocal line. Crispin's last words end in F major with Piero and Betta each taking one of the chord tones, and proceeding to a trio in 6/8 time above a new accompaniment figure. (Ex. 10)

\[ \text{Ex. 10 (p. 28)} \]
The characters enter thrice more an eighth note apart

The song divides as follows:

Section A in f minor
A \textsuperscript{1} transposed down a minor second

Section B composed of two parallel phrases
in g minor with a lowered fourth

Section C in g minor and G major, using an
accompaniment pattern similar to the earlier
"anger motive"

Crispin's following recitative consists of a vocal
line rising chromatically, along with the treble in the
piano, and a pedal point of C (with grace notes) as he
builds up to not looking at Piero kissing Betta. The
rising lines continue on the words "one, two, three",
and the anticipation mounts, then relaxes downward after
the final two times on the same pitch. Barab passes
through the major keys of A, B\textsuperscript{b}, A\textsuperscript{b}, and C to this
point. Piero then leaves the trio, as Crispin and Betta
continue using the same accompaniment figure. As
Betta ends the trio, the figure is used above a furious
tremolo using octave G's. (Ex. 11)

Ex. 11 (p. 30)
The pitch G continues even after Betta has ended her line on F.

Crispin sings a portion of unaccompanied recitative ending on the pitch C, which Piero uses to sing "I don't know" again. At this point Crispin has a solo section in which the accompaniment supports the vocal line's pitch and rhythm, and maintains the "I don't know" motive while Crispin deviates from it. (Ex. 12)

![Music notation]

Ex. 12 (p.31)

The bass is an ostinato on C, as are the majority of pitches in the vocal line. Piero sings an unaccompanied line on C, and then over octave G's appears a presto section comprised of a parallel period between Betta and Crispin., also introducing a new "Spanish" accompaniment motive. (Ex. 13)
Piero enters for eight measures of trio in $b$ major in which each character sings his line repeatedly (i.e. "Let me die"; "Mercy"; and "Cursed villain"). The new "Spanish" motive ends with the trio, and Crispin continues over a C tremolo, using a menacing text.

Piero interrupts on a high A, singing the word "Hold!", and appropriately holds it over a diminished seventh chord based on $F\#$. With tacit accompaniment, Piero asks to say his last prayers, in g minor. In the short solo section that follows, Barab uses a $G^b$ instead of an $F\#$ while remaining in g minor. Piero sings two parallel phrases, ending on a $V_7$ in C major, which had been used as a pedal point throughout this section.

Barab then writes Crispin an interesting short solo, generally supported by the accompaniment and being modulatory in nature. The vocal line has a repetitive figure in it. (Ex. 14)
I fear you've soiled your trousers; let me help you brush your

Ex. 14 (p. 37)

It occurs first after four measures of singing, then after two, and finally, after half a measure.

It also appears three times in the accompaniment at different intervals. Over two measures of contrary motion in the piano, Piero tells Crispin he will be paid in half an hour, as the section ends in D major. Piero sings his next humorous reversal of language in d minor.

Crispin then repeats his vocal line from the page before with different text and fuller accompaniment.

Betta breaks into a 6/8 time section, singing a vocal line appearing to be in F major, while the accompaniment plays between F major, d minor, and D major. It ends in D♭ major.

Left alone on stage, Piero sings that he has in fact no money, let alone 750 pesetas. This is done over a sequentially developed treble and pedal A♭ in the piano.  

(Ex. 15)
Ex. 15 (p. 39)

It ends in D major. Piero then repeats singing his cataloging of Betta's long name. This time the vocal line is minus accidentals and a modulatory bass ending on a V chord in C major. Immediately following is Piero's completion of the lyrics he sought earlier, each time written in C major. The piano uses the triplet figure to the end, in D major.
OBSERVATIONS
Because of Mr. Barab's contention that text dictates operatic construction, one can expect to find certain parallels between speaking and singing the text - i.e. pacing (tempo), rhythm (syllabic emphasis), inflection (pitch and duration), and general mood.

Mr. Barab allows the singer to freely recite on a pitch or certain parts of the text. An example is the Representative in *Game of Chance*, unaccompanied. In contrast, he writes out rhythmic speech patterns on various pitches, accompanied. Generally however, the accompaniment does not duplicate the vocal line's pitch or rhythm.

Even though traditionally a composer does not tie himself to speech patterns in arias, Barab chooses to write melodies that rhythmically support speech (i.e. *Game of Chance*) page 28). Certain words lend themselves to exact rhythmic duplication - from a speaking to a singing setting, i.e. Biblical ; notoriety ; better ; if I may ; waiting to meet their latest discovery ; Chanticleer ; glorious .

Some words and phrases also lend themselves to musical settings which duplicate accented syllables in speech (according to Webster), or "sense" importance in the phrase. For example - "together" and "for only love is happiness for me" on pp. 42-3 in *Game of*
Chance; and "But when I sing" on page 34 in Chanticleer. Also seen in these examples is Barab's purposeful use of high notes for important words or syllables. Moreover, extremes of ranges for all characters consistently occur in the arias.

The writer has made the following observations about the rest of Mr. Barab's operatic writing:

1. There are no consistent rhyme "schemes" in the operas. Rhyme occurs internally; at the ends of phrases, or anywhere that suits dramatic purpose. Sometimes, purposeful lack of rhyme renders the line more memorable and effective.

2. There is little use of a "leitmotif" effect in Barab's operas. Recurring accompanimental patterns for example, are not significant in overall organization of the opera, but rather they are used when they suit dramatic intent (as in the exit music for the Knitters in Game of Chance). It is not intended for musical development.

3. Mr. Barab determines his voice types (i.e. soprano or mezzo, tenor or baritone) through their age and love interest in the libretto.

4. "Ensembles", sometimes taking the place of a chorus, do not necessarily sing simultaneously, but rather establish the main roles distinctly and in conversation.
5. There is little text repetition, thereby aiding the fast moving operatic structure.

6. Barab's choice of subject matter and libretto always has a light and witty view of human frailties and situations. His intention remains entertainment even though he is a bit didactic at times.

7. His operas are always accessible to the audience in story matter, vocal presentation, and comprehension.

8. Technically, the demands on singers are as follows: utterly clear and natural enunciation of English - as close to speech production as possible, secure breath connection and freedom to act, and good high notes. The text is set in such a manner as to facilitate communication with the audience. In other words, much of the drama is written into the music and does not need extra interpretation from the singer.
THE COMPOSER
The composer of these three one-act operas, Seymour Barab, was born in Chicago in 1921. His musical studies began with the piano, and at a very early age he became an active accompanist for singers, choral groups and instrumentalists. By the time he was thirteen he had earned a regular position as a church organist.

Upon entering high school, Mr. Barab began studying the cello. Strongly motivated by increasing success, the future composer's major performing interest in piano was supplanted by the cello. He has been heard frequently in concert and on recordings as an accomplished interpreter of renaissance and contemporary music. Many composers have dedicated their works to him.

Professional performing as a cellist has been an important portion of his career. Mr. Barab served as a faculty member at Black Mountain College, Rutgers University, and the New England Conservatory of Music. Performing, however, took precedence over teaching in his early career. The prevailing thought of the day assumed that, upon finishing school, one joined an orchestra. Mr. Barab has played with the symphony orchestras of Philadelphia, Cleveland, San Francisco, Indianapolis and Portland, as well as the Columbia and American Broadcasting Orchestras. He
is still a frequent performer in Manhattan and often appears as a guest artist at festivals.

Composition was always a fascination, and Mr. Barab became more and more involved with the technical process of writing music as he came to know more musicians in various fields of music and as a performer.

His list of published and recorded compositions includes over 200 song settings of his own lyrics and those of major twentieth century poets. He has also written choral works, theatre pieces, and scores for ballet, motion pictures and television. Why does he have such a preference for vocal writing? Mr. Barab answers that he "is fascinated with vocal production and people who sing." He does not consider himself a singer. He used to play the accompaniment for his aunt while she sang and believes "you get the most beautiful and musical music out of the voice."

Mr. Barab prepared for writing operas with his song composition, though the latter has not enjoyed the same acceptance from publishers as his operas. His one-act operas have been performed more frequently than the operas with 3-4 acts. The assumption is, of course, that because of the large costs entailed in producing full-length opera, a short, less elaborate one-act opera will be more easily mounted.

In personal interviews with Mr. Barab, I asked the following questions on May 5th:
Q. Mr. Barab, it has been my experience while being present at several performances of your operas, that I rarely missed a word. Is that a major concern of yours in composing for the voice?

A. I believe it is rare that an opera composer's intention is to have the text understood. For myself, I don't want a word of what's being sung to be lost. It's the same with vocal line. (It cannot be so disjunct or hard to follow as to obscure the textual understanding.)

Q. Have you written an opera with one person's voice in mind?

A. No, and I probably would not write for a particular singer's voice.

Q. How would you go about writing, let us say, a cycle of songs for a recital if commissioned?

A. I would consider what else is on the recital, how long, what kind of text the person would like, etc. (He uses texts other than his own for song writing, because it involves far fewer theatrical problems than operatic writing.)

Q. Do you ever use songs you've written before in your present writing?

A. I would occasionally get one out if I needed it, but I would never put it in an opera I'm working on.

Q. What format do you use in composing?
A. I have no set procedure for writing sections of an opera - just what fits the libretto and dramatic situation. I do believe the libretto must be completed before one note of music is written. I don't experiment musically just for sake of a "new sound". I have no motivation to establish a "Barab" style. Certain practices such as determining the voice quality via age and love interest in the libretto may be considered done in "traditional style". I do not like to involve a chorus in one-act operas though, as you can lose text clarity. Piano and orchestral writing are another consideration. Texture and its timbre must allow the words to be unmistakably (sic) understood.

Q. I understand your operas for children's audiences are quite popular - Little Red Riding Hood, for instance.

A. They seem to be. I write children's operas in a classical style so as not to tax their ears, so to speak, or cause tension.

Q. How would you describe your style?

A. I would say I am generally described as "middle stream modern." I do use contrapuntal writing in opera for the voices as well as the instrumentalists. My harmonic "palette" is taken from whatever sounds like the situation.

Q. Do you ever write your own text?
A. I now write my own librettos - you have more control when you do. Also, professional librettists don't exist anymore.

Q. By writing your own librettos now, do you hope that your operas will be performed more "authentically" or as you originally planned?

A. Somewhat. However, I believe it is undesirable to "force" the singer into an interpretation that he (the composer) imagined. And, too, the singer is incapable of knowing this completely in the first place. The composer must accept this and give up on holding the reins so tightly. If a composer aspires to direct the production, he needs to be modest in his picture of himself and his importance to the performance. Stage directions are important in the score, but the director shouldn't have to tell a singer how to sing a line; rather he should get some ideas from the singer's interpretation.

Q. Do you then feel you must lead the way for more operatic writing using clarity of text as its criterion?

A. No, I feel no sense of mission in perpetuating American opera in this respect. My writing tastes and opinions are individual, not part of a movement or school of writing. I do not believe Americans will ever be opera lovers predominantly of their own language. It's not part of our social development.


Scores:


Barab, Seymour, Not a Spanish Kiss, manuscript unpublished, 1976.

Bizet, Georges, Carmen, G. Schirmer, 1958.