SHORT SONGS FOR SIX VOICES

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Abstract

This thesis contains the score of a six-voice choral setting of five original songs. The score is preceded by program notes and analysis for each movement. In analyzing the accompanying score, the origins of each tune (including both its composition and past performance settings) are detailed to show the transition from a short score (or lead sheet), to performances that incorporate improvised elements, to the present fixed score for a six part vocal ensemble. These six part settings were composed at the University of Pittsburgh between 2015 and 2017. The original tunes they are based on were composed between 2008 and 2014.

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1.0 Introduction

The writing of my *Short Songs for Six Voices* is an ongoing process that began on two levels that I shall outline in detail here. The first level is the process of revisiting old material, and the realization that some previously written material has not yet reached its full potential in terms of how it has been previously rendered. The second level follows the first, while also mirroring it: once I have created a new realization of a pre-existing piece (in this case, new realization is a short work for a six-part vocal ensemble), the result of a particular realization creates a void that needs to be filled – I often feel the necessity to create more works using a particular instrumentation to create a body of pieces, with the result of the first piece in mind. The first piece in this collection is *I Am Rose*, which influenced the six-voice settings of the other pieces included here, all written between 2016 and 2017.

When the NY-based vocal ensemble Ekmeles came to Pittsburgh in the winter of 2016 for a concert and graduate composer reading session, the piece I wrote for them was *I Am Rose* (text: Gertrude Stein), the genesis of which is an eight-bar tune I notated in 2011. Each following song (written recently) is for a six-part (SSATBB) ensemble, and is based on a pre-existing short piece. The tunes these pieces are based on were composed roughly from 2006-14, mostly non-consecutively.

The borrowing or recycling of pre-existing material was something I first encountered in the music of Percy Grainger[1]. This was quickly followed by my discovery musical recycling in

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[1] Grainger's 1937 composition for wind ensemble *Lincolnshire Posy* is a set of six pieces based on folk song transcriptions that Grainger collected from six different performers. In his preface to the work, he notes the musical and personal traits of each singer whose performance directly influenced his settings.

the music of Charles Ives, Machaut, and composers such as Michael Finnissy and Elliott Schwartz, plus various arrangements and recompositions by Duke Ellington, Joe McPhee, and Charles Mingus (among other composers in improvised idioms). Each composer has a different way of dealing with borrowed or recycled material, and has had an influence on my recent music. With figures such as Grainger and Ellington especially, the boundaries between composer and arranger are difficult to distinguish, and with Ellington specifically, listeners can notice radically different treatments of the same basic material that depend on who he was working with at any given time, and equally (if not more importantly) who had played a certain composition of his in the past.

The circumstances surrounding the composition of the original tunes found in *Short Songs* and their first performances were influential to their setting for an all-vocal ensemble. I will elaborate on those first performances here, citing how they influenced these newsix-voice settings, and in working with a fixed ensemble, where these settings deviate from those performances.

1.1 Origins of Tunes, and First Performances[2]

I first came upon Ned Rorem's setting of *I Am Rose* (from the Gertude Stein story *The World is Round*) as an undergraduate. Like earlier experiences with Grainger, I was struck by the brevity and simplicity of Rorem's setting. While I did not write my original setting of *I Am Rose* until 2011, I kept going back to Stein's works, and wrote the tune quickly when I finally set to it.

I Am Rose was premiered on March 9, 2011 by a five-piece ensemble with two voices (female/male), alto/tenor saxophones, and baritone horn. The unfolding of parts (melody, bass,

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[2] This section notes the date and premieres of the original material as seen in the appendix of this document. Information regarding the present six-voice settings is explored in later sections of this essay.

suspensions) was reflected in this version. However, the droning texture that follows the exposition of the melody in *six songs* was directly influenced by another version performed later. The premiere of *I Am Rose* featured an alto saxophone solo by Billy McShane, whose overblown attacks on middle C created a stark and surprising opposition to the docile nature of the repeated eight-bar form. This solo lasted for four choruses before the melody was sung once more to end the piece. Not surprisingly, every time I have played *I Am Rose* in an improvisatory setting, it lasts for about three and a half minutes – the length of the premiere performance.

The text from *Incidentally* comes from a 2010 blog post by New England Conservatory's then-president Tony Woodcock. I composed the melody trying to be selective in pitch material (like most of these songs, using a slim economy of tones). I wrote the underlying accompaniment (very simple half note attacks on each beat) after the melody was finished. In writing a chordal bass part, I was careful to use vertical intervals which would be easy for an upright bassist to execute such as perfect fourths and fifths, as the original setting was intended for a vocalist accompanied by a rhythm section of piano, bass, and drums.

Incidentally was first heard in the fall of 2012 during a recital of a student jazz ensemble led by pianist Frank Carlberg. Like *I Am Rose*, *Incidentally* was treated as a launch pad for improvisation over the form of the tune, with its bass line repeated. Occasionally the form was broken in the interest of musical variety on cue of a soloist. The musicians were allowed to play freely without the bass and drums determining a rhythmic pulse or underlying harmony, before the tune would be heard again in its written form with the bass accompaniment to end the work.

The text for *Heaven* is an adaptation of a dialogue from the cartoon cult classic *All Dogs Go to Heaven* (starring Burt Reynolds as Charlie B. Barkin). The text is spoken by an angel

telling Charlie he has arrived in Heaven after being run over by the goons of his archenemy Carface. This is a prelude to the musical number "Let Me Be Surprised[3]."

The original *Heaven* was one of the first pieces I wrote with my duo *FULL CIRCLE TIME MACHINE* in mind. *FULL CIRCLE* is a duo of violin (played by my friend Tara Mueller) and chord organ[4] (played by myself). Shortly after our formation in 2011, we both started to sing the material I would bring to rehearsals, and it is this combination of sonorities and musical textures that informed many of the songs include here. We first played *Heaven* at Yes.Oui.Si Space, a now defunct gallery down the street from the New England Conservatory of Music on May 24, 2012.

The melody of *A Wish* is the oldest of the set. Written sometime in 2006 and committed to paper in 2010, it was not performed until the spring of 2011 (by *FULL CIRCLE TIME MACHINE*). As it was paired in concert with *I Am Rose* (played by the same duo), the mechanics of the chord organ, its ability to drone and swell based on how much each key is depressed and/or how much the fans vent is covered played a significant role in our interpretation. It is interpretations like these (featuring not only slow-moving and sustained textures, but also male/female voices heard in the same register) that informed the composition of these six-voice pieces. In addition to the sonic texture of this duo being an influence on me, I was spurred on by transcriptions I made of our performances, parts of which greatly informed the compositional output seen here (in *A Wish,* but also *I Am Rose*, and especially *Heaven*).

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[3] Music by Ralph Burns
[4] Prominent in the 60's and 70's in homes across the U.S, the chord organ is an electric fan-powered reed organ with chord buttons similar to those of an accordion. Though often used in various indie music contexts today (most notably by artists in the Elephant 6 Collective, and outsider music hero Daniel Johnston), they are no longer manufactured.

I like to think of *Broadway Coda* as the end of a musical I'll never write. It is by far the youngest melody in this set, and the only one to feature original text. The text and the melody were written simultaneously, and as such they dictate each other's progress. I wrote the song for two friends (a violinist and bassist who both sing), who commissioned a number of composers to write short open-ended works for their duo. Though I am unsure of when the piece was first played, I have since played it in various contexts, most notably trio performances with a bassist and vocalist in which I played piano. Unlike the preceding pieces, the appearance of the tune in *Songs for Six Voices* is notable for its use of chorale-style block harmonies that do not appear anywhere else in this work.

2.0 Textural Translations: Chord organ → Wind Ensemble → Chorus

Over time, I have become interested in making pieces which pay tribute to *FULL CIRCLE TIME MACHINE*, in part because the project now meets so infrequently (about once a year) and our performances have only been recorded professionally on a couple of occasions. More important is the difference from performance-to-performance of the duo. The violin/chord organ combination has since influenced some of my other work, and it is a potential reality that, some day, the chord organ itself may be a thing of the past.

I became interested in the chord organ during the summer of 2011. I had developed a great interest in *outsider music* (also referred to as visionary music) – music made by untrained artists who were, by and large, inspired by popular music. An example of outsider music related to the orchestral world would be the work of Gavin Bryars and the Portsmouth Sinfonia – a collection of musicians who performed orchestral repertoire on the instruments they were least familiar with. Contrary to public perception, the musicians rehearsed, trying to do their repertoire as much justice as possible given their limitations. The composer and instrument builder Harry Partch has also been cited as an outsider music figure. Other notable outsider artists include The Shaggs, Wesley Willis, and Daniel Johnston. It is through the latter that I became interested in the chord organ, and in performing my own material.

After beginning to listen to Johnston, I saw the documentary *The Devil and Daniel Johnston*, where his discovery of the chord organ is explained in detail. I became curious, and soon bought an instrument of my own. I delighted in its ability to drone, and took great interest in the chord buttons (six major and minor triads in fourths from D to Eb), making it possible to blend different harmonies independent of the keyboard, or rapidly flutter between different triads. In thinking of ensemble contexts for this instrument, I had been in touch with Tara

Mueller about forming a duo, and this seemed like the best possible instrument to use (though we have utilized others, such as piano, trombone, and small electronics).

A precedent to this work is my *Donald Miller Piece* for violin, two voices, and wind ensemble. Originally a duo for *FULL CIRCLE TIME MACHINE*, I chose to orchestrate the piece for wind ensemble in the spring of 2012. In making a wind ensemble version, I looked at various ways to create and vary sustained textures that would overcome some limitations posed by the chord organ - mostly in terms of dynamics and articulation. With the text for *Donald Miller Piece* being totally phonetic, my emphasis was not on how to work with text.

Most of the vocal setting herein is syllabic in nature, with care taken to follow the natural rhythm and pitch contour of the spoken text. My goal in setting these pieces for chamber choir (or six solo voices) was not so much to simulate the texture of the chord organ or *FULL CIRCLE TIME MACHINE*, but to use these precedents as guides for generating new material in the choral medium.

2.1 Setting of Text

The idea that musical setting of text should follow the natural rhythm of the text being set is important to me. This technique is especially ubiquitous in popular music, and sacred music (especially hymnals). While this piece does contain melismatic sections, sections that are built exclusively from vowel sounds and/or and scat syllables, a large portion of the music is set using syllabic principles that are dictated by the meter of the text. The example below (metric analysis of *I Am Rose*) shows one kind of four-footed verse (trochaic tetrameter) and its syllabic

emphasis[5] in my musical setting. While not every text within this set of pieces contains such consistent and regular meter, the prosody of the phrases can be observed in the musical contour of their respective musical settings. In the example below, forward slashes indicate strong beats, and asterisks indicate weak beats.

Figure 1. Metric analysis and text setting in *I Am Rose*

/ *   /   *   /   *   /

I am Rose, my eyes are blue
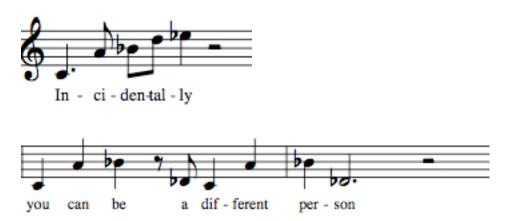
This translates to:

An adherence to the natural rhythms of speech can be observed in each of these settings. In realizing pitch content for each setting, it is important that there be some consistent intervallic content, or in some cases a pivotal interval from which a setting is built. Similar to rhythm, such intervals are usually found in an intuitive manner through repeated reading of the text.

From the example above, it can be seen that the prominent interval in *I Am Rose* is a perfect fourth. Though only the first two bars of the tune are seen here, these patterns of paired fourths followed by an ascending minor third continue to drive the tune, as the meter of each line is consistent.

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[5] Three feet of verse with a strong/weak pattern in each foot, followed by one strong syllable on the fourth foot

Below, the first bar of *Incidentally* shows an initial leap of a major sixth, followed by a half step, a major third, and another half step in the same direction. The return of the major sixth later in the tune is an important detail that suggests an intervallic center, but also facilitates the setting of the text "You can be a different person" in a way that remains true to the contour of these words when spoken aloud.

Figure 2. Measures one, three, and four of *Incidentally*, illustrating both a wide range to facilitate text setting of a word with five syllables, and the return of a central interval (m.3-4), transposed by a half-step to reflect the spoken inflections of the set text.

In - ci - den-tal - ly

you   can   be   a   dif - ferent   per - son

2.2 Texture and Time

Of the five pieces in this set, *Heaven* spends the longest amount of time in a free floating, timeless texture that is (like *I Am Rose*) broken only by the return of its melody. It relates the most to *I am Rose*, as they each start with introductions that incorporate some part of their text, unlike *A Wish* or *Incidentally*, after which the tune in its entirety is heard, followed by a development that features a saturated, continuous texture. In each piece belonging to this set, the respective melody returns in a manner that is in comparison to its introduction heard in its own

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plane against developed drones, or as if from afar. *Incidentally* is the one exception to this rule, due to the half note pulse remaining consistent throughout.

2.3 Drone as Layer vs. Drone as State

In various kinds of music, a drone is typically defined as a layer in a larger musical structure that consists of a sustained tone or chord that changes rarely or slowly. It is easy to cite the fundamental tone of the Tanpura as heard in Indian Classical Music, the tenor voices in Perotin's four-part organum, or the violin playing of John Cale in the Velvet Underground as examples of static drones that constitute one layer in a larger structure. However, the term drone has evolved in late 20th and 21st century musical discourse. In defining selected "language types" that contribute to his compositional strategies, the composer and saxophonist Anthony Braxton describes a drone as a sonic state and a *sound mass* that can function as a goal point, or be combined with other states (such as melodic states or rhythmic states) in the fixed or ad-hoc construction of a musical work. Such states do not have a stasis in pitch as an inherent property; the shifting tonal and rhythmic points of a drone state do not subtract from its perception as a sustained sound mass that functions differently than other sustained textures.

Thus, with the chord organ and violin as a source for this cycle, the use of sustained, slowly changing combined tones can be seen as the construction of a goal-oriented drone state. This state is rarely static, but sometimes (as seen in the ending of *I Am Rose*[6], and most of *The Night Light*) is combined with melodic states. To contrast, the use of a static four-voice chord in the last ten measures of *Heaven* functions more as a droning layer than a drone state. However, it is preceded by a wordless, saturated texture that is similar to the drone state reached at the end of *I Am Rose*, albeit the drone in *Heaven* features individual voices that move at a faster rate.

_____

[6] figure 9

Figure 3. m.20 of *Heaven* (Drone as state)

2.4 Counterpoint

Contrapuntal activity related to the Renaissance polyphony of 16th Century European composers is present in these pieces to a considerable degree (particularly the first two settings). After studying Renaissance polyphony intensively for a year in 2011, my improvising and compositions were influenced by its workings and constraints.

These influences as well as my deviations from their theoretical conventions are audible in some of *FULL CIRCLE TIME MACHINE's* recordings, and in particular the transcription in figure 3 below: an improvised introduction to *FULL CIRCLE TIME MACHINE*'s first performance of *I Am Rose.* In this transcription, it is easy to hear devices used by Renaissance composers – in particular the presence of two voices that together produce various tensions and

resolutions while following each other in both pitch and rhythmic senses to create balanced contrapuntal relationships. In the last two measures of this transcription, the counterpoint is broken with the two voices moving simultaneously in parallel motion. Additionally, chains of activity that suggest suspensions (measures two to four of Example 3) are prepared and resolved in ways that do not follow the traditional makeup of a suspension. Here, chains of suspended tones facilitate chromatic movement. The sevenths (both major and minor) that appear in the transcription function as a kind of dominant substitution – Ab/G leads to A/E (tonic), F/Eb or C#/B lead to C/E (tonic).

Figure 4. Transcription of *I Am Rose* 2011 chord organ introduction

This transcription became the basis of the present six-part contrapuntal introduction to *I Am Rose*. In order to accommodate a larger number of voices, the introduction is metered, and as a consequence contains contrapuntal features that are more strict in nature. The first major seventh (Ab/G) that serves a dominant function is still present, but melodic lines that move the piece forward through imitation and conventional counterpoint between the top and bottom voices can be observed.

Figure 5. Excerpt of *I Am Rose* polyphonic introduction in *Short Songs* (m.9-12). The F# in the bass voice (m.12) corresponds to the introduction of F# in the transcription above.

The inclusion of voices that briefly move in parallel fourths or seconds is common in *Incidentally*, but the clashing voices always move together before they resolve (usually resolving in opposite directions), and each maintains a consonant relationship to at least three other voices if clashing with one. This can be observed in *Incidentally* below, where the two soprano voices sometimes move in parallel seconds or fourths (which are dissonant in this context), before resolving to consonant intervals.

Figure 6. *Incidentally* m.37-39. Clashing major second (fifth quarter, m.37), and parallel fourths (m.38, 39) between soprano one and two.

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2.5 Local Structures and Pitch Relationships as Contrast

One goal of this cycle was to create a piece with a significant dramatic arc, but one that also (almost literally) sustained a nearly singular texture that remains fairly consistent throughout the work. With this texture in mind, I rely on the character and range of the melodies to provide contrast – as opposed to traditional notions about large forms (the fast-slow-fast scheme of an 18th century concerto being one example). I offer the following scheme of melodic and textural organization of the settings in *Short Songs*. Measure numbers reflect the appearance of each respective tune in the context of a movement. The denotation "contrapuntal" refers not to the melody of a tune alone, but its relation to any accompanying figures in the noted sections.

After *I Am Rose*, in which the characteristic interval is a fourth and overall range within a major sixth (from middle C to the A above – see Figure 1), *Incidentally* presents a stark contrast in its overall range of a minor tenth, a greater number of varied melodic leaps, and the covering of the entire range within the first measure of the tune.

Figure 7. *Incidentally* melodic content. The entire range of the tune in the first bar:

Of the leaps in *Incidentally*, thirds and the major sixth between C4 and the A4 are the most prominently featured.

A Wish falls within the range of a major ninth. Though this range is only slightly smaller than *Incidentally*, the range each melodic phrase is most often a tritone. The lines *I ask not each*

kind soul to keep / Let those who will if any weep feature wider ranges (a fifth between *I* and *ask*, followed by an octave between *Let* and *any*).

The melody of *Heaven* features the widest range of the set, though its largest melodic leap is a major sixth, which appears in measures 14-17, and does not reoccur It is difficult to define a characteristic interval in *Coda*, though it is the only tune to feature an octave leap, which appears in the tune immediately, and stands as a major contrast with each preceding movement in terms of its centering of this initial octave leap. *Coda* is also the only movement to feature its original tune in full without any sort of introductory material.

In summary, while the ranges of each tune in this setting differ, they are ordered in such a way that there is a gradual widening of intervallic content, up to the immediate presentation of an octave leap in *Coda*. In contrast, the widest leap present in *I Am Rose* is a perfect fourth. *Incidentally* and *Heaven* feature leaps of sixths as central points, and *A Wish* features two-measure phrases that widen to include an octave in the range of only one phrase. The absence of the octave leap in the first four movements make the octave leaps in *Coda* notable to the local structure of the movement, and the overall arc of the set.

The three songs with predominantly sustained textures (*I Am Rose, A Wish*, and *Heaven*) are songs that were almost exclusively played by *FULL CIRCLE TIME MACHINE* (we did not play *Incidentally* or *Coda*). Thus, the idiomatic droning textures of the chord organ found their way into these pieces, and the drone states implied by these textures became a focal point of the entire work. In this effort, *Incidentally* and *Coda* became signposts that offer harmonic and contrapuntal interest, greatly contrasting with the other movements. While not especially shorter or longer than the other movements, they could be said to function as an interlude and coda respectively in the context of this current collection.

3.0 Analysis by Movement

The beginning of *I Am Rose* features fragmentation of the Gertrude Stein text. Though here presented in a contrapuntal context similar to that of a 16th century Italian motet, the fragmentation gives way to a short and relatively fast melody which is repeated three times – with each repetition adding a new contrapuntal layer.
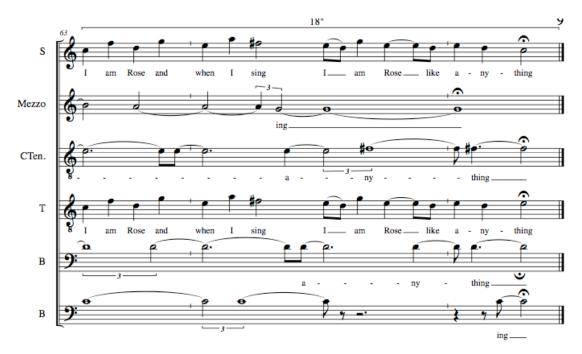
I Am Rose takes its form directly from the *FULL CIRCLE* performance. While the beginning of this setting is metered, the opening material (and subsequent shape of the opening motet-like section) is borrowed from what I improvised in a 2011 performance, accompanied by fits and starts of frenetic plucked violin playing.

Figure 8. Transcription of *I Am Rose* 2011 chord organ introduction

Following the introduction and the unfolding of the original tune, the vocal ensemble begins a series of shifting long tones that are loosely based on the continuation of *FULL CIRCLE TIME MACHINE*'s 2011 performance. Like the performance, the return of the melody is accompanied by drones (each vocalist re-attacking their pitches at a different time using words from the text), which are within the limited tessitura of C4-G4 (see figure 8).

Figure 9. The last system of *I Am Rose*

Incidentally follows *I Am Rose* and features a steady tempo of about q=96. Though only marginally faster than *I Am Rose*, the melody of *Incidentally* has a much wider range, with substantial leaps that produce a marked contrast. Following the melodic presentation (which is enlivened the second time by increasing counterlines), we hear contrapuntal activity that provides the quickest moving texture within the entire set of pieces. That this contrapuntal section is written over the form of the melody with its accompaniment intact allows for several modal changes within a phrase.

Figure 10. modal exchange from the soprano 1 to tenor voice – E5 is consonant in the soprano one voice during m. 34, and through use of the same mode (over a different bass) it becomes dissonant in the tenor voice during m.35

The last measure of *Incidentally* is designed to transition seamlessly into *A Wish*, which features a wordless introduction with members of the choir covering their mouths (and consequentially muffling their tones). This introduction is not based on any pre-existing material, save for perhaps shadows of the melody itself. The melody of *A Wish* implies the harmonic structure and form of a 16-bar blues progression, which fits the metric patterns of the text it was originally based on. The text and harmonic implications of the melody are mapped on to each other below.

Table 1 – Iambic Tetrameter mapped on to the blues form of *A Wish*

Chord	Line of text	Measure Numbers of Blues Progression (with eighth note pickups)
F (I)	I ask not that my bed of death	1-2
F (I)	From bands of greedy heirs be free	3-4
Bb (IV)	For these besiege the latest breath	5-6
F (I)	Of fortunes favoured sons, not me	7-8
C (V)	I ask not each kind soul to keep	9-10
Bb (IV)	Let those who will, if any, weep	11-12
F (I)	I ask but that my death may find	13-14
F (I)	The freedom to my life denied	15-16

Following the introduction of *A Wish*, the melody is heard three times – once by the upper voices alone with the second and third times accompanied by drones that loosely reflect material from the premiere of the tune by *FULL CIRCLE TIME MACHINE* that immediately followed the performance of *I Am Rose* cited above. While the melody of *A Wish* contains a wider range than *I Am Rose* it moves no more than a fifth within each musical phrase (or line of the original text), creating a noticeable contrast with the melodic material heard in *Incidentally*. Additionally, the unfolding drone material of *A Wish* stays in a relatively limited tessitura. Following the large melodic leaps and sweeping contrapuntal lines in *Incidentally, A Wish* presents a sense of stasis and general contrast that owes just as much to its texture, intervallic content and limited tessitura than to a contrast in tempo or rate of motion.

Of this current set, I see *Heaven* as the most literal homage to *FULL CIRCLE TIME MACHINE* in terms of its form. The movement begins with the entire ensemble in unison, within

G3-G5. As these pitches represent extremes for the highest and lowest voice types in the ensemble, it is suggested that the vocalists individually taper in and out of the melodic line according to their registral limitations (male voices using falsetto in upper extremes), thus creating interesting shifts in timbre and intonation. This is a feature that *FULL CIRCLE TIME MACHINE* capitalized on during vocal passages in our performances as a duo.

After the same segment of melodic material is presented above oscillating quarter notes (in the two lowest voices), the final phrase of the text is harmonized in sixths while the basses and baritones emphasize an open fifth (E2, B2) every time the melodic voices land on a quarter note (see figure 10). The syncopated nature of this phrase represents a break from the quarter-note accompaniment, and was not reflected in the original *FULL CIRCLE* performance.

At m.18 in *Heaven,* each voice part breaks out of otherwise proportional and coordinated movement, while again utilizing a limited set of pitches that they often share in terms of register. At the beginning of this free-flowing section (m.18), the male and female voices move away from each other before shifting closer to each other (from m.19). The Tenor and Alto voices sing the melody over a closed chord that consists of B, C, F, and G, staggering their breathing to create as consistent and even a sound as possible (see figure 11).

Figure 11. *Heaven* m.14-17

Coda begins with all six voices singing in a relatively homophonic manner broken only by suspensions in the bottom four voices. The melody (a 17-bar form) is heard twice, with sustained bass and tenor lines filling in silences that were present in the first seventeen bars, creating a chorale-like texture to contrast with the largely monophonic opening. The last phrase of the text (*is there / away / to stay*) slows down the second time, giving way to a sustained texture in the lowest four voices. These voices land on an Ab Major seventh chord, over which the melody of *I Am Rose* is hummed in a modified form to fit within this new center of pitch. After four bars, the lower voices shift to a C Major chord, and the melody closes in its original form. During this closing, the male voices gradually rise to meet the register of the female voices, in a way that mimics the first movement in this cycle.
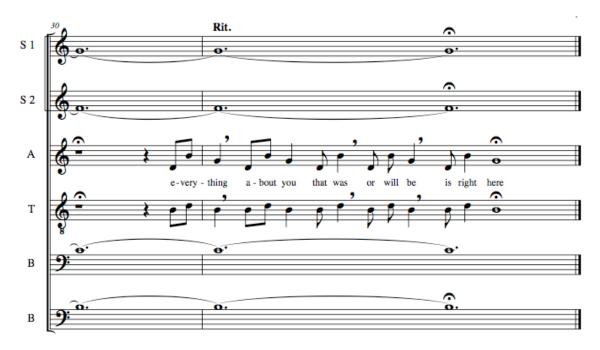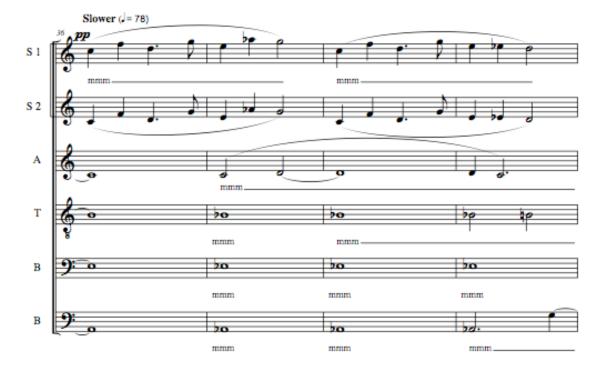
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Figure 12. *Heaven* Ending

Figure 13. Altered *I Am Rose* melody over Ab Major seventh chord in *Coda*

4.0 Narrative Flow

I've always had an interest in how pieces in my catalogue relate to one another both musically and in terms of text. A strong precedent for me is the work of Steve Lacy, whose recorded output contains multiple versions of some vocal works – all framed differently in context with other pieces that most often feature the voice. I will now discuss how these pieces unfold in a narrative sense as a whole.

When I was working with ad-hoc groups that featured vocals, I took delight in ordering and re-ordering repertoire that we would play. Even apart from performance situations, the shifting of vocal settings was interesting to me in that I could create larger narratives with collections of pieces that could be shuffled. At one point I realized I had about twenty short text settings, and was always in search of ways to frame them that would enhance a live experience. One example can be seen in the pairing of *I Am Rose* and *A Wish*. Though *I Am Rose* was presented in isolation at its premier, one of *FULL CIRCLE TIME MACHINE*'s first performances featured it alongside *A Wish*. The pairing of these two songs creates not only a musical arc, but a narrative one, telling a story in a way that either song on its own could not.

After Ekmeles read the present version of *I Am Rose* in 2016, I realized that the setting could be the beginning of larger work for a vocal ensemble. In wanting to expand that single reworking into a set, I thought of the days of playing the original tunes in the varied contexts spoken of above, and decided on the present order before writing the set. Though the texts come from a variety of sources and genres (a short story, poetry, and a screenplay), the order in which they are presented creates a narrative. The themes of such a narrative could be understood as discovery, departure, and (with the end of *Coda)* a return. At the core of all of the texts in this set, one could find a common thread of personal identity, and a dialogue between the voices or

several characters, or one character alone with many of their own thoughts. The number of potential characters is not explicitly clear in the body of the entire text, so it is up to the individual listener to make these connections however they wish.

4.1 Voice, Character, and Texts

"Rose is very concerned about who, what, when, and why she is, and she often expresses that concern through song, and when she sings she cries[7]."

- Ariel S. Winter (*We too were children*)

If there is a character that ties these texts together, it is definitely something child-like or youthful. *I Am Rose* is a unique event from *The World Is Round,* where Rose is defending herself from her cousin Willie the Lion by singing. It is easy to imagine that in some situations, asking "*Who are you?*" could be a means of defense, of trying to gain an understanding of another beings intention. The question posed by *Incidentally* is another one that is trying to decipher some kind of identity, which has everything to do with self-perception and one's own image. *A Wish* shows the transformation of an individual in a living state moving towards their death, and is an exposition of their final thoughts – particularly regarding those around them, and a sense of freedom that they perhaps didn't feel during their own life. Don Bluth's 1986 Cult classic *All Dogs Go To Heaven* was a favorite of mine as a child, and watching the movie in recent years sheds light on its darker themes and implications. In the scene that contains the text for *Heaven*,

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[7] http://wetoowerechildren.blogspot.com/2011/05/gertrude-stein-world-is-round.html
(last accessed March 27, 2017)

the protagonist is told that though his life has ended, everything about his entire existence in both life and death is already known, and that it can be found in one place. *Coda* is made of fragments that never come to a grammatically sound resolution, and play with the perception of the listener, and perhaps performers. Though I did not intend for there to be a concrete meaning, I would say one theme could be that of unrest and non-resolution. Even with the final cadence of *Coda,* one might recall the last sung text as "*Is there a way to stay?,"* landing on an Ab major seventh chord the key in C Major. This is a dominant substitution that does anything but suggest a true close. The return of *I Am Rose* without text also gives the feeling of return, though one where the need for, or perhaps even the possibility of language is diminished.

APPENDIX A

ORIGINAL LEAD SHEETS (2008-2014)

A.1 – I AM ROSE

(2011)

I Am Rose

Gertrude Stein

Jason Belcher

slow or medium tempo

I am Rose my eyes are blue I am Rose and who are you?

I am Rose and when I sing I___ am Rose like a - ny - thing

Incidentally

Tony Woodcock

Jason Belcher

Freely, with forward motion

A.3 – A WISH

(2008)

A Wish

Matthew Arnold

Jason Belcher

I ask not that my bed of death from bands of gree-dy heirs be free for these be-siege the la-test breath of for-tune's fa-voured sons not me I ask not each kind soul to keep let those who will if a-ny weep I ask but that my death may find the free-dom of my life de-nied

Heaven

Concert

Jason Belcher
Text: David N. Weiss (All Dogs go to Heaven)

A.5 – BROADWAY CODA

(2014)

Jason Belcher