

the questions that tempt the sleeper

an improvised musical play in one-act

by

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The Cast:

Old Man – a widower in his late 70s. He is able-bodied but showing the signs of aging with frequent pains, a retired linguist or logician of sorts. He grieves his recently deceased wife. During his career, he was a workaholic, but not as extreme as his son, Frantic Man. He is frustrated to see the same behavior in his son but cannot talk with him about it without admitting his own faults. His rest is interrupted by the question “Why?” His experience of time in the night is non-linear. His world is consumed by sounds of bellowing winds and fragmented and elusive speech. His memories, though erratic, are vivid when he wakes from sleep. His color is beige and his element is the wind.

Frantic Man – a man at the prime of his career, around 50 years old, whose day-to-day activity consists of reactions to the immediacy of technology– a business man of sorts. Time wasted in face-to-face interactions enrage Frantic Man. His question is “What?” His experience of time in the night seems random and reactive and his memories are erratic, violent, and confused. The accompaniment of his insomnia is a dynamic rhythmic backdrop that defies tonality and cadence. His color is red and his element is fire.

Young Woman – a young woman in her early 20s. She is a student of the arts and letters and the granddaughter of the deceased. She is coming of age. Just before waking, she uncannily reconstructs waking moments of her past. She enjoys these moments in a sort of self-conscious curiosity. The young woman’s question is “When?” Her experience of time in the night is linear as she passes through the stages of her life. Her world is consumed by tonal melodies that are reminiscent of genres in musical history, much like the stages of her life. Her color is light blue and her element is water.

Ensemble – People of the Night that create the interactive and motivic sound design for each character using mobile devices.

Ambient Band – a small group of musicians that create an improvised ambient sonic backdrop that accompanies each character and the People of the Night.

The deceased – “Wife,” “Mom,” and “Grandma,” who exists only as a sound cue known as “the missing fundamental.”

OVERVIEW

“the questions that tempt the sleeper” is composed of the interwoven monologues of three characters, each centered on different methods of enquiry that emerge in the moments between sleep and wakefulness. Each character employs a set of musical, visual, literary, and performative signatures that reveal their personality. The Ensemble becomes a modern-day chorus, while contemporary dance and theatre inform motifs drawn from literary modernism and surrealism, with a postmodern contemporary focus on mediation through language and technology. Ultimately, however, the piece seeks to draw insight from the moments in which we are made aware of ourselves and others, of searching and loss, as inspired by Virginia Woolf, from whose novel *To the Lighthouse* the title is derived.

THE PLAY

The wind continues louder and louder as the actors take their places: Young Woman (stage right-down stage), Old Man (center stage-up stage), Frantic Man (stage left-down stage).

Part I: Solitude

Scene 1a: OLD MAN

Old Man is seated in his armchair in the family home trying to sleep, eerily lit by dim white light. It's the middle of the night. His overriding question is "Why?" Why did this happen now? Faltering, falling, disoriented, falling in the dimmed lights, he starts talking. (Duration is approximately three minutes.)

Transition 1a: OLD MAN SEGUES TO FRANTIC MAN

As Old Man's white light gradually fades, Frantic Man's red light abruptly snaps on and the Ensemble recalls the Old Man's music. As Old Man's music fades, the Ensemble introduces Frantic Man's music. (Duration is approximately one minute.)

Scene 1b: FRANTIC MAN

Frantic Man is scrolling down his mobile device looking at messages. It's the middle of the night and he's roaming his apartment unable to sleep; his back is hurting. The majority of his thoughts are centered on work, receiving emails from junior partners with questions, silly questions, about work. He speaks about random topics in fits and starts. He is not able to finish one thought before going on to the next. His overriding question is "What?" What helpless and hapless employees do I have? What could they possibly want now? What can I do to earn more? He ponders these thoughts in a judgmental and competitive way. Stretching, restless, and pathetically tied to his mobile device, it is an extension of self. He curses the distraction of technology yet welcomes its interruption as it eclipses his grief. (Duration is approximately three minutes.)

Transition 1b: FRANTIC MAN SEGUES TO YOUNG WOMAN

As Frantic Man's red light starts to fade, the Ensemble recaps the Frantic Man's music juxtaposed by the introduction of the Young Woman's music. Young Woman's light blue light comes up. The People of the Night engage in a spirited

musical conversation between Frantic Man and Young Woman. (Duration is approximately one minute.)

Scene 1c: YOUNG WOMAN

Young Woman is lying on floor of her first apartment with her feet up listening to her iPod and comfortably asleep. She finds herself dreaming of Grandma. She lived with her grandparents for a few years while she was very young during her parent's nasty divorce. She tries to reconstruct her earliest memory of her grandmother. She remembers that she felt closer to her grandmother than her grandfather. Young Woman's overriding question is "When?" When did I start to become this person? When did I establish this relationship with my grandmother?

When will grandfather be on his own, if ever? She has a sense of sympathy, shared experience, and shared loss with her grandfather. She gets up, takes out her earbuds, and does some dance moves and talks of her grandmother and learning to cook as she moves through a dance sequence. (sound cue: "the missing fundamental") Her memories are linear as she progresses from her childhood to the present. She struggles to construct her own narrative and finds that there are gaps. She recalls a special gift [music box] her grandmother gave her. (sound cue: music box) She smiles with satisfaction and a sense of attainment. She sends a text message [...to her father: "Where is the music box?"]. She ends up in the lotus position on the floor as the light fades and we hear the tinkling sound of the music box her grandmother gave her. (Duration is approximately three minutes.)

Transition 1c: TIMELESS

Complete darkness for a brief time while the Ambient Band glissandos from Young Woman to Frantic Man (Duration is approximately 3-5 seconds.)

Part II: Contemporaneous & Divergent

Scene 2a: YOUNG WOMAN AND FRANTIC MAN

Suddenly, Frantic Man's mobile device shows a new message. (sound cue: "new message") What is this? Oh no, what does she expect of me? I don't remember this. What is she talking about anyway? Curiosity turns to confusion and anger followed by despair. Frantic Man dances. He finds his joy in dance, expectant that this dance will clear his mind and help him remember what. Or better yet, dance may bring rest. After his dance, he lumbers on the floor, mimicking slumber, with his mobile device within ready reach. He lies nearly still.

Young Woman is clearly straining to relax. She does some exercise movements to calm her restless thoughts. After several repetitions, she begins to move with ease and grace. She remembers her grandmother's love when she lived with her. When will I ever feel that kind of love and comfort again? Is it even possible? (sound cue: "the missing fundamental")

Frantic Man begins to explore the space of the floor. He ponders the ground--beneath the ground--the ground that keeps a lid on death. He feels his pulse race from exertion and savors the power of his life. He gropes for his mobile device. He

feels secure and indomitable, the master of this technological universe. He interacts with his device. (Duration is approximately three minutes.)

Transition 2a: THE MUSIC OF YOUNG WOMAN AND FRANTIC MAN COLLIDE AND END IN ABRUPT SILENCE

The Ensemble stops playing the music of the Young Woman and Frantic Man as their lights fade. Brief silence. Slowly, the white light comes up while the red light abruptly snaps on. Old Man is startled from his rest (concurrent with the red light coming on) while Frantic Man simultaneously bolts to attention, as if hearkened by his light. (Duration is approximately one minute.)

Scene 2b: OLD MAN & YOUNG WOMAN

Young Woman recalls how welcome her grandparents made her feel. She was fraught with anxiety about the divorce and wondered when things would return to normal or what normal may become. She enacts her cautious entrance to her grandparents' home, recalling the unique smell of their home and wondering if she would miss her home. She scoffs at these childish memories and is grateful for the understanding and warmth of her grandparents while she struggled with the divorce.

Old Man is asleep, lost in memories. He gets up and moves around like a young man remembering his wife as a young woman. He fondly recalls how they met at a dance. He recalls his joy when their granddaughter came to live with them—such love filled their home. Those days are gone. He falters and slumps back into his chair.

Young Woman recalls the kindness of her grandmother. She was so giving. Everyone needed her. “Who is supposed to carry this burden? It can’t be me.” (Duration is approximately 3 minutes.)

Transition 2b: OLD MAN CANNOT HEAR YOUNG WOMAN

The Ensemble conjures the music of the Old Man as they transition from Young Woman to Old Man. Old Man's white light fades. All music fades to silence. Frantic Man's red light abruptly turns on followed by brief silence. (Duration approximately one minute.)

Scene 2c: FRANTIC MAN AND OLD MAN

Old Man wakes with a start and shows regret for something that happened decades ago. He did not attend one of his son's accomplishments. Why? He is regretful about the way he treated his son while he was growing up and feels a potent redemption by his close relationship with his granddaughter. He realizes how much he relied on his wife to sustain relationships. How can I carry on? Defeated and dispirited, he drops into his chair.

Frantic Man wonders what he should do. He paces, prances, and pouts. He's worried about his father but he really doesn't want to talk to him. He reluctantly

realizes he is behaving just like his father. He can't call now. Old Man is probably asleep. "Who will take care of him? It can't be me!"

Old Man is overcome by sadness. He tries to remember. He finds a picture of his granddaughter being held by his wife. (sound cue: "the missing fundamental") (Duration approximately three minutes.)

Transition 2c: CHAOS

The pale blue light fades up so all three characters are lit. The Ensemble struggles to create musical unity but are hampered by sporadic and fleeting references to their characters. They struggle for harmony while transitioning to the music of Scene 3. (Duration is approximately 2 minutes.)

Part III: Chaos - Convergence

Scene 3: OLD MAN, YOUNG WOMAN & FRANTIC MAN

Old Man continues to feebly move about. Young Woman is stretching on the floor while Frantic Man's movements lessen as he comes to accept the uncomfortable repositioning of his family relationships. Eventually, Old Man, in his chair, appears contented. Young Woman is curled up on the floor, and through stretching comes to face Old Man. Frantic Man slowly sets his device down and graciously turns to face Old Man— an awkward portrayal of acceptance. (sound cue: the leitmotifs begin to shift. Over the course of the scene, the motifs awkwardly sort themselves out, merging toward a major triad built upon a new fundamental. sound cue: acceptance-end) The three characters have been made one. (Duration is approximately 2 minutes.)

The stage is immediately dark. (sound cue: a beat of silence followed by "the missing fundamental") (Duration is approximately 30 seconds.)

THE END

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Score for Ambient Band & Mobile Phone Ensemble

Mary Simoni

1 OVERTURE
MPE(ALL) 1 minute
ff Synth Sample

2 on cue:
f missing fundamental
30 seconds

3 *p* Scene 1a: OLD MAN
~3 minutes

4 Transition 1a: OLD MAN
SEGUES TO FRANTIC MAN
MPE(OM) modulates to MPE(FM)
~1 minute

5 *f* Scene 1b: FRANTIC MAN
~3 minutes

6 Transition 1b: FRANTIC MAN
SEGUES TO YOUNG WOMAN
MPE(FM) modulates to MPE(YW)
~1 minute

7 *mp* Scene 1c: YOUNG WOMAN
~3 minutes

8 on cue:
music box

9 Transition 1c: TIMELESS
~3-5 seconds

10 on cue: new message
on cue: missing fundamental
mf Scene 2a: FRANTIC MAN & YOUNG WOMAN
~3 minutes

11 Transition 2a: YOUNG WOMAN & FRANTIC MAN collide
MPE(FM) & MPE(YW)
~1 minute

12 *mp* Scene 2b: OLD MAN & YOUNG WOMAN
~3 minutes

13 Transition 2b: OLD MAN CANNOT HEAR YOUNG WOMAN
MPE(YW) & MPE(OM)
~1 minute

14 on cue:
missing fundamental
mf Scene 2c: FRANTIC MAN & OLD MAN
~3 minutes

15 *fff* Transition 2c: CHAOS
MPE(ALL)
~2 minutes

16 *mp* Scene 3: OLD MAN, FRANTIC MAN, YOUNG WOMAN
~2 minutes

17 *ff* sound cue: acceptance-end
f wait a beat, then play missing fundamental
~30 seconds

Performance instructions.

- 1) There is no beat to the score. Time is marked by scenes and transitions of approximate duration. The progression of time through the score is based on the numbers enclosed in a square at the beginning of each measure.
- 2) The Ambient Band is comprised of at least a Synth Player and a Sample Player. The Synth Player and Sample Player play together at the beginning of the measure. The Synth Player plays the pitches at the beginning of each measure accompanied by the Sample Player who plays the sound cues that may appear in the latter part of each measure.
- 3) MPE(ALL) = Mobile Phone Ensemble-All Members
MPE(OM) = Mobile Phone Ensemble-Old Man
MPE(FM) = Mobile Phone Ensemble-Frantic Man
MPE(YW) = Mobile Phone Ensemble-Young Woman