

**Alan Louis Smith's *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*:
A Historical and Musical Analysis from a Performer's Perspective**

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requirements for the degree Doctor in Music Performance

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To Dr Adam Louis Smith and Stephanie Blythe: thank you for your willingness to answer my questions and your contributions to this thesis. Thank you for creating such a beautiful piece for me to study all of these years. Thank you to Margaret Ann Alsip Frink.

A heartfelt thank you to my sisters, Kellie, Melissa and Ellen, and all of my friends both near and far that have encouraged me on this journey in Ireland. Thank you for the pep talks, the laughs, and the hugs. You know who you are.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Kenan and Kathi Judge, who are my greatest supporters, my inspiration, and my heart. Words cannot describe how thankful I am for the both of you.

List of Musical Examples

Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman from the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink

(1850) for mezzo-soprano, violin, cello, and piano

By: Alan Louis Smith

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Abstract

The history of art song in the United States is a varied and unique blend of differing styles and cultures. Previous research includes the histories of Native American music, the influence of mass immigration on American compositional sound and the study of the composers that have come to exemplify these blended traits of composition. With research contributions by Hugh Wiley Hitchcock, David Nichols and Charles Hiroshi Garrett, the history of American art song has been widely examined. A large amount of research has also explored performance practice and interpretation in art song, with a vast amount of analysis from Judith Carman, Thomas Hampson, and Victoria Etnier Villamill.

Alan Louis Smith (b. 1955), is an American collaborative pianist and teacher, along with being a gifted composer. His contributions to American song present new investigations for research and deserve further examination. Smith combines his unique style of writing with song texts that derive from distinctive points in the history of the United States. While there has been research compiled on his other vocal works, such as Tamara Brook Regensburger's dissertation 'Alan Louis Smith's *Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle*', there are other works of his that deserve exploration. This thesis focuses on his song cycle, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman from the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink 1850* for mezzo-soprano, violin and cello. Written for American mezzo-soprano, Stephanie Blythe, this thesis traces the origins of the work and explores the historical context of the diary, Smith's compositional style, and the various implications for performers.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

American composer Alan Louis Smith's song cycle *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman* utilizes the text of the diary of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink that was written as she travelled across the United States in a covered wagon in 1850. Written specifically for American mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe, the work also features violin, cello and piano. Smith has selected excerpts from the diary that show the varied emotions experienced by Margaret on her journey. This thesis will analyse the various aspects of the music and what life was truly like for Margaret Frink on the trail along with implications for performers.

1.2 Margaret Frink and her Diary

Margaret Ann Alsip was born on 25 April 1818 in Fredrick City, Maryland to parents Joseph and Mary Alsip.¹ She married Ledyard Frink in Kentucky on 17 April 1839 and Margaret describes their thirst for adventure in her own words when she states in her diary

But we were not yet satisfied. The exciting news coming back from California of the delightful climate and abundance of gold, caused us to resolve, about December, 1849, that we would commence preparing to cross the plains by the spring of 1850.²

The Frinks had previously moved from Kentucky to Ohio and then later, Indiana, as Mr Frink engaged in his merchandise endeavours, in which he became quite successful. Preparing to travel west took a vast amount of money and preparation.

¹ Kenneth Holmes (ed.), *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails 1850 Vol. 2* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 59.

² Margaret Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, (Ledyard Frink, 1897), published with permission by Kenneth Holmes 1996, 63.

Francis Parkman notes the wealth required to travel and states

The emigrants were primarily middle class. You needed money to make the trip, at least \$1,000 when \$1,000 was a significant amount of money, enough to buy a house. You had to contribute to the paying of guides, you had to pay for horses if you took them, oxen to haul the wagons, provisions, equipment, the wagons themselves, and you had to take cash for getting started again in Oregon. Women generally were reluctant to go, but they knew if they stayed behind, they might never see their husbands again.³

In the case of the Frinks, who did not have any children or critical ties to their home states, the prospect of travelling west was an easier decision for them than most. They were simply an older couple looking for adventure and a change of scenery. Alan Louis Smith notes ‘The Frinks and the Alsips were people of means and regarded their great journey to the gold fields of California less as a desire to add to their wealth than a surrendering to the excitement of a new adventure.’⁴

Margaret’s personal account in her diary is exceptionally rare, as it was not common for women to make this journey across the plains and many people believed that having a woman on the trail was bad luck. Margaret notes their preparations and fears and states

Our team consisted of five horses and two mules. We had two saddles for the riding-horses, one for Mr. Frink and one for myself. I believe we were all ready to start on the morning of the 27th of March. On the evening before, the whole family, including my mother, were gathered together in the parlour, looking as if we were all going to our graves the next morning, instead of our starting on a trip of pleasure, as we had drawn the picture in our imagination.⁵

Although the Frinks never had any children of their own, they were accompanied on their trip by a young boy named Robert (aged eleven) who had been living in their care since he was seven years old. There is very little information regarding the circumstances of which he

³ Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail: an illustrated edition of Francis Parkman’s western adventure*, Introduction by Anthony Brandt (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Zenith Press, 2016), 13.

⁴ Alan Louis Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850* (Fayetteville, AR: Classical Vocal Reprints, 2008), iii.

⁵ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 65.

began to live with the Frinks. Robert wanted to head west with the Frinks and was given permission to join them by his uncle.⁶ Margaret's relationship with Robert is naturally maternal throughout the diary and they would realistically spend the most time together during the day as the women were expected to mind the children and care for the domestic duties of the travelling party.⁷ Notably, Robert was lost for an entire day on the trail, and was eventually found by their other companion, Aaron Rose. This is the story for the eighth song in the cycle, 'The Lost Boy'. Robert is a central figure throughout Margaret's diary, along with Aaron Rose, who was twenty-one at the time of their journey and was an employee of Ledyard Frink's store.⁸ Having another male companion on the trail was an asset for safety and security. While he is often mentioned throughout the diary, it would be uncommon for Margaret and Aaron Rose to spend much time together during the day, as Aaron Rose would have been in charge of taking care of livestock, hunting and gathering and managing repairs of the covered wagon and other equipment.

Another party that is referenced at various times throughout the song cycle is the Carson brothers from Ohio. This group of brothers crossed the Missouri River at the same time as the Frinks, and then went their separate ways after the crossing. As this river crossing was a major milestone and dangerous part of the journey, the parties were bonded by this risky experience. They all reached their destination in California at the same time at the end of the journey and Margaret was well aware that they disapproved of a woman being on the trail.⁹ The social aspect of meeting the same people on the trail gave the travellers hope and entertainment.

⁶ Ibid, 63.

⁷ Parkman, *The Oregon Trail: an illustrated edition of Francis Parkman's western adventure*, 13.

⁸ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 65.

⁹ Ibid, 145.

When read in its entirety, the diary reveals other friends and acquaintances that the Frinks met on the trail; and they often got separated and met again in another location. Most notably, along with the Carson brothers, the song cycle describes the meeting of a woman and her seven children travelling with strangers after losing her husband in 'Upon Them She Depended'. This tragic story especially affected Margaret as she was well aware that she could easily have a bad day on the trail and would be sharing her fate.

Margaret and Ledyard Frink's adventure had only just begun after completing their journey to California. They quickly became leaders in the 'Sutterville Camp' in Sacramento as Margaret helped the local judges and ministers to establish a Baptist church.¹⁰ As leaders in the community, they began to make connections and friends. The Frinks rented a house in Sacramento and decided to start a business of their own. Margaret describes this new venture and states

The house had been brought from Baltimore and was used for a time as a retail store. There was one large room below and one above, with stairs on the outside. Nothing was finished but the sidings and floor. I could put my hand through the cracks between the boards. We paid \$175.00 for the first month's rent. There was a counter in the room, but we had no furniture. Mr. Frink bought \$18.00 worth of lumber, from which he made a dining table, and benches to serve as chairs. He put up a tent in the rear for a kitchen, and paid \$50.00 for the kitchen stove. He put a sign over the door, "Frink's Hotel," and we were ready for business.¹¹

As Mr Frink built the furniture, Margaret tended to the domestic duties of their new hotel venture.

The arrival to California came with its own hardships for the Frinks as they tried to build their new life. A cholera outbreak in their village affected every member of the family and their

¹⁰ Ibid, 148-149.

¹¹ Ibid, 148-149.

business suffered due to people fleeing town to avoid disease.¹² The Frinks were able to survive and avoid financial ruin and move to a new location where they were able to raise dairy cows and keep their hotel business afloat. After an arduous journey or a hard day of work in the mines, many men craved a home cooked meal and fresh milk which was a rarity and that is what the Frinks, and Margaret in particular, provided. Albert Hurtado notes

Gold rush letters and diaries are full of evidence that men were incompetent at the basic domestic skills, but the value of women's work in the California economy was driven by more than their superior ability to darn socks, wash long johns, nurse babies, and change diapers.¹³

The word of their popularity travelled quickly and the business started going so well that they were able to sell their hotel and open a dairy farm. They employed Aaron Rose to sell the milk in town as he was a trusted employee and friend.¹⁴

By October 1851 the Frinks were able to move into their final home which was built from the wood they sent to California long before their journey began. Margaret notes in her diary

We had by this time given the land of gold a fair trial. We had come here as gold-seekers only, not as settlers. But after a year's residence in the delightful valley of the Sacramento, we had satisfied ourselves that no pleasanter land for a home could be found, though we should roam the wide world over. We gave up our plan for further travels ... The progress of time only confirmed us more strongly in our choice of a home, and we never had occasion to regret the prolonged hardships of the toilsome journey that had its happy ending for us in this fair land of California.¹⁵

In an addendum added to the published diary by Mr Frink, he accounted for what became of their travel companions. He states that Robert Parker, 'the plucky eleven-year-old boy who was determined to cross the plains with us, having reached man's estate, started out on his own account, and, having experienced his share of the vicissitudes of fortune common to life in California, settled in business in Sacramento, where he now resides with his wife and three

¹² Ibid, 149.

¹³ Albert L. Hurtado, 'Sex, Gender, Culture, and a Great Event: The California Gold Rush', *Pacific Historical Review*, 68 (1999), 6-7.

¹⁴ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 151.

¹⁵ Ibid, 151-152.

children.¹⁶ Aaron Rose worked in dairy for two years and then went home to Martinsville to be with his parents, with a newfound wealth of \$3,000.¹⁷ The Carson brothers who were at the crossing of the Missouri River with them and came into California at the same time as the Frinks became successful in mining. The brothers then moved to San Francisco to return to brick masonry and plastering and later went home to Cincinnati, Ohio.¹⁸ The connections the Frinks made along their adventurous journey across the West created lifelong companions and friendships. Margaret died on 16 January 1893 in Oakland, California and her husband, Ledyard, published her diary in full after her death. In the preface written by Ledyard himself, he explains

Owing to the many requests made by relatives and friends for a history of our journey across the plains to California, made in the summer of 1850, the minutes of which were kept by Mrs. Frink, I have concluded, even at this late day, to issue this book. Although there may be some errors, it is practically a correct history.¹⁹

Ledyard died 6 March 1900.²⁰

This diary and the other accounts collected during the mid-nineteenth century have given major insights into the lives of people travelling in a covered wagon and have become historic artifacts. The diary gives a first person account of the amount of preparation required before a trip, emotions of leaving their homes and loved ones behind, the adventures and people they encounter, along with the physical toll of life on the trail. Women's accounts like Margaret Frink's have shown a completely different side to this journey to the West. Ledyard Frink's addenda and contributions to the publication of the diary are also notable, as he adds background and what became of many of their companions on the journey. The Frink's story

¹⁶ Ledyard Frink in Kenneth Holmes (ed.), *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails 1850 Vol. 2* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 155.

¹⁷ Ibid, 154.

¹⁸ Ibid, 154.

¹⁹ Ibid, 62.

²⁰ Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails 1850 Vol. 2*, 59.

is one of triumph in the face of adversity, and also creates valuable research questions to be explored. With this rich diary, Alan Louis Smith has taken this artefact and brought it to life in his exciting and thoughtful song cycle.

1.3 Alan Louis Smith: Composer

During a search for new and exciting repertoire, exploration produced a discovery of two unique works for mezzo-soprano by an American composer named Alan Louis Smith. Born in 1955 in McAllen, Texas, he is regarded as ‘one of the United States’ most highly regarded figures in the field of collaborative artistry’, along with being a gifted composer.²¹ He currently teaches at the University of Southern California and works with singers at the Tanglewood Institute, where he met and worked with world-renowned mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe when she was there as a young artist.²² They continued to stay in touch, exchanging letters and working together on various projects, and have developed an annual week-long song workshop for young singers called the Fall Island Vocal Arts seminar.²³

Smith has composed two song cycles for Blythe, *Vignettes: Ellis Island a song cycle in Six parts for Voice and Piano* (2000), and *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman; From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink (1850)* for Mezzo-Soprano, Violin, Cello and Piano (2008). Both were based on real-life accounts, first of interviews of immigrants that were processed in Ellis Island, New York, and the latter, based on the diary of Margaret Alsip Frink. The diary is Margaret’s detailed and adventurous telling of her experiences as she travelled across the United States in a covered wagon during the height of the California Gold Rush in 1850.

²¹ Tamara Brook Regensburger, ‘Alan Louis Smith’s Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle’ (DMA dissertation, Ohio State University, 2009), 107.

²² Alan Louis Smith, ‘Faculty - Alan L. Smith’, <<https://music.usc.edu/alan-l-smith/>> [accessed 24 March 2020].

²³ See Chapter 3, 41.

The structure of the cycle, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman* is as follows:

1. The Allure of the West (Instrumental)
2. Prologue to the Journal
3. There's a Lady
4. Considerable Excitement
5. The Face of the Earth
6. Buffalo Chase
7. The Sioux Tribe and the 'White Squaw'
8. Lost Boy
9. Upon Them She Depended
10. The Mountain
11. Margaret's Dream (Instrumental)
12. Here We Are
13. Epilogue to the Journal

The work was commissioned by Music Accord for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Centre and for Stephanie Blythe and pianist Warren Jones. It premiered on 22 February 2008 at The New York Society for Ethical Culture in New York City.²⁴ The performers included, Stephanie Blythe, mezzo-soprano, Warren Jones, piano, Ani Kavafian, violin and Pricilla Lee, cello.

Alan Louis Smith included opening remarks in the score of the work to give the performer context on his inspiration and musical ideas of the work. Smith was inspired to dig deeper into stories, particularly from women, on the new frontier after his other work based on people's real-life experiences including *Vignettes: Ellis Island* and *Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn from the private papers of a World War II bride* which is written for piano and soprano voice.²⁵ Smith notes

For two or three years before receiving the commission for a vocal chamber work from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center I had a still, small tickling in the back of my brain that compelled me to want to know more about the lives of pioneer women, particularly in their own words from their letters and diaries. From time to time I would look around in bookstores and browse online, but never in

²⁴ Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850*, iv.

²⁵ Alan Louis Smith, *Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn from the private papers of a World War II bride*, (Fayetteville, AR: Classical Vocal Reprints, 2002).

earnest. When the commission from the Chamber Music Society became a reality I became serious about seeking out the words of those intrepid women.²⁶

Smith's love for words and the way Blythe can communicate and illuminate the text are apparent when he speaks of composing. He was immediately attracted to reading Margaret's diary and states

Mrs. Frink's remarkable diary reveals her adventurous spirit, her deep love for those in her care, as well as her perspicacious and resourceful ability to provide for herself and her family through a combination of shrewd bargaining and alliances with those with whom she came in contact on their journey westward. She was generous and big-hearted toward people in need and in distress along the trail, sometimes giving the last of whatever she possessed in order to help someone.²⁷

For the singer to truly grasp the complexity of the journey and all of the life threatening trials and tribulations she experienced, reading the journal in its entirety is recommended.

Familiarity with Margaret's voice is important to being able to create the specific colours in the voice, and also have the particular context needed to perform this work to its fullest potential.

The work of Alan Louis Smith and his contribution to modern American art song has been relatively unexplored in terms of research and analysis. His unique style of composition warrants deeper investigation. Over the course of his friendship and collaborative relationship with mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe, the singer has influenced the way he writes for the voice which adds interesting research questions to explore. Selecting texts with great emotion and historical significance creates a compelling and deeply evocative world within each work. There has been some research compiled on his first song cycle for Stephanie Blythe, *Vignettes: Ellis Island*, but there is very little investigation on his second cycle written specifically for her, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*. Both of these works are rich in historical significance and are musically complex and unique. This opens up a broad spectrum

²⁶ Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850*, iv.

²⁷ *Ibid*, iii.

of research questions and the vast and significant work of Alan Louis Smith's song cycles and chamber music deserve further exploration and performance.

1.4 Literature Review

Relatively new to circulation and unexplored academically, the works of Alan Louis Smith have had some previous investigators. Tamara Brook Regensburger's doctoral thesis on Smith's work, *Vignettes: Ellis Island*, gives the reader a broad overview of the song cycle. Entitled 'Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle', the dissertation includes detailed descriptions of each piece, a biography and curriculum vitae for Alan Louis Smith, and a history of performance.²⁸ Regensburger also gives historical context of what it was like to be processed in the immigration hub of Ellis Island, New York, in the early twentieth century. Included are photographs of historically significant places, musical examples and interviews with the creators of the work: Alan Louis Smith (composer), Stephanie Blythe (singer) and Paul Sigrist (Ellis Island Oral History Project Coordinator). These interviews delve deeper into the origins of the work, how it came about and Smith's personal views on composition. These descriptions and detailed accounts helped to shape my own performance and provided the background to bring her research further to include the practical implications for performers and how best to effectively perform this work in my lecture recital.

My lecture recital, *Vignettes: Ellis Island, A Performer's Perspective*, was presented and completed in June 2021.²⁹ Throughout my research for the presentation, I explored Alan Louis Smith's compositional style, his choice of texts, and his relationships with the key players in creating the cycle. Studying the different pieces and singing through them gave me

²⁸ Regensburger, 'Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle'.

²⁹ Madeline Judge, *Vignettes: Ellis Island, A Performer's Perspective*, Lecture Recital Presented 11 June 2021, Passed Doctoral Examination at the Royal Irish Academy of Music.

an entirely new perspective on how Smith writes for the voice, and for Stephanie Blythe in particular. Along with this information and my own study of the score, listening to recordings and collaboration with my pianist, I was able to present the ways to most effectively perform the work in its entirety. Drawing on historical context and the intentions of the composer, I presented on the vocal colours, themes and obstacles to overcome to bring out the most expressive aspects of the piece, along with ways to educate and inform an audience with this work.

Alan Louis Smith provides context at the beginning of his cycles in his compositional notes, with a brief description of how he selected the texts, musical themes, and instrumentation.³⁰ With *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, Smith includes personal anecdotes about how the work came about and the specific musical moments that he finds the most interesting. Identifying these themes early on, and the various devices he has purposely included in the work, can help the singer and instrumentalists find shape and structure in their learning process. The inspiration for the work and the defining characteristics of Margaret's diary are also outlined. Margaret Frink's diary is filled with her experiences on the trail and Smith selected the words and stories that he connected to the most. Her unique voice helped to shape the cycle. These details grant the reader overall insights into the work and help to guide the singer on where she can delve deeper into the music.

Judith Carman, has separately reviewed *Vignettes: Ellis Island* and *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman* for the *Journal of Singing*.³¹ With her knowledge of the historical backgrounds of various works in her 'Singing in History' series, she connects the audience to the overall feel

³⁰ Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850*, iii-iv.

³¹ Judith Carman, 'Vignettes: Ellis Island. A song cycle in Six Parts', *Journal of Singing*, 66 (Mar/Apr 2010) 492-493.

Judith Carman, Review: *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman: From the Daily Journal of Margaret Alsip Frink, 1850* by Alan Louis Smith, *Journal of Singing* (May/June 2012), 602-605.

of each piece and what Smith is trying to convey.³² With each piece, she focuses on the suitability for the voice and how to collaborate effectively with the piano and strings. Placing the work in context, both historically and in terms of its place in the American soundscape, she provides the reader with rich context. Carman's knowledge as a singer and teacher helps her to identify the various challenges and benefits of each song.

Margaret Alsip Frink's diary is an irrefutable source material for this cycle.³³ As it is where the entire compositional process began, Smith encourages anyone working on this piece to read the work in its entirety. Published by Kenneth Holmes in *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails 1850 Vol. 2*, her diary is a lively and exciting read.³⁴ Margaret's account is incredibly detailed, and the reader gains a greater sense of the author's voice and experiences when read in its entirety. There are many descriptive and adventurous days that occur in the diary that are not included in the song cycle, and awareness of the full picture of Margaret's experiences can help set the individual songs in context for the singer.

There are many articles and books written about the greater context of American song, including the various authors of the *Cambridge History of American Music*, Charles Hiroshi Garrett's *Struggling to Define a Nation: American Music*, Hugh Wiley Hitchcock's *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* and Thomas Hampson's introduction to the book, *A singer's guide to the American art song*.³⁵ Smith's compositional style and sound is

³² Judith E. Carman, 'Singing our History: People and Events of American History represented in American Art Song Part I: 1620 to the Civil War', *Journal of Singing*, 72 (March/April 2016), 419-429.

Judith E. Carman, 'Singing our History, Part II The Civil War to World War 2', *Journal of Singing*, 72 (May/June 2016), 537-546.

Judith E. Carman, 'Singing our History, Part III: World War II to the Present', *Journal of Singing*, 73 (September/October 2016) 13-21.

³³ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*.

³⁴ Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails 1850 Vol. 2*, 62-155.

³⁵ David Nichols, *The Cambridge History of American Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Charles Hiroshi Garrett, *Struggling to Define a Nation: American Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

cultivated from his upbringing and education, along with the greater influences of major composers of American song. These sources illuminate the various devices and stylistic choices of the major composers that Smith cites as influences. Discovering this context can help a performer find patterns in his composing that show the similarities and differences between each composer.

Throughout the research for this project, interviews and articles about Alan Louis Smith and Stephanie Blythe have been particularly enlightening. Theresa Regensburger's thesis interview delves deeply into the background of their relationship and their thoughts on text, composition and style. These interviews address many of the questions a singer of Smith's works may have. Other interviews and biographical snippets have outlined their musical background and experiences.³⁶ Smith's role as a collaborative pianist and teacher have greatly influenced his writing style, and each interview from the perspective of his work as a coach and collaborator can help place his compositions in context, such as his interview by Margo Garret in the *Journal of Singing*; 'Alan Louis Smith: Master Collaborative Pianist and Professor on How Composing Enlarges Him as a Performer and Teacher'.³⁷ This point of view shows how he works to compose for the strengths of the singer, and how he discusses the intentions of any composer from a more in depth point of view with the singer.

Hugh Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1974).

Thomas Hampson, 'Forward' in Victoria Etnier Villamill, *A singer's guide to the American art song, 1870-1980* (Metuchen, N.J. & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1993), ix-x.

³⁶ Alan Louis Smith, 'Should I Encourage Accompanying As A Career?', *American Music Teacher*, 42 (1992), 22-25.

Alan Louis Smith, 'Faculty - Alan L. Smith', <<https://music.usc.edu/alan-l-smith/>> [accessed 24 March 2020].

Anthony Tommasini, 'A Future So Bright It Can Handle Dark', *New York Times*, 17 February 2008.

Leslie M. Holmes, 'A Conversation with Stephanie Blythe', *Journal of Singing*, 64 (2008) 635-642.

Opus 3 Artists, 'Stephanie Blythe', <https://www.opus3artists.com/artists/stephanie-blythe/?fbclid=IwAR1Umt5f4LWWNFRYSep3AkM8o_106n_afS2ej4ixtm5_89fwV9iKHBW2xwA> [accessed 19 November 2021].

³⁷ Margo Garret, 'Alan Louis Smith: Master Collaborative Pianist and Professor on How Composing Enlarges Him as a Performer and Teacher', *Journal of Singing*, 76 (2020) 341-347.

While reading the diary and noting the different events that take place on Margaret's journey, it is important to gain knowledge of her experiences in terms of historical context. Finding sources that explain what life on the trail was really like, along with the different social and political standards of the time, help to identify Margaret's perspective in her story and create a better picture of what her day-to-day life was like. A practical and informative resource on the ecological aspects to life on the trail and first account experiences is the website for the California Trail Interpretive Centre.³⁸ These practical accounts echo those of Margaret and the interactive maps offer a scope of the trail.

While researching the roles of women on the trail and the social constructs that ruled their daily life in nineteenth century America, articles such as Christiane Fischer's 'Women in California in the Early 1850s', T.A. Larson's 'Women's Role in the American West', and Nancy J. Taniguchi's 'Weaving a Different World: Women and the California Gold Rush' are excellent sources that addressed what day-to-day life was like for a woman in mid 19th century America.³⁹ Carroll Smith-Rosenburg's 'The Hysterical Woman: Sex roles and role conflict in 19th-Century America', and Donna Schuele's "'None Could Deny the Eloquence of This Lady": Women, Law and Government in California, 1850-1890', address the societal obligations that were placed upon women and how they became successful in the West.⁴⁰ The vast majority of Margaret's stories are extremely rare for a woman at this time to experience. All of these articles ask intriguing questions on how things have drastically changed in the United States and how some things have stayed exactly the same.

³⁸ California Trail Interpretive Centre, 'Margaret Frink 1850', <<https://ctic.oncell.com/en/margaret-frink-1850-225114.html>> [accessed: 3 July 2021].

³⁹ Christiane Fischer, 'Women in California in the Early 1850's', *Southern California Quarterly*, 60 (1978) 231-253.

T.A. Larson, 'Women's Role in the American West', *The Magazine of Western History*, 24 (1974), 2-11.

Nancy J. Taniguchi, 'Weaving a Different World: Women and the California Gold Rush', *California History*, 79 (2000)141-168.

⁴⁰ Donna C. Schuele, "'None Could Deny the Eloquence of This Lady": Women, Law and Government in California, 1850-1890', *California History*, 81 (2003) 169-198.

Carroll Smith-Rosenburg, 'The Hysterical Woman: Sex roles and role conflict in 19th-Century America', *Social Research*, 39 (1972), 652-678.

The history of politics in the United States is a topic that has been continuously researched and analysed and, throughout this thesis, is often referenced for historical context. The political climate at this time carried a lot of tension and change. Online sources such as the educational sections on the Whitehouse.gov website, specifically the section on ‘The Presidents of the United States of America’, provides a chronological list of the different presidents, along with an outline of the major events that happened in each presidency.⁴¹ Various references outline the major historical events happening in the mid to late nineteenth century, including William Deverell and Anne Hyde’s, *Shaped by the West: A History of North America to 1877 Volume 1*.⁴² These sources help to enlighten readers and researchers to the detailed political, social, and economic happenings of the time, creating a greater understanding of the gold rush and Margaret’s experiences.

The effect of the Gold Rush on Native American populations in the United States is also a main point throughout the song cycle and this thesis and is examined both from a historical standpoint and from the present. Major events from 2021 are outlined in Rebecca Herscher’s article ‘Key Moments in the Dakota Access Pipeline Fight’, and Bill Chappell’s article ‘Interior Secretary Deb Haaland moves to ban the word “squaw” from federal lands’.⁴³ Preservation and awareness is key in outlining the historical effects on these people and a way to contribute to their healing.

⁴¹ Michael Beschloss and Hugh Sidey, ‘The Presidents of the United States of America’, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/millard-fillmore/>> [accessed: 31 May 2022].

⁴² William Deverell and Anne Hyde, *Shaped by the West: A History of North America to 1877 Volume 1*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

⁴³ Rebecca Herscher, ‘Key Moments in the Dakota Access Pipeline Fight’, <<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/02/22/514988040/key-moments-in-the-dakota-access-pipeline-fight?t=1654022323289>> [accessed 31 May 2022].

In depth article detailing the protests of the Standing Rock Native American people against the construction of a gas pipeline which would disrupt sacred and spiritual sites and could contaminate their main water source. Bill Chappell, ‘Interior Secretary Deb Haaland moves to ban the word “squaw” from federal lands’, *NPR*, 19 November 2021.

Now considered a slur against Native American women, this word has now been removed from the names of United States federal parks and lands.

1.5 Methodology and Conclusion

This thesis examines different sources regarding Alan Louis Smith's compositional style and influences and details of the diary and what life was like on the trail for pioneers. Exploring the different implications for performers and the ways to most effectively perform this work, this thesis also includes thoughtful discussion on how to create discourse and reflection amongst audience members. Along with a practical approach of score study and listening to recordings, my own preparation and performance of the work has provided personal experience and context for possible implications for performers.

The diary of Margaret Frink has contributed to the overall understanding of life on the Oregon Trail as many people journeyed West in search of riches and adventure in the United States in the mid nineteenth century. Her account reveals a full range of her emotions and the incredible strength she possessed as a woman of her time. Alan Louis Smith saw the potential in this text and has created a thoughtful and unique song cycle for his friend and collaborator mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe. This thesis will examine the work further from its historical context, the compositional style of Alan Louis Smith and the implications for performers of this work.

Chapter Two: Historical Context

2.1 Introduction

Historically informed performance and research enhances the experience and background knowledge for a singer or performer, and adds dimension to any performance for the audience. With this background, the singer can connect more deeply to the text, to the character or person's experiences and emotions and unlock different vocal colours and dramatic elements. The overall performance will have the context to create true finesse. This research also creates more opportunities to thoughtfully engage an audience in beneficial discussion and reflection. Alan Louis Smith's song cycle *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman* recalls a woman's experiences from over one hundred and fifty years ago and requires the singer to have a frame of reference to know what the experiences of people on the Oregon Trail could have been like.

Margaret Alsip Frink's journey to the west of the United States was documented in great detail in her diary in 1850. There are many different accounts that have been published from people of this time period as it was very common to document daily life in a diary or in letters to friends and relatives. Her account is not only incredibly detailed, but also possesses a refined voice and point of view and her candour gives the reader a glimpse into what her day-to-day life was really like, especially with the unique distinction as a woman on the trail. Sixty-four years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, eleven years before the beginning of the American Civil War, and fifteen years before the abolishment of slavery in the United States in 1865, the Frinks started their journey during a tumultuous and ever changing time in America.¹

¹ Alan Louis Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850* (Fayetteville, AR: Classical Vocal Reprints, 2008), iii.

2.2 The California Gold Rush

Looking back at the conditions of travel mid nineteenth century, it is often hard to imagine choosing such a risky journey from today's point of view. America was going through a time of great change and as stated on the National Park Service's website, 'At a time when restless Americans were already itching to go west, the discovery of gold in California in 1848 was like gasoline on a fire.'² This era in American history has become known as the California Gold Rush, where thousands of migrants travelled on an arduous journey across the great plains and mountains of the Midwest in search of riches and adventure in the West. With plenty of land to claim, discover and build upon, the West was an opportunity for many migrants to create a better life for themselves. A seemingly small interaction created a ripple effect across the country. The National Park Service states

John Sutter was a Swiss immigrant who came to California in 1839 with a dream of building an agricultural empire. When he needed lumber in early 1848, he assigned the task to one of his men, James Marshall. Marshall decided to build a sawmill on the South Fork of the American river, about 40 miles from Sutter's home. Marshall discovered a gold nugget on January 24, 1848, while at the sawmill. He and his men found more gold nearby. Both Marshall and Sutter tried to keep things quiet, but soon word leaked out. Gold fever quickly became an epidemic.³

Along with the temptations of riches and land, came great uncertainty. As Keith Heyer Meldahl states 'vast portions of the West remained unexplored and unmapped in the mid-nineteenth century.'⁴ This cultivated a culture of adventure and great desire, but not everyone who journeyed west became a success. With the immense amount of people in search of gold, resources became scarce, and many returned home to the eastern United States emptyhanded. It is important for a performer to know the driving forces behind what the Frinks were pursuing and the major risks they were taking leaving their home, family and comfortable

² 'The California Gold Rush' <<https://www.nps.gov/cali/index.htm>> [accessed 18 November 2021].

³ Ibid.

⁴ Keith Heyer Meldahl, *Hard Road West: History and Geology along the Gold Rush Trail* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 14.

living situation. The voice must be coloured, and the text must be inflected, with determination and passion.

2.3 Realities of Life on the Trail

A journey of this magnitude and scale during the mid-nineteenth century took months to plan for and prepare. This information is of the utmost importance for the performer to be able to appropriately communicate the various emotions throughout the cycle and acknowledge how difficult it was to travel at this time. Mehl Dahl goes into intricate detail outlining the various challenges the migrants faced preparing for life on the trail and states

The overland journey to California followed a tight schedule bracketed by winter. Emigrants could not set out across the Great Plains until late April or early May. Trails turned to mud by the spring thaw needed to dry out, and the spring grass had to come up, for grass was fuel in this age of animal power. On the far end of the journey, the Sierra Nevada had to be crossed before the first snows threatened to seal the high passes, which could happen as early as October. That left a five-month window – May through September – to complete the journey, perhaps six months if the weather on either end cooperated. The constraints of winter created a singular disadvantage in timing. Some of the hardest sections of the journey – the deserts of the Great Basin – had to be crossed at the absolutely hottest time of year, in August and September.

Wagon travel averaged about 15 miles per day. Good travel days saw more than 20 miles go by, but river crossings, bad weather, or rough terrain slowed progress on some days to a handful of miles. Some days were spent resting or making repairs. Many emigrants halted on Sundays to observe the Sabbath. All in all, the 2,000-mile trip typically took from four to five months by ox-drawn wagon, three to four months by pack train.

A successful overland crossing took more than timing. It took preparation and planning. In the early 1840's, at the start of major overland emigration to Oregon and California, the United States ended at the Missouri River. When emigrants set foot on the Missouri's west bank, they entered wilderness – at least from the perspective of white Americans.⁵

⁵ Ibid., 13.

In mid nineteenth century America, the vast West was mostly unexplored. To prepare for their own journey, Margaret was in charge of getting their clothes made and canned food collected and Ledyard was in charge of getting the wagon made and prepared.⁶ The Frinks had a mattress that they could fill with air or water, a feather bed, and had storage for food, water and necessities inside the wagon. This would be a completely new experience for them as they were middle class and were used to a comfortable lifestyle.

Along with the gathering of supplies, the Frinks prepared by utilising two guidebooks on their journey; John C Fremont's *The Report of the Exploring Expedition of the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1842, and to Oregon and North California in the Years 1843-44* and Joel Palmer's *Journey of Travels over the Rocky Mountains to the Mouth of the Columbia River made during the years 1845 and 1846 containing minute descriptions of the valleys of the Willamette, Umpqua, and Clamet, a general description of Oregon Territory, its inhabitants, climate, soil, productions, etc. etc., a list of necessary outfits for emigrants; and a table of distances from camp to camp on the route.*⁷ These guide books helped them to consolidate and prioritise their supplies and food, along with planning the major river crossings and treacherous locations they would face on their journey. Francis Parkman notes that the planning of provisions was of the utmost importance and only the necessities would normally make it to California and states

To venture along the 2,000-mile length of it, you took more than a ton of provisions, more if you had a big family. Among the unwise, it was common to take some of the stuff that people leaving home cannot imagine living without – like the bureau drawers your grandmother had originally brought with her from Boston. Abandoned furniture became one of the signs that let emigrants know they were still on the trail. That, and the graves.⁸

⁶ Margaret Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, (Ledyard Frink, 1897), published with permission by Kenneth Holmes 1996, 63.

⁷ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 61.

⁸ Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail: an illustrated edition of Francis Parkman's western adventure*, Introduction by Anthony Brandt (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Zenith Press, 2016), 8.

As they had the financial means, the Frinks were also able to afford a shipment of building materials to California for a new home before their journey. This was a major advantage as many people could not afford to plan and pay for their homes in advance. This made the end of the trip and arrival in California more relaxed, as it was easier to find building materials and lumber in their home state and it was less expensive than buying wood out west.⁹ They travelled quite comfortably at the beginning of the journey and Margaret's diary reveals the way their trip began and her diary states

Until we had crossed the Missouri River, we stopped at hotels and farmhouses every night, and did not use our own bedding. After that, there being no more hotels nor houses, we used it continually all the way to California.¹⁰

After the crossing of the Missouri River, the Frinks entered what was the undiscovered West, where stores and resources became scarce. The dangerous journey was filled with treacherous river crossings, aggressive and unpredictable wildlife and a lack of clean water along the way. It is noted by Meldahl that 'roughly 20,000 died on the overland trails to California between 1840 and 1859... [travellers] died mostly of disease, particularly cholera from contaminated water.'¹¹ Margaret Frink's journal mentions the ailments of cholera and scurvy many times, as it was a great fear among the pioneers and many did not know how each affliction was contracted. Scurvy is entirely preventable, as it is a condition caused by lack of vitamin C in a person's diet.¹² Many immigrants canned fruits and pickled vegetables to keep scurvy at bay. Cholera, which is contracted by contaminated water, was a disease that was incredibly difficult to prevent. As fresh water was an already finite resource on the trail, many had to drink water that they feared would spread the disease. The bacteria that caused cholera made many people very sick, and it was often fatal. The journey out West took courage and was not

⁹ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 64.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹¹ Meldahl, *Hard Road West: History and Geology along the Gold Rush Trail*, 14.

¹² Kenneth Holmes, (ed.), *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails 1850 Vol. 2* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 60.

successful for the underprepared. Travellers were bombarded by many different dangers on their journey and Meldahl notes:

But even if you escaped disease, there were plenty of other ways to die on the road west, including accidental gunshot, trampling or kicking by animals, and being crushed under wagon wheels. Many drowned on river crossings. The Platte, North Platte, and Green rivers claimed the most victims, but some even drowned on smaller rivers like the Humboldt. Some were killed by Indians. Others were shot, stabbed, or bludgeoned to death in fights with other emigrants.¹³

The physical toll and realities of life on the Oregon Trail contained many highs and lows. There was never a guarantee of contact with other people, or places of refuge, and there was no set route that everyone followed. Many delays occurred if anyone fell ill, repairs on equipment were needed or if food for their animals was scarce. Francis Parkman echoes these sentiments of risk and the unknown and states

The official border of the United States of America in the 1840's ended at the Missouri River, which opened up to the vast unknown. The journey took meticulous planning in terms of navigation, provisions, and supplies. Supply posts were few and far between, and provisions were also overpriced and expensive. The Oregon Trail never became a comfortable or easy route to the West. Nobody ever graded it or smoothed it out, it had no signposts, and travellers commonly wandered off it and got lost.¹⁴

With this 'vast unknown' laid out before them, making this trip was a true leap of faith for most travellers, and many glamorised the expedition before their departure.

With hope of riches and a new life ahead of them, many underestimated the terrain and day-to-day life before them. Parkman recalls the specific difficulties of travelling over this unexplored land and states:

To call the terrain rocky doesn't quite cover it; the rocks were often razor-sharp obsidian, which cut the hooves of the oxen so badly the trail would at times be red with blood. Mosquitoes here were a hell of

¹³ Meldahl, *Hard Road West: History and Geology along the Gold Rush Trail*, 14-15.

¹⁴ Parkman, *The Oregon Trail: an illustrated edition of Francis Parkman's western adventure*, Introduction by Anthony Brandt, 8.

their own, covering every part of an animal except its eyes. The horses would whinny and moan all night long. Sleep was impossible.¹⁵

As performers of Alan Louis Smith's *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, it is vital to understand the gravity of what this journey entailed, as the voice can carry different colours and articulations with the knowledge of their experiences. These images that are expressed in the diary and not included in the song cycle can also influence and add layers to the performance of the work. A portion of the diary that is not used in the song cycle, but is powerful in imagery is recorded on 20 August 1850, just before they were about to ascend the most treacherous aspect of the trip, the Mountain. Margaret states

The emigrants are a woe-begone, sorry-looking crowd. The men, with long hair and matted beards, in soiled and ragged clothes, covered with alkali dust, have a half-savage appearance. There are but few women; among these thousands of men, we have not seen more than ten or twelve. The horses, cattle, and mules are getting gaunt, thin, and weary, almost ready to drop in their tracks, as hundreds of them have already done.¹⁶

Throughout the cycle, it is important to plan the contrasting emotions and stories that come about on such an adventurous journey. With uncertainty, fear, pain, and fatigue, comes great excitement and joy. With pieces such as: 'Considerable Excitement', where Margaret reveals her fear when she hears that there was the murder of an emigrant on the trail they were traveling the next day, to the arduous and physically taxing climb of 'The Mountain' towards the end of the cycle, a background knowledge of the physical and mental toll this journey took is key to creating the most effective performance.¹⁷

The various dangers and tragedies that occurred on the trail are important to acknowledge, but there were triumphant and happy memories as well. Meldahl acknowledges the positive sides to the journey and states

¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 132-133.

¹⁷ See Chapter 4, 70, 91.

Not all was hardship on the overland trails. There was plenty of fun: music, dancing, hunting, socializing around campfires, and sex too – probably more than mid-nineteenth-century sensibilities would admit in their journals and memoirs.¹⁸

Our knowledge and awareness of this history can also bring about important discussions of what is happening in the present. Powerful performances spark dialogue among audience members and artists can help to thoughtfully encourage discussion. *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman* addresses gender roles, racial prejudices and takes place during the time of slavery in the United States, which still has effects on marginalized communities to this day.

2.4 Political Climate

Throughout the mid nineteenth century, the United States was a country was in great turmoil. Still in the first century of its creation, the federal government had trouble functioning and representing the majority of the country and the many issues that people were experiencing. With such a vast land area and a large population of people, all coming from different cultures with their own traditions and customs, settlers had completely different viewpoints and beliefs. The major issues of slavery, the rights of Native Americans, women, and immigrants, and economic disagreements, created great tension and conflict. There were also the intersectional issues among all of these different groups that the United States as a country is still grappling with today. The fight for equality among women, and especially women of colour, the widening gap between the rich and the poor and rights for the disabled were major issues that were barely addressed at this time. On Margaret's journey, she encountered people who were enslaved, Native Americans, and other immigrants. It is important for the performers of this work to acknowledge the entire story when engaging with Margaret's life, including the narratives that are uncomfortable through today's lens.

¹⁸ Meldahl, *Hard Road West: History and Geology along the Gold Rush Trail*, 15.

The thirteenth president of the United States, Milliard Fillmore, was presiding over a completely divided Senate in 1850 over the federal government's response to run-away or 'fugitive slaves'.¹⁹ Many were on opposing sides, hoping for freedom for all slaves, or intervention from federal officers to capture and return slaves to their owners in the south. The various territories of the West were still on their way to joining the United States and were already inhabited by Native Americans, Mexicans and Canadians who were hoping to keep their land and live in peace. William Deverell and Anne Hyde outline the western lands becoming a part of the United States and discuss the challenges facing a new government and state

California became a territory and then a state in 1850. However, the administrative structures of a state, including courts, laws, and representative bodies to create laws, took a while to develop.²⁰

There was hope in the West, where new systems could be born and a different way of life could be developed. This young country carried vast potential and the motivation to grow economically was strong. This great migration set in motion what would make up the state of California and the American West today. While many thought that this was a 'New World', there were already Natives living on these lands. The realities of the colonialist take-over of the west are noted by Judith Carman when she states

The first colonists did not come to an empty land. At the time the "New World" was discovered by Europeans in the 15th century, scholars estimate there were fifty million inhabitants in the Americas – probably ten million living in what would become the United States. These Native Americans belonged to many different tribes with a complex web of languages and living styles ranging from stable agricultural and fishing communities to nomadic hunting and gathering. They were a spiritual people who revered the land that gave them life and sustenance. There was no concept of private ownership of land nor of exploitation for personal gain. This harmonious interaction with Mother Earth was in direct opposition to the views held by the immigrants from Europe who sought new land for themselves for a

¹⁹ Michael Beschloss and Hugh Sidey, 'The Presidents of the United States of America', <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/millard-fillmore/>> [accessed: 31 May 2022].

²⁰ William Deverell and Anne Hyde, *Shaped by the West: A History of North America to 1877 Volume 1* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 229.

variety of reasons, none of them compatible with those who already lived there. The Europeans brought guns and disease and an insatiable greed for all the land from the Atlantic to the Pacific.²¹

Singers of this work have a responsibility to be aware of the injustices that many experienced, so that we can find justice and healing in the present.

2.5 Effect on Native Americans

Today, it is easy to see the lasting effects the Gold Rush had on the Native tribes and populations across much of America. In his article 'The Gold Rush and the California Dream', Kevin Starr reflects on mass migration to the West and states 'Like every other important historic event, the Gold Rush has been – and will continue to be – interpreted from the vantage point of the present.'²² Stories passed down through surviving generations of Native Americans include tales of genocide, disease, broken treaties, stolen land and loss of identity. These displaced people also included Mexicans and Canadians. Nancy J. Taniguchi acknowledges these atrocities and states

The Gold Rush disrupted traditional patterns of life for Indians throughout California, and within a couple of decades, warfare, disease, and starvation had decreased their numbers by three-quarters or more. Even more than the men, Indian women suffered from the violence and exploitation that marked the era.²³

The treatment of Native peoples is a dark mark on the history of America, the effects of which are still being experienced today.

As Native cultures were erased and discriminated against, the ancestors of these people are working to regain their voice. Moved onto reservations with little to no resources, many Native Americans today feel left behind.²⁴ When engaging with this cycle, it is important to

²¹ Judith E. Carman, 'Singing our History, Part II The Civil War to World War 2', *Journal of Singing*, 72 (2016), 542-543.

²² Kevin Starr, 'The Gold Rush and the California Dream', *California History*, 77 (Spring 1998), 57.

²³ Nancy J. Taniguchi, 'Weaving a Different World: Women and the California Gold Rush', *California History*, 79 (2000), 145.

²⁴ Carman, 'Singing our History, Part II The Civil War to World War 2', 543.

acknowledge this reality that occurred alongside Margaret's story. Starr provokes interesting questions when discussing history and the impacts of decisions made by those long ago and how we can move forward to heal the effected communities and states

These are the risks we run in deconstructing history, for whatever motivation. In absolute moral terms, the loss of one single Indian child, much less the near-total destruction of an entire people is not worth an affirming view of the Gold Rush. In absolute terms, the destruction of the environment was not worth the gold taken from it. And yet, what are we to do? Are we to say that the Gold Rush was nothing because of its devastating impact on Native Americans? Are we to say that the Gold rush was nothing because it treated California, as Bayard Taylor put it, like a princess whom bandits had captured, cutting off her hands merely to take the rings from her fingers? The problem with deconstructing history is the difficulty in reconstructing it; In finding a totality, including its tragic dimensions, and affirming it as the founding time period so much of the new interpretations of the Gold Rush are so welcomed for those who commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Gold Rush, for example, even the 100th anniversary, it seemed such an Anglo-American event. One hundred fifty years later, because of who we are today in California, we see the Gold Rush as an intrinsically international event ... by Anglo-America. In 1898 and 1948, we saw it as almost exclusively masculine. Today, we are astonished by the presence of women in the Gold Rush story, whether in California or, as J. S. Holliday so eloquently points out, as the living embodiment – in memory and in letters – of home, love, nurture, and responsibility. The devastating effects of the Gold Rush on Native America, together with an acknowledgement of the environmental damage that was wrought, have only surfaced in full force over the past twenty-five years or so, with the rise of the new history. In these two dimensions – a human and an environmental catastrophe – we have presented ourselves with near-intractable insights because, as I have suggested, we have entered history from the perspective of moral absolutes. As I previously stated, not the life of one Indian child was worth the Gold Rush.²⁵

The Native American people have resilience and passion for preserving their traditions and languages. With revitalized calls for equality and protests in the 1960's, the Native American

²⁵ Starr, 'The Gold Rush and the California Dream', 58.

people have called for respect and awareness of their struggles.²⁶ As recently as 2017, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe have protested the environmental impacts of the proposed Dakota Access Oil pipeline, which could potentially compromise the tribe's main water source.²⁷ The inhabitants of this land deserve to protect their resources and should be treated with respect. Performers of *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, whether they are the singer or instrumentalists, should acknowledge what is happening today, as it is a direct result of American history and the narratives of Margaret's diary. It is an educational opportunity for the audience and can open up the pathways to discussions on what is happening in these communities in the present day.

2.6 Women's Roles in mid nineteenth-century America

Another important aspect of the diary is Margaret's role as a woman on the trail. Her unique experiences are outlined in detail and reflect on how she was treated as one of few women on the trail. Albert L. Hurtado discusses the many challenges when examining history from another perspective and states

The history of women is key to understanding the evolution of the western region in the last several centuries, and women's history must be understood in all of its particularity, conflict, and complexity. Explaining that history in an evenhanded way while including women of all backgrounds is a difficult challenge because it involves multiple points of view possessed by peoples who were often at odds with each other and whose aims were often in conflict with twenty-first-century ideas about rights and justice. The writing of multicultural history is necessarily a tricky business. The hero of one story is the villain of the next tale and in the next iteration becomes a victim. Perspective makes all the difference and multiple perspectives do not necessarily clarify the view and lead us to the same ineluctable conclusion.²⁸

²⁶ David Nichols, *The Cambridge History of American Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

²⁷ Rebecca Herscher, <<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/02/22/514988040/key-moments-in-the-dakota-access-pipeline-fight?t=1654022323289>> [accessed 31 May 2022].

²⁸ Albert L. Hurtado, 'Settler Women and Frontier Women: The Unsettling Past of Western Women's History', *A Journal of Women Studies*, 22 (2001), 5.

Along with the significant inequalities present during this time for people of colour, gender also played a large role in everyday life in mid nineteenth century America.

Margaret's situation as a woman is another factor that can illuminate what life on the trail was like for minorities. Hurtado states that 'Gender signifies far more than sexual difference; it is a status that determines power relationships in society.'²⁹ Margaret possessed all of the qualities of an honourable woman of the time but she was also so much more. She possessed great strength along the trail along with immense vulnerability. She was an asset for the party, not only for her domestic labour and skills, but also with her business-minded forward thinking. Carroll Smith- Rosenberg describes the 'ideal female in the nineteenth-century America' and notes

(That she) was expected to be gentle and refined, sensitive and loving. She was the guardian of religion and spokeswoman for morality. Hers was the task of guiding the more worldly and more frequently tempted male past the maelstroms of atheism and uncontrolled sexuality. Her sphere was the hearth and the nursery; within it she was to bestow care and love, peace and joy. The American girl was taught at home, at school and in the literature of the period, that aggression, independence, self-assertion and curiosity were male traits, inappropriate for the weaker sex and her limited sphere. Dependent throughout her life, she was to reward her male protectors with affection and submission. At no time was she expected to achieve in any area considered important by men and thus highly valued by society. She was, in essence, to remain a child-woman, never developing the strengths and skills of adult autonomy. The stereotype of the middle class woman as emotional, pious, passive and nurturant was to become increasingly rigid throughout the nineteenth century.³⁰

These expectations of feminine life in mid-nineteenth century America are often challenged by Margaret as her diary provides insight to her own thoughts especially as she interacts with other people on the trail. Margaret acknowledges that there are few women on the trail and that her presence attracted a lot of attention from fellow travellers. This in no way dissuaded

²⁹ Hurtado, 'Sex, Gender, Culture, and a Great Event: The California Gold Rush', 2.

³⁰ Carroll Smith-Rosenburg, 'The Hysterical Woman: Sex roles and role conflict in 19th-Century America', *Social Research*, 39 (1972), 655.

her from pursuing this adventure with her husband. William Deverell and Anne Hyde discuss the idea of women on the trail and state that

The dramatic family decision to go west tells us a lot about US national culture in the mid-nineteenth century. Crucial to this culture was the idea of individual ambition – the belief that anyone with good intentions who worked hard could be successful. But ambition took very different forms and was often limited by race and class. Women, of course, were supposed to support their male family member’s ambitions, rather than having their own. The experience of migration is a useful case study of the notion that men and women, as well as white citizens and everyone else, should lead very different lives, a view that shaped the nation’s ideology but was challenged by western migration.³¹

It is important to note the complete rarity of a wife accompanying her husband on the first trip West as most women let their husbands go first and become established and the family hoped they could come later.

There were also ever-present dangers that she faced as a woman on the trail. Being separated from the group could mean life or death. The awareness of the roles of women in society in nineteenth century America can influence a singer’s interpretation of this work, especially in terms of Margaret’s interactions with others throughout the cycle and her emboldened style. As it was a rarity for her to be there, anytime Margaret encounters another person on the trail is a major moment. For singers of *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, this context of the lives and rights of women at this time is vital, as Margaret was often rebellious in her tone and way of life. The way the singer performs a piece that is directed at strangers, such as ‘There’s a Lady’, compared to a piece that is describing something exciting in the diary such as the ‘Buffalo Chase’, can sound incredibly different and create a more nuanced effect for the audience.³² Margaret’s sarcasm and wit can bring about an entirely different image to

³¹ William Deverell and Anne Hyde, *Shaped by the West: A History of North America to 1877 Volume 1*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 227.

³² See Chapter 4, 67, 76.

previous ideas of women on the trail. Showing Margaret's rebellious personality adds another exciting element to the work and creates a well-rounded picture of who she was as a person.

2.7 Significance and Conclusion

When examining a piece of writing from the past, it can be seen for its contributions and triumphs and also for its faults and failings. Ellie Kaplan's article on the National Park Service's website outlining Margaret Frink's journey acknowledges her contributions to knowledge of the time and the consequences of her actions, especially in terms of her effect on the Native people living there and their ecological systems such as the City of Rocks.³³

Kaplan states

The diary's focus on the couple's challenges and feats during their journey and their ultimate success as hoteliers in California obscures the simultaneous dislocation and genocide of California Indians that made the Frink's achievements possible. Through her writing, Margaret Frink contributed to a cultural claiming of the American West for Anglo-Americans, including the City of Rocks.³⁴

It is important to analyse this work through the lens of that time, not only through the standards of the present.

With Margaret Frink's diary in particular, there are racial slurs and references that would not be acceptable today. She documents her interactions with African American slaves and with Native American communities, revealing her fear and their sense of 'otherness'. When asked in our email correspondence about the use of slurs and whether he felt the need to address them in this work, Alan Louis Smith states:

So what do we do with this information in looking at Mrs. Frink's diary and others' through our own lenses from our own time? One very real option in our world is to follow cancel culture and ban the

³³ 'City of Rocks remains an important place for local tribes. You can respect their culture and history by respecting the land and not collecting artifacts or destroying cultural sites.' 'City of Rocks National Reserve Idaho' <<https://www.nps.gov/ciro/index.htm>> [accessed 19 November 2021].

³⁴ Ellie Kaplan, 'Margaret Frink', <<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/margaret-frink.htm>> [accessed 18 November 2021].

diary and my composition. Speaking for myself, I would support with respect anyone who felt this is the right answer for themselves, though my choice would be different. Better in my opinion would be to leave the diary and the song cycle as it is and use them as springboards for discussion. Imagine a planned performance of the songs that included a panel discussion on the same event and in the same venue that discussed historic perspectives with modern ones. What richness might be gleaned? Who in taking part in such a discussion might find their lives changed for the better and become an advocate for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in new and changed ways?³⁵

Acknowledging that a piece of historical work can contain multitudes, of both beauty and historical significance, along with verbiage and actions that would not be acceptable in today's society, will help a performer to appreciate it, and, ultimately, learn from it. In *The Cambridge History of American Music*, William Brooks discusses the dichotomy that often plagues the sense of what makes anything inherently 'American' and this dialogue can also shape the way a singer approaches this work. Brooks states

Deep in America's dreams, locked in a complex embrace, stand two mythic figures: The Pioneer (inventor, frontiersman, outlaw, tycoon) naked, self-made, indebted to no one, whose accomplishments dwarf his compatriots; and the Citizen anonymous, unremarkable, but with the strength of thousands, shielded by the absolute equality of the polling booth. In their entanglements – sometimes cooperative, sometimes competitive – these figures act out the profound tension between two fundamental ideologies which drive America's politics and culture: individualism and egalitarianism.³⁶

Exploring the different ways Margaret could be portrayed as the 'pioneer' or the 'citizen anonymous' can add more depth to the performance as well. Whether or not the broader effects of her journey were intentional, they do exist.

With this background knowledge, performers can create specific moments throughout their performance that highlight these issues and specific societal expectations of the time. Whether it is a general knowledge of the political atmosphere at the time, or class and gender roles, this

³⁵ Alan Louis Smith, email correspondence, 4 May 2022.

³⁶ William Brooks, *The Cambridge History of American Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 30.

background information will add layers to the performance of *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*. When performing the work, ‘The Sioux Tribe and the “White Squaw”’, it is essential for the performer to imbue the performance with awareness and respect, as the use of traditional Sioux chant calls for it.³⁷ With the piece ‘Upon Them She Depended’, the singer must portray the fear and shock in Margaret’s voice.³⁸ As a woman during this time, this situation is catastrophic. A vocal line from a piece in this work can be interpreted differently, for example, if the woman is interacting with another woman, a child, her husband, or someone she does not know. These subtleties could mean life or death on the trail and will create a multifaceted experience for the audience. Educating audiences on the historical context of a work can increase awareness, create thoughtful discourse and discussion and can help us view the problems we face today with compassion and empathy.

³⁷ See Chapter 4, 80.

³⁸ See Chapter 4, 88.

Chapter Three: Alan Louis Smith's Compositional Style

3.1 Introduction and Biography of Alan Louis Smith

This chapter discusses the background of Alan Louis Smith, personally and professionally, along with his compositional style traits and their implications for performers. Alan Louis Smith was born in 1955 in McAllen, Texas to his parents Dorothy and Raymond Smith. Dorothy was a nurse and teacher and his father, Raymond, was a farmer, who died when he was a young boy.¹ Smith sang at home often with his siblings and his mother was their first piano and music teacher. He continued his lessons at his local church, where the family was very involved, and tried his hand at arranging and composing in high school. He later decided to study piano at Baylor University in Texas.² After pursuing his Bachelors and Masters degrees at Baylor, Smith spent time teaching piano at a local college until he decided to pursue his doctoral degree in collaborative piano with Martin Katz at the University of Michigan.³ This was a major turning point for Smith, as it combined his passion for playing the piano and his other passion of working with singers.

He has gone on to have a successful career as 'One of the United States' most highly regarded figures in the field of collaborative artistry', along with being a gifted teacher and composer.⁴ He currently teaches at the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music and works as a coach with singers at the Tanglewood Institute.⁵ It was at the Tanglewood Institute that he first met his friend and future muse, Stephanie Blythe

¹ Tamara Brook Regensburger, 'Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle', 108.

² Ibid., 111-114.

³ Alan Louis Smith, 'Faculty - Alan L. Smith', <<https://music.usc.edu/alan-l-smith/>> [accessed 24 March 2020].

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Smith, 'Faculty - Alan L. Smith', <<https://music.usc.edu/alan-l-smith/>> [accessed 24 March 2020].

3.2 Stephanie Blythe and *Vignettes: Ellis Island*

Stephanie Blythe is a world-renowned, American mezzo-soprano who performs in operas and recitals in major venues across the globe and ‘is considered to be one of the most highly respected and critically acclaimed artists of her generation.’⁶ Originally from Mongaup Valley, New York, she was, in her own words, ‘the daughter of a jazz-musician father and a mother who “couldn’t carry a tune”’.⁷ F. Paul Driscoll has described Blythe as

One of the most interesting and accomplished singers of her generation, able to adapt her voice and personality to a wide range of characters and musical styles. Her instrument is gorgeous – sunny in texture, generous in scope, noble in feeling – and her technique rock-solid, but in a mezzo-rich marketplace (Blythe herself has termed it “the mezzo glut”), what sets her apart is her particular brand of wit and intelligence. Blythe’s brains are evident not only onstage (in her surgically precise comic timing, for example) but off, in her unerring ability to choose the correct role at the correct time.⁸

Smith and Blythe established a working relationship while she was studying in the summer programme at the Tanglewood Institute as a young artist and continued to stay in touch, exchanging letters and working together on various projects. Notably, the two have developed a week-long song workshop for young singers called the Fall Island Vocal Arts seminar.⁹ Anthony Tommasini notes ‘It is tempting to focus on Ms. Blythe’s vocal technique for clues to her versatility. But the authority of her work also comes from keen dramatic instincts and sensitivity to language, not just in opera but in song.’¹⁰

⁶ Opus 3 Artists, ‘Stephanie Blythe’, <https://www.opus3artists.com/artists/stephanie-blythe/?fbclid=IwAR1Umt5f4LWWNFRYScp3AkM8o_l06n_afS2ej4ixtm5_89fwV9iKHBW2xwA> [accessed 19 November 2021].

⁷ F. Paul Driscoll, ‘Blythe in Bloom’, *Opera News*, 65 (2001), 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹ Video of Stephanie Blythe and Alan Louis Smith describing the annual week long vocal programme they established together called the Fall Island Vocal Arts Seminar at the Crane School of Music in Potsdam, NY. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBceXRubPeI>> [accessed 11 May 2022].

¹⁰ Anthony Tommasini, ‘A Future So Bright It Can Handle Dark’, *New York Times*, 17 February 2008.

Smith has written two song cycles for Stephanie Blythe - the first is *Vignettes: Ellis Island, a song cycle in Six parts for Voice and Piano (2000)*. The origins or beginnings of the cycle are quite unique and involve three key players: Composer, Curator, and Muse. While on a trip to New York in 1997, Smith's friend and fellow pianist Todd Sisley arranged a trip to Ellis Island to meet oral historian Paul Sigrist.¹¹ Paul Sigrist pioneered a project where he located immigrants that had been processed in Ellis Island and interviewed them about their experiences. Sigrist later sent Smith excerpts from the interviews that he thought Smith could set to music. At the beginning of June 1999, Smith took the excerpts out and decided to set them to music as a birthday gift for Stephanie Blythe.

Smith goes on to say 'When I write for Stephanie, I described it once as a comparison of one of those giant boxes of Crayolas to the smallest box they make, twelve crayons. I want to write with every color imaginable for her.'¹² By laying strips of paper around his room with the various texts, Smith started to find shape and an overall story line among the different voices. The project started out as a single song and Smith continued composing to create a 40-minute cycle. It only took him one week to compose this work.¹³ The cycle premiered at the University of Southern California with Stephanie Blythe and Alan Louis Smith as the pianist on 24 February 2000. This initial collaboration with Stephanie Blythe has led to more opportunities, as Smith states,

The premiere of the work was at USC with me playing but the Lincoln Centre was with Warren Jones.

That performance of the opening night of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Centre was the season opening concert, and Stephanie and Warren were the entire second half [of the program]. It was an

¹¹ Regensburger, 'Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle', 135.

¹² Margo Garrett, 'Alan Louis Smith: Master Collaborative Pianist and Professor on How Composing Enlarges Him as a Performer and Teacher', *Journal of Singing*, 76 (2020), 343.

¹³ Regensburger, 'Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle', 135-137.

advertisement or a precursor to the premier of *Covered Wagon Woman* in January. That was a joint commission for both Stephanie and Warren. Not just for Stephanie, for both of them.¹⁴

3.3 Origins of *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*

Their collaborative relationship has grown and expanded and includes a second cycle and the focus of this thesis, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman, for Mezzo-Soprano, Violin, Cello, and Piano (2008)*. Smith and Warren Jones had also met at the Tanglewood festival ‘in the late 80s [or] early 90s’, and Smith composed *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman* with Jones in mind. Smith describes this process and states

Having received the commission from Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Centre, I began to open myself up to the words I might set. For me, ALL begins with and comes out of the words. The commission, other than including Stephanie and Warren, was left up to me as far as the make-up of the ensemble, the subject matter, and the length of the composition. The only request was that the ensemble be larger than just voice and piano. That freedom was both freeing and daunting. I had faith that the right creative sparks would reveal themselves and they did.¹⁵

Smith’s selection of texts for his compositions is an emotional approach. As he was majorly influenced as a musician by his upbringing in his Southern Baptist church, he cites this as where he was first introduced to music and found a passion for text.¹⁶ This has carried on into his own writing as one of the main tenets of his compositional style is his service to the text. Smith recognizes this in his upbringing and notes

I really started with arranging and I found this very gratifying. Also, growing up in a Southern Baptist conservative religion like that, I learned of the power of words combined with the power of music. It had a very powerful moving force in my life ... But the magic and the power of words and music are the same. Maybe it doesn’t have a religious overtone to songs by Fauré or Schubert, but the idea is there, and that’s significant to my upbringing.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., 141.

¹⁵ Alan Louis Smith, email correspondence, 4 May 2022.

¹⁶ Regensburger, ‘Alan Louis Smith’s *Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle*’, 109.

¹⁷ Ibid., 113.

Smith's dedication to the text creates contrast and drama for the listener and enhances the overall effectiveness of the work. While perusing an independent book store near the location of the Tanglewood Music Centre in Massachusetts, Smith purchased 'one of the eleven volumes of women's diaries that would occupy my creative life for more than a year ... a fire was kindled.'¹⁸ Smith's interest in text and storytelling inspired him to search out more detailed accounts and diaries. Smith states

I was not attracted most strongly by the time period, but by the power and courage of those remarkable women. They could have come from any time period. I come from a family of humble, courageous, strong women and Margaret Frink feels like she could be one of them. As I read the many diaries I was drawn into that world and of that time of mass migration and its concomitant effects on indigenous people.¹⁹

Smith has taken a keen interest in stories of people on the precipice of great change and large moments in history, such as the *Vignettes: Ellis Island*, and his song cycle, *Vignettes: Letters from George to Evelyn (World War II) for Soprano*. After finding this first book of diaries, he continued with his research of pioneer women. Smith notes

The largest assembled body of collected work was the eleven-volume collection from University of Nebraska Press, *Covered Wagon Women*, edited and compiled by Kenneth L. Holmes. I ordered the other ten volumes of diaries. My original intention was to use the voices of many women, echoing the process I had followed in *Vignettes: Ellis Island*. In reading the eleven volumes I used many Post-It notes to mark pertinent pages as well as much underlining in pencil of emotive passages along with notes to myself in the page margins. Mrs. Frink, because of her wonderful writing and the completeness of her story from beginning to end, kept standing out in my imagination.²⁰

As with *Vignettes: Ellis Island*, his focus on the text and the remarkable bravery and story telling that is present in these first-hand accounts is common with most of his compositions, as that is where the process begins for him as a composer and coach.²¹ Creating a journey for

¹⁸ Smith, email correspondence, 4 May 2022.

¹⁹ Smith, email correspondence, 4 May 2022.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Margo Garrett, 'Alan Louis Smith: Master Collaborative Pianist and Professor on How Composing Enlarges Him as a Performer and Teacher', 344.

the listener and finding a through story line for the entirety of the piece was no small feat.

Smith states

Once I switched my thinking to use only her diary as the source, the scope of the words to be set fell into place fittingly. I began to feel as though I knew her. Then the task of paring down a full and amazing diary (114 printed pages) into song texts followed. I followed my instinct to narrow the texts to ones I found to be the most powerfully emotive, believing that immediacy of feeling would translate best into a musical work which would be encountered by listeners. There was much about her journey which had to be left out of my composition, of course, but anyone who wants to enrich themselves can read her diary for themselves and I strongly encourage it.²²

Smith tends to select texts based on his own instinct and what he feels creates the most emotive storytelling. As he was reading this diary, these particular passages jumped out at him as the most emotive and powerful. They also create a through story line and reveal Margaret's essence. As performers, reading the diary in its entirety can enhance the storytelling of Margaret's journey, and inspire other vocal colours and stylistic choices. The background work and research is often where a performer can find nuance and unique emotive qualities. With his unique selections, he is able to not only tell the stories of the individuals involved, but also highlight other narratives and important details in history.

3.4 Smith's Compositional Style Traits

Composing for Stephanie Blythe

Smith has taken voice lessons and worked with singers throughout his vast career as a collaborative pianist and this experience has helped him to be able to compose for the voice.

Smith notes

²² Smith, email correspondence, 4 May 2022.

This is really a significant aspect of my composing: I almost always write for a person that I know, for a voice that I know well, for a spirit I know well and usually for someone that I love a lot; ... like Stephanie Blythe ... So I don't just compose theoretically.²³

Working closely with Stephanie has helped him tailor the song cycles to her strengths as a singer and their close friendship has enhanced the collaborative process. Smith states

Now, knowing that love for the person for whom I am writing is the most important thing to me, when I coach others' music, whether Schubert or Juliana Hall, I always think, "For whom was this written? What was that relationship like between composer and dedicatee?" It makes it a richer experience for me as a coach.²⁴

Stephanie Blythe has cultivated her skills for the coloratura works of Handel, larger Wagnerian roles and more dramatic characters. She has many different colours available in her vocal arsenal. Smith makes sure he acknowledges her vocal challenges, such as avoiding her passaggio at the top of the staff and giving her time to rest in the cycle. In *Vignettes: Ellis Island* and *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, he employs plenty of legato singing in her middle voice, accented by light passages of coloratura and staccato singing. She is first and foremost a storyteller. Smith recognizes Blythe's strengths and states

Below the top passaggio and down is like a gem for her, a total playground, she can do anything in that range. But she also has a glorious high range and I wanted to give her a few high notes for her to show that off. So I wrote a few high notes. Another thing is that she's a great Handelian. She has great runs.²⁵

These particular parameters are something for a singer of this work to be aware of, as it pertains to their particular abilities as a vocalist and challenges they may come across in the work.

²³ Regensburger, 'Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle', 147.

²⁴ Garrett, 'Alan Louis Smith: Master Collaborative Pianist and Professor on How Composing Enlarges Him as a Performer and Teacher', 343.

²⁵ Regensburger, 'Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle', 114.

Text Setting and Text Painting

Smith's compositional choices in terms of meter and key are all in service to creating the soundscape that best illuminates the text. Text painting is a major hallmark of his style. Some examples of text painting in *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman* include setting the text 'the air was getting lighter at ev'ry step' with a quiet and wandering passage with 'complex intervallic movement'.²⁶ Smith states

The stress and non-stress of the English is very, very important to me. And it needs to be clear, but I do find that from time to time, in a 30 minute cycle for instance, maybe in two or three or four places I'll set the words a little bit so that the stress is not ... so that it works against the words sometimes, because I find that it perks up the brain of the listener just a little bit.²⁷

These creative and unexpected changes in his vocal lines create excitement for the listener, whether that is with rhythm, articulation or tonality. Playfulness and flexibility are needed to achieve the most dramatic effect with the contrasting pieces he composes.

Smith utilizes the entirety of a mezzo-soprano's range and colour in his writing. Sharon Mabry writes

Several hundred years of music history had brought forth five basic approaches to vocalization: bel canto (a lyrical, legato-smooth vocal line'; coloratura (florid music that emphasizes agility and flexibility); declamatory (a style that stresses extreme ranges of dynamics, pitch, and vocal color); recitative (a declamatory style that focuses on the delivery of a text within a limited vocal range); and folk song styles (based on naturalness, clarity and simplicity, with little or no use of vibrato).²⁸

Throughout this song cycle, the singer is expected to channel all five of these singing styles at different points, and these stylistic choices aim to bring the story and the text to life. The ensemble needs to take personal responsibility throughout the work to create the correct effect

²⁶ Sharon Mabry, *Exploring Twentieth-Century Vocal Music: A Practical Guide to Innovations in Performance and Repertoire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 29.

See Appendix B, Recording Track 10.

²⁷ Regensburger, 'Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle' (DMA dissertation, Ohio State University, 2009), 116.

²⁸ Sharon Mabry, *Exploring Twentieth-Century Vocal Music: A Practical Guide to Innovations in Performance and Repertoire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 122.

for each piece.²⁹ Taking ownership of each line and finding the hidden themes and images is very important, as each member of the ensemble has a moment to shine and lead the work.

Smith notes

From time to time the strings represent pictorial ideas such as running buffalo, the braying of mules, or the back-and-forth motion of rocking chairs; at those times their musical illustration is absolutely equal in importance.³⁰

This awareness from all members of the ensemble can create a unified vision for each individual piece, along with a clear concept throughout the entirety of the work.

Playfulness and flexibility are key among all of the musicians looking to perform this work.

Smith states

The commission was broad and left the final choices up to me. I have written for both violin and cello (as well as viola), including vocal works which include these instruments one at a time (Ex: voice, cello, piano) and I felt that combination of piano trio and voice would be just the right combination for the range of storytelling and range of colors. Also, the ensemble would be intimate enough to create a wonderful sense for each participant in the piece to feel powerfully involved in the storytelling.³¹

It is of the utmost importance that the instrumentalists, as well as the singer, feel empowered to take risks in terms of storytelling and ownership of their respective parts to create the most effective and layered performance for the audience of this particular work. With service to the text and a passion for creating the images Smith intends in the music, the ensemble can create an exciting and unique experience.

Compositional Influences: Barber, Copland, and Ives

Smith's compositional style has many different influences and he has remarked in the past on how his writing has evolved to find his own sound. When he first started arranging and composing, he felt he 'overcomposed', and it was taking away from the expression and clarity

²⁹ Smith, email correspondence, 4 May 2022.

³⁰ Alan Louis Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850* (Fayetteville, AR: Classical Vocal Reprints, 2008), v.

³¹ Smith, email correspondence, 4 May 2022.

of the text.³² This evolution has led his composing to focus on the text and the soundscape surrounding it to enhance the storytelling for the listener. Aurally, his musical soundscape is heavily influenced by twentieth century American music and melodies. Smith notes his passion for Samuel Barber and states

I'll tell you, Samuel Barber songs I just adore, as someone who writes in American English. Aaron Copland [sic], also ... Samuel Barber, I just think, has such an ability to capture the overall color of a poem and then to set the words just specifically and a voice exactly where you need it and the piano accompaniments are so beautiful. Copland[sic], similarly, like in the Dickinson songs, he has the same gift.³³

Smith's American compositional influences show up in patterns in his own composition. With Samuel Barber's style of writing, Martha Elliot notes

We don't really need to find a new style in order to sing it. In fact, the approach we use could be called the prevailing "modern" style of singing: it is based on nineteenth-century traditions, but with more faithful adherence to the details in the score and with fewer wild tempo fluctuations, rubato, and portamento. This approach is, however, still rich, flexible, and expressive.³⁴

This modern style, that lacks the traditional structures of key and meter, is a major tenet of Smith's composing, as it has the flexibility of modern composition while still being accessible and expressive. The moments of simplicity and beautiful melodies in Smith's works are influenced by Aaron Copland, and Elliot states that Copland

Criticized the emotional excesses of some Romantic composers but didn't approve of the overly intellectual approach of many modern composers. Copland wanted performances of his works to be expressive yet not overly sentimental, and he preferred simple, straightforward playing without excessive vibrato.³⁵

³² Regensburger, 'Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle', 120.

³³ Ibid., 115.

³⁴ Martha Elliot, *Singing in Style* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 284.

³⁵ Ibid., 281.

Finally, with Smith's other major influence, Charles Ives, there are many similarities in their background. They both grew up surrounded by church music and challenge their listeners with 'musical experimentation' that never abandons the beauty of traditional hymns.³⁶

Throughout Smith's song cycles, he manages to find tranquil and quiet moments of release for both the singer and listener, for example, no. 5 in *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, 'The Face of the Earth'.³⁷

Another major tenet of American composition in general is the use of musical quotation and borrowing from different genres. Keith Clifton notes

A concurrent and overlooked trend during the same period has been the growth of quotation music. Unlike earlier composers, chiefly Ives, who borrowed American popular and sacred tunes, recent composers often use European classical music, and opera in particular, as source material.³⁸

Smith has utilised this in his other works, quoting the song 'Beautiful Dreamer' by Stephen Foster in a nostalgic piece called 'Martha' in *Vignettes: Ellis Island*, along with jazz and musical theatre stylistic choices.³⁹ Smith states

When I wrote *Vignettes: Ellis Island*, it was an important turning point in my composing because it was no longer Germanic sounding. I wanted to have a popular, Tin Pan Alley kind of sound in some of it, for the immigrants coming into Ellis Island would have had that sound in their ears. The songs of *Ellis Island* which are not of Tin Pan Alley are much more streamlined and based on chordal-quintal harmony, as opposed to tertial harmony in which I had always written before. Ned Rorem uses much chordal-quintal harmony and is one of the things I love most about his music.⁴⁰

With the cycle *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, Smith utilises quotation of a Native American flute melody in 'The Sioux Tribe and the "White Squaw"', and draws from other

³⁶ Ibid., 279.

³⁷ See Appendix B, Recording Track 5.

³⁸ Keith E. Clifton, "'Yes, it's a brilliant tune'": Quotation in Contemporary American Art Song', *Journal of Singing*, 72 (2016), 280.

³⁹ Alan Louis Smith, *Vignettes: Ellis Island a song cycle in six parts* (Fayetteville, AR: Classical Vocal Reprints, 1999), 43-45.

⁴⁰ Garrett, 'Alan Louis Smith: Master Collaborative Pianist and Professor on How Composing Enlarges Him as a Performer and Teacher', 346.

musical styles such as a ‘boisterous waltz’ in the piece ‘There’s a Lady’ and musical theatre style choices in the dramatic piece, ‘Here We Are’.⁴¹

Smith took on the quotation of Native American song and his other artistic choices with great respect, as he also spent time researching the background of each musical culture. On the quotation of Native American music by Ives, Charles Hiroshi Garret notes

Both in this excerpt and in his subsequent discussion about using Native American musical material, Ives advises composers to pay closest attention to the “spirit” of a given type of music. Generally speaking, he states that integrating any type of music is permissible as long as the composer “is confident that they have a part in his spiritual consciousness.”⁴²

Smith stays true to the qualities imbued in the traditional Native American melody, as he has the cello play on harmonics to imitate the traditional wooden flute. These harmonics create a hallow sound in the cello and changes the soundscape that has been occurring throughout the rest of the song cycle. Smith takes the melody and keeps true to its ‘spirit’ on a western instrument, taking his compositional cues from Ives, Copland, and Barber.

Lack of Key Signatures and use of Accidentals

Another element that a listener may not be aware of, but is a major factor that affects the artists involved in performance of this work, is Smith’s use of accidentals in lieu of key signatures. Each piece contains a tonal centre, but Smith’s playful writing engages the listener by wandering off the centre of the key to keep the work interesting. This freedom from key signatures is in service to the expression of the text. On the page, the music can appear a bit chaotic, with accidentals sometimes crowding the line and making the pitch appear higher or lower than it truly is. The use of a C flat is particularly tricky to decipher for a singer. To perform these works most effectively, vocal flexibility and stamina and a strong ear from the singer are required to be able to focus on characterisation and musicality.

⁴¹ See Appendix B, Recording Tracks 7, 3, and 12.

⁴² Garrett, *Struggling to Define a Nation: American Music*, 39.

The pianist can help to aid in the grounding of these pieces by giving the singer and instrumentalists chordal harmonies to establish harmonic context early on in rehearsals. Smith attests this preference to complete freedom of expression for his composing as he has previously stated ‘Now I am more willing and ready to not put a key signature at all and just put in the accidentals in whatever measure that it calls for, because it allows me the freedom of going anywhere I want to tonally.’⁴³

Lack of Bar Lines and Changes in Meter

Textual freedom and expression is also visible on the page with Smith’s writing in regard to his meter markings and bar lines. Smith states

Something I did in *Vignettes* [Ellis Island] that I actually I borrowed from [Samuel] Barber, for instance in *Hermit Songs*, there are no meter signatures. I found that also very freeing. I’m not rabid about that, the no time signature, because time signatures are very helpful (so are key signatures), but I have found by omitting time signatures altogether and switching from 6/8 to 7/8, 3/4 or whatever, that two things happen: One is that there is no time signature that bunches up at the bar line and makes you think that “oh this is a new thing”. It’s like; if notes are cows then you remove the fences and the cows can go wherever they want.⁴⁴

Aurally, the pieces are simple enough to decipher, and the sole purpose of the changes in meter is to align with the natural emphasis of the text. It is important for the singer and instrumentalists to create seamless transitions, while being aware of the different strong beats in a piece. By analysing and speaking the text, the singer can prepare for the natural emphasis that Smith is hoping to create. A way to make sure the changes are easy to see is marking each change in meter in the score so the mind can properly prepare for a shift.

⁴³ Regensburger, ‘Alan Louis Smith’s *Vignettes*: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle’, 117.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

Use of Articulations and Markings

Throughout the work, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, Smith generously employs articulations and markings in specific ways. Each marking implies a different colour or articulation for the voice and, to perform the work to its highest expressive potential, these markings must be noted and executed. It is up to the performers to interpret many of the markings, as there are often many different markings in one phrase, such as a tenuto line, a tenuto marked ‘ten.’, tenuto with staccato, or a tenuto with accent. All of these markings can bring about unique ways to play with the text, the ensemble texture and colour of the voice. Utilising a different colour or inflection for each articulation, along with distinct ways to mark the score, can establish an idea of the many ways to differentiate each sound. Smith utilises less traditional tempo instructions at the start of each piece, giving the singer and ensemble room for interpretation and playfulness. These different instructions include:

‘With energy and a positive spirit’, ‘Quick and kicky’, ‘gossiping in an unflattering tone’, ‘amazed and consternated’, ‘almost sobbing’, ‘terrified’, ‘exultant’, ‘warmly and expressively’, ‘not dragging’, ‘waltz like’, ‘faster with sweep’, ‘free recitative’, ‘murmuring and just barely audible’, ‘with awe and satisfaction’, ‘leisurely rocking’, and ‘Quicker and with a sense of humour’.⁴⁵

Use of the Golden Mean and Musical Themes

Alan Louis Smith’s *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, contains many points of reference in terms of structure and themes. When composing *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, Smith discovered the climax of the cycle occurs at the piece, ‘The Mountain’ as it ‘arrives at the point of the Golden Mean and builds in intensity in the same way that Mrs. Frink describes the fierce exertion of humans and animals in reaching the top of the mountain.’⁴⁶ Tamara Brooks Regensburger explains

⁴⁵ Alan Louis Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850* (Fayetteville, AR: Classical Vocal Reprints, 2008).

⁴⁶ Alan Louis Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850*, vi.

The Golden Ratio [also known as the golden mean] is a mathematical occurrence that establishes ideal proportions for an object in nature, whereas the regularity of the intervallic sequence creates a pattern which defines a standard for aesthetic perfection. In nature, these mathematics are translated into swirl patterns which can be witnessed in flowers, sea shells, hurricanes or galaxies ... A trend among twentieth century composers was to design an architecture plan for their compositions that set the climax at the point of the Golden Mean.⁴⁷

Smith instinctively followed this structure and states

The arc revealed itself in the process of writing. I think that the point of the golden mean is in my musical DNA due to performing and teaching so many pieces that follow that arc. For me everything springs from the words.⁴⁸

Planning is key for any performer of this work, as the largest and longest song is the tenth in the cycle. Pacing vocally, so the singer has room to grow and time to rest, is paramount in performance.

The different themes that come about throughout the score are referred to in this thesis as the 'Hopeful A' motive, the 'Mr. and Mrs. Frink Duet', and the 'Nostalgia Theme'.⁴⁹ These different musical themes can act as mental goal posts throughout the cycle for the singer and listener. It is important to bring these themes out of the overall musical texture, as they tie all the different pieces together and can create a nostalgic and ethereal effect for the audience. A way to identify and ensure each passage is brought out clearly is to highlight each theme that occurs in any instrumental or vocal line throughout the music.

⁴⁷ Regensburger, 'Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle', 45-46.

⁴⁸ Alan Louis Smith, email correspondence, 4 May 2022.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 4, 59.

See Chapter 4, 60.

See Chapter 4, 103.

3.5 Context and Conclusion

When composing song cycles specifically, Smith notes that he pays extra attention to contrast from song to song and has previously stated

I want there to be contrast, in dynamics, in tempo, so then an audience is having some sort of journey. Making a song cycle for me is kind of like planning a meal, you want salad, you want meat, you want carbs, and you want something really good for dessert. So I think of that while I'm planning it. So for example in the latest song cycle, *Covered Wagon Woman* I was very aware of contrast from piece to piece.⁵⁰

This contrast takes careful planning from performers, as it takes intense focus and pacing to achieve the highs and lows presented throughout the work. Physically, the extreme changes in tempo need to be regulated and rehearsed. Knowledge of the historical background and a keen awareness of Smith's style are very important contexts for the performers when learning this work, as Smith's writing, with its lack of key and time signatures, unexpected harmonic progressions and quick transitions between characters and mood make it a challenge. Vocally, the work is long and varied in terms of musical markings. Planning the different characters and styles throughout is paramount for the singer to be successful and sing with control and finesse.

Alan Louis Smith acknowledges his American compositional influences and also carves out his own signature style. His historically significant works hearken to the past, while he composes with a fresh and interesting outlook. Clifton notes this dichotomy and states

American art song composers also have explored the tension between old and new, gradually moving the genre beyond its folk origins to embrace contemporary techniques, modern poetry, and broader experimentation.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Regensburger, 'Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle', 123.

⁵¹ Clifton, "'Yes, it's a brilliant tune'": Quotation in Contemporary American Art Song', 279.

While tackling these broader topics in history, Smith's storytelling reflects on a concept that many Americans feel. Thomas Hampson notes

This continued self-examining is indicative of a far greater collective experience we call the American experiment: i.e., the challenge of existence of the one among many; the tolerance of the specific in the context of the greater good; the obsessive love/hate dialogue with form, whether political, social, religious, or musical; the confusing preoccupation with "art" versus "popular" as concepts; and certainly, above all, the persistent longing to define "it" as "American".⁵²

It is important to bring attention to all of the works of Alan Louis Smith so they will be performed more often and given the recognition they deserve. Acknowledging his writings' inherent beauty and complexity, along with the difficult vocal passages it possesses will set up any singer for success when setting out to perform this work. Knowledge of his stylistic choices when learning this music will help singers to perform this work to the best of their ability, and acknowledging his influences will help to find nuance. This context empowers performers so that they can create a more layered performance, which will inspire audiences to empathize with these powerful stories.

⁵² Thomas Hampson, 'Forward' in Victoria Etnier Villamill, *A singer's guide to the American art song, 1870-1980* (Metuchen, N.J. & London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1993), ix.

Chapter Four: Musical Analysis and Implications for Performers

4.1 Introduction

Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman exemplifies Smith's key stylistic compositional traits.¹

Each piece displays a facet of his compositional style and the vast cycle gives the listener great contrast and drama. With all the necessary background research and analysis in place, it is important for the performers of this work to understand and prepare for the necessary physical and musical difficulties of the piece. In terms of implications for performers, the various colours, articulations and fast paced changes in this work create challenges. In this chapter, each piece will be outlined from its basic structure, to the stylistic traits of Smiths that it possesses, and the various challenges and implications for performers for the ensemble and singer with knowledge I have gained from my own performance of the work. Included in the supporting materials of this thesis is a recording of my own performance of the work, which was awarded a passing mark for a Doctor in Music Performance examination at the Royal Irish Academy of Music on 6 May 2022.²

4.2 Analysis and Implications for Performers

1. The Allure of the West (Instrumental)

Date: N/A

Tempo and Time: ♩ = ca. 60, Andante

Key: None

Vocal Range: N/A

Text: N/A

The opening piece of the cycle has no text or vocal line and acts as an introduction to the soundscape of the rest of the work. Written for piano, violin and cello, the piece effortlessly introduces the listener to the main themes, colours and characters personified by the different instruments.

¹ See Chapter 3, 45-55.

² See Appendix B.

Alan Louis Smith describes one of the main themes that occur throughout the work which is referred to in this thesis as the ‘Hopeful A’ motive and states

One other important aural landmark that recurs frequently throughout the set of songs is heard in the very opening in the piano part. It is a shimmering chord in close harmony with added chord tones at the intervals of a ninth and an eleventh. The chord vibrates with harmonic possibility, just as the Frinks’ hearts and minds must have vibrated with possibility for what was ahead of them in their journey. The chord is arpeggiated in the very opening, but even when it is played as a block chord, as it is at many places in the cycle, it is luminescent like the shimmering allure of gold.³

These chords in the piano, referred to as the ‘Hopeful A’ chord, vary slightly in pitch, but continue in the same bright colour and are reminiscent of gold reflecting the light as seen in Example 1. Starting *pianissimo*, Smith is very particular about the expressive devices that he uses, whether that is a simple crescendo and decrescendo, or the particular groupings of 9 or 10 in the rolled chords in the piano. The pianist needs to be made aware of the background of the work to accurately execute the shimmering gold quality wanted in the chords.⁴

³ Alan Louis Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850* (Fayetteville, AR: Classical Vocal Reprints, 2008), v-vi.

⁴ See Appendix B, Recording Track 1.

Example 1: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 1 ‘The Allure of the West’, bars 1-2

The Allure of the West

The musical score is for the piece 'The Allure of the West' by Alan Louis Smith. It consists of four staves: Mezzo-Soprano, Violin, Cello, and Piano. The tempo is marked 'Andante' with a metronome marking of approximately 60 (ca. 60). The dynamics are marked 'pp' (pianissimo) for all instruments. The Mezzo-Soprano, Violin, and Cello parts are mostly silent in the first two bars, indicated by a horizontal line with a fermata. The Piano part is active, featuring a complex arpeggiated chord in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The piano part includes a 'Ped.' (pedal) marking at the end of each bar.

These chords also act as an aural goal post for the listener to find throughout the entirety of the work and these rolled chords continue in a similar fashion in the piano throughout this first piece. The warm cello then enters at bar 5, also *pianissimo*, and introduces another theme that can be heard throughout the work, referred in this thesis as the ‘Mr and Mrs Frink Duet’ which is shown in Example 2. Judith Carman notes this theme and states ‘The opening cello melody begins with the rising major sixth, as though taking a long look into the western distance. The violin takes its version of the melody high in the treble over the repeated arpeggiated chord in the piano.’⁵

⁵ Judith Carman, Review: *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman: From the Daily Journal of Margaret Alsip Frink, 1850* by Alan Louis Smith, *Journal of Singing* (2012), 603.

Example 2: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 1 ‘The Allure of the West’, bars 5-8

The violin enters an octave above the cello and this lilting legato musical passage is then passed to and embellished by the violin at a high tessitura. This opening movement acts as a sort of musical appetiser, transporting the listener away to a different time and place. A key aspect of Smith’s writing is his imagination, and how he plays with the rhythm, tonal centre, and articulations to express the true emotions these people were feeling. He states in the score notes that the cello often represents ‘Mr. Frink’s inner thoughts and feelings ... [and] the violin part most often represents the inner thoughts and feelings of Mrs. Frink. Since she is speaking (or singing) much of the time, the commentary of the violin part on her inner thoughts is not copious.’⁶ As the violin represents Margaret, the bright shining timbre is important to differentiate from the warmer and darker timber of the cello, which is

⁶ Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850*, v.

representative of Mr Frink. At bar 14, after sustained notes that represent the open horizon, the violin mimics the cello's 'Mr and Mrs Frink Duet'.⁷ This passing of the theme creates a dialogue or introduction to the two central characters and it is important for the strings to take on the characterisations of their line. At bar 17, the rolled and glistening chords of the piano stop, as the violin descends to a lower tessitura, and engages in a short interaction in thirds with the cello on the opening theme, until the lone cello part descends to a sustained F# that carries directly into the next piece.

The instrumentalists need to be aware of these characterisations and what is happening contextually in the diary to achieve the appropriate sound. I discussed these various themes and characterisations with my pianist, cellist and violinist throughout our collaborative and rehearsal process. Each part was imbued with the specific qualities Smith was looking for, along with the artistic expression of each player. The cello is often the warm, voice of reason of Mr Frink, with random outbursts when he is nervous or upset. The high flying violin needs to carry a brighter and more piercing tone, as Margaret would have stood out as a woman on the trail. She never hesitated to make herself heard to the rest of the travelling party and has a strong voice. The collaboration between the strings is important, as they will be responding to one another and alternating the different musical themes throughout the piece.

Another aspect of Smith's writing style that is present in this piece is the lack of key signature and his frequent use of accidentals. Smith enjoys the freedom that this method of writing gives him, as there is no limitation to where he can take the sound. The instrumentalists will require preparation to execute the various pitches that are not traditionally marked along with the required colours for the characters. As the end of the piece immediately follows into the next song, 'Prologue to the Journal', the singer needs to be present throughout the first piece, showing the hope and fear for the long journey in her body and on her face. It is important for

⁷ See Appendix B, Recording Track 1.

the singer to be prepared to immediately begin the next piece , ‘Prologue to the Journal’ , as there is no break between songs.

2. ‘Prologue to the Journal’

Date and Location: (1897) Oakland, California

Tempo Markings: ♩ = ca. 80 ‘With energy and a positive spirit’

Key: None

Vocal Range: a – c#"

Text: ‘ ... We knew nothing of frontier life, nor how to prepare for it. And besides, we were met with all the discouragements and obstructions that our neighbours and the people of our county could invent or imagine, to induce us not to attempt such a perilous journey. But, nothing daunted, we kept at work in our preparations for the trip.’ ... ‘We bade farewell to all our relatives, friends, neighbours, and acquaintances. ... ‘It was a beautiful spring day. Our faces were now at last set westward.’⁸

The ‘Prologue to the Journal’ begins immediately following the opening piece, with the cello holding an F# over the bar line from the previous piece, ‘The Allure of the West’. The opening ‘Hopeful A’ chord motive from the piano needs to feel like a springboard for the voice to come in as directed with the musical markings, ‘with energy and a positive spirit’. The text of the ‘Prologue to the Journal’ was written after the Frinks arrived in Oakland, California in 1897.⁹ Margaret is able to look back on their preparations for their journey and reflect on how little she knew before leaving. This requires the singer to imbue this piece with wisdom and excitement.

The vocal line rests in the middle voice from the pitches a to c#" , with a declamatory tone as the opening lines are mostly unaccompanied at the beginning of the piece. Smith’s writing often includes text painting to better express what is happening emotionally for a character. Judith Carman notes in her review of the work that ‘The vocal line throughout the work is set syllabically, except for a few rapid melismas used for tone painting, and fits the word stress

⁸ Margaret Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, (Ledyard Frink, 1897), published with permission by Kenneth Holmes 1996, 63-66.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

perfectly.’¹⁰ This declamatory style is shown in Example 3. With changes in meter and specific use of triplets and expressive markings, the voice does not stay in the same place for very long. This is also marked by Smith’s use of dotted rhythms and an arpeggiated vocal line that demonstrates Margaret’s nerves during her preparations. With a great awareness of the wandering tonality and frequent use of accidentals, all the dotted tenutos and changes in rhythm, the singer can create a beautiful legato line and an effortless sound, without losing the nervous energy that Margaret is expressing. In my own performance, listen for the variety of articulations that are employed, without losing the clarity of the text.¹¹ As the voice grows and crescendos, the strings and piano can also take the dynamics up to the next level, as long as they are aware of the singer and do not hinder their text or vocal line.

Example 3: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 2 ‘Prologue to the Journal’, bar 34

The image shows a musical score for bar 34. It consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Mezzo-soprano (Mez.) voice, with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The vocal line is marked 'Free recitative' and includes a triplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are: 'We bade fare-well to all our rel - a tives, friends, neigh-bors, and ac-quain-tan-ces.' The middle staff is for the Violoncello (Vlc.), with a bass clef and a 4/4 time signature. It is marked 'Free recitative' and 'pizz.' (pizzicato). The bottom staff is for the Piano (Pno.), with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a 4/4 time signature. It is also marked 'Free recitative'. A horizontal line is drawn below the piano staff.

After Margaret says goodbye to everyone she knows, the piece becomes fuller in the accompaniment at bar 35. The vocal line uses a recitative style throughout this piece, with pizzicatos in the cello and the variations of the sparkling rolled chord in the piano as the

¹⁰ Carman, Review: *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman: From the Daily Journal of Margaret Alsip Frink, 1850* by Alan Louis Smith, 604.

¹¹ See Appendix B, Recording Track 2.

accompaniment. Smith includes a short interlude beginning with the 'Hopeful A' motive in the piano, followed by a passage that is alternated between the violin and cello. The piece gradually slows to the end and the voice expands to a legato line with crochet rhythms to mimic the open road and broad horizon ahead of them.

The singer must show this excitement in facial expressions and movement, and can also create another layer to the performance by portraying Margaret reflecting on her experiences. I achieved this with a sense of excitement in the body, and reflection on my face, especially when Smith brings out the 'Mr and Mrs Frink Duet' from the opening of 'The Allure of the West', and ends with warm open 5th chords in the piano accompaniment, which is nostalgic in tone and demonstrates the open and unknown aspects of their upcoming journey.

As is typical of Smith's writing, he chooses to use accidentals in lieu of a key or time signature, so the singer needs to create a sense of ease and flexibility as the piece wanders harmonically and rhythmically. The recitative feel of this piece also requires clear diction from the singer throughout her middle voice, as this is the audience's introduction to Margaret's story. In preparations for my own performance, speaking the text in rhythm and without rhythm helped in finding the correct emphasis and a natural sense of production.¹² Various colours and emotions must be demonstrated with the voice such as excitement for the adventure, fear of the unknown and sadness leaving her family and friends behind. These colours can be achieved with different inflection of the text, vocal dynamic, or vocal production. As demonstrated with my own performance of the piece, I chose a quieter dynamic and took time for breaths and pauses throughout the recitative sections, such as in Example 3. These unaccompanied passages require clear text from the singer and finesse from

¹² See Appendix B, Recording Track 2.

the ensemble as they start to play again together. This quieter dynamic allowed me to open the voice to a larger sound to end the piece as Margaret looks westward.

3. 'There's a Lady'

Date: 1 April 1850

Tempo and Time: 'Quick and kicky' dotted crochet = ca. 100

Key: E Major, changes often

Vocal Range: b – f#"

Text: 'whenever we stopped even to water the horses, there would be squads of people standing about, full of curiosity, and making comments upon ourselves and our outfit, thinking we were certainly emigrants bound for California. But some would remark, "There's a lady in the party; and surely there's no man going to take a woman on such a journey as that, across the plains." Then some of them would venture to approach the wagon and cautiously peep in; then, seeing a lady, they would respectfully take of their hats, with a polite salutation, and we felt that if there was anything in having good wishes expressed for us, we should certainly have a successful and pleasant trip.'¹³

This next piece entitled, 'There's a Lady', shows a sarcastic and rebellious side to Margaret's persona, which is reflected in Smith's whimsical writing style. The piece begins with a brief introduction with staccato arpeggiations in the piano and staccato scales and leaps in the violin. The staccato rhythms set the tone for the 'quick and kicky' spirit of the piece. The violin then transfers the main melody line in the same fashion to the voice when it enters at bar 8. This detached melody illustrates the chaos going on around Margaret at any stop they would make, almost alluding to the people whispering and buzzing around her. The piano and cello act as the accompaniment with arpeggiated lines to establish the tonal centre in the opening section, as Smith is constantly changing key and meter. With particular markings, such as tenutos on crochet notes, which almost create a suspended feel, and the staccato quavers in 6/8 time, the vocal line's rhythmic patten also creates the illusion of changed meter. With an abrupt key change at bar 19, the vocal melody and violin come together with the voice staying a third above on a counter melody and the violin taking over the main melody.

¹³ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 67.

Creating contrast with another *fortissimo* key change at bar 27 and a shift to 3/4 time, Smith marks a brazen change into a boisterous waltz. Almost teasing the listener, the vocal line makes a mezzo piano entrance and states: 'But some would remark' ending on a *f* to show Margaret's disbelief. The singer can have a lot of fun in terms of articulation and colour throughout this section. Shifting the waltz, yet again to a new key, the vocal line is marked, 'gossiping in an unflattering tone', to show Margaret's disdain while overhearing men say she should not be on the trip. The comedic timing is key with the cello almost remarking as an 'eye roll' from Mr Frink as he hears his wife's response. Unbothered and determined to enjoy herself, this theatrical piece ends on the same bouncy and fun melody. The violin and cello duet to the end of the piece, ascending to a light and matter of fact finish.

Vocally, this piece requires many different colours and articulations to achieve great contrast and find the sense of playfulness. Starting the piece with a clear and detached vocal line will give the voice room to grow and change later on. Planning is important, as this is only the second piece, and the voice should not be strained or pushed. At bar 37 with the 'gossiping and unflattering tone', the singer can use a more forward and nasal approach to the voice to achieve the desired colour, and the singer may take liberties in terms of the expression of the text, almost laughing her way through it. This is shown in my own performance of the piece demonstrating a complete change in tone and style.¹⁴ This excerpt is demonstrated in Example 4. This aspect of singing the cycle provides a chance for humour and a musical theatre style colour.

¹⁴ See Appendix B, Recording Track 3, (00:48).

Example 4: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 3 'There's a Lady', bar 34-39

As these pitches are at a *piano* dynamic and doubled in the accompaniment, there is no need to push or force the voice. At bar 50, there is potential for a beautiful exchange between the voice and cello, taking time to acknowledge the passing of the melody, like a sarcastic conversation. Encouraging the ensemble to think playfully throughout this piece will help to find smoother transitions and a sense of fun. As the piece stays mostly in middle voice, the singer needs to keep the air and voice light and the articulation flexible to make room for all the changes that Smith requires.

Smith is specific with his markings and notation and bringing them out in the ensemble will only enhance the humour and light-heartedness in this piece. The singer can play with posture, laughter and smiling while imitating the men. Facial expressions and body language throughout a performance of 'There's a Lady' can also inform the audience of Margaret's confidence and brazen disregard for the expectations of the time.

4. 'Considerable Excitement'

Date: 6 April 1850

Tempo and Time: 'Moderato – With Anxiety', crochet = ca.120

Key: None

Vocal Range: c#¹ – e²¹

Text: '... We found considerable excitement prevailing over the report that a California emigrant had been murdered that day some ten miles west of the city, on the road we were to travel the next day. I then began to feel that we had undertaken a risky journey, even long before we came to the Indian country. We got out the Colt's revolver that night to see that it was in good order, and made ready to defend ourselves against attack.'¹⁵

In a complete change in tone, and a total dramatic shift, Smith takes the listener into the next piece, 'Considerable Excitement'. The opening features the piano on accented open 4th chords and fortissimo tremolos in the cello at a high register. With dotted rhythms in the melody and dotted accents, the breathless fear can be heard in Margaret's voice. Smith particularly brings out the line 'that a California emigrant had been murdered that day' with the dotted accents and vocal line high on the staff. Vocally, this piece is accented and forte, so the singer must plan ahead to not push the voice or over sing.

The pizzicato line in the violin at bar 14 is distinct in contrast as the wandering pitches seem to descend and pass back and forth with the cello at a quiet dynamic. When the voice enters at bar 17, the vocal line moves in a stepwise motion at a 'hushed dynamic' and at a low tessitura, revealing Margaret's fear as she realises they are travelling that path the next day. Smith creates a dark and creepy feel when he trades tremolos from the piano to the strings and their atonal pizzicato passages between the voice singing on one note 'with trepidation'. The dotted accents return as Margaret starts to feel more anxiety, knowing that the trip may become more dangerous as they enter the land of the Native Americans. The piece ends in a similar way to the beginning with open chords in the piano and the high tessitura tremolos in the cello followed by the violin, showing the heightened anxiety. The voice ends at the top of

¹⁵ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 70.

the staff, accelerating to the end at a fortissimo dynamic, accented and in a stepwise motion, almost in a frantic bid to defend themselves.

The most striking part of this piece comes from the anxiety and fear represented in the strings. With tremolos at a high tessitura and loud dynamic, it is very effective and dramatic. When Margaret is afraid and realises that they may have taken part in a ‘dangerous journey’, the strings arpeggiate in an atonal sequence at a quiet dynamic as demonstrated in Example 5. This music can create an image of Margaret constantly turning and checking her back. The singer can take theatrical liberties with this piece and can react to the gigantic shifts in the accompaniment in facial expressions and physical movement. In my own performance, I chose to bring out a brighter vocal colour to match the high pitched tremolos in the strings to show anxiety.¹⁶ I prioritized the text and jagged rhythms in this piece to create contrast, as the next piece, ‘The Face of the Earth’, is legato and much more virtuosic.

Example 5: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 4 ‘Considerable Excitement’, bar 19-22

The musical score for Example 5 consists of four staves: Mezzo-soprano (Mez.), Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vlc.), and Piano (Pno.). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins at bar 19. The vocal line (Mez.) starts with a half note G4 (labeled 'the next day.'), followed by a quarter rest. In bar 20, the vocal line has a quarter note F4 (labeled 'I then be-gan to feel'), followed by a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. A slur with a '5' indicates a five-note descending run. In bar 21, the vocal line has a quarter note B3 (labeled 'that we had un-der-tak-en'), followed by a quarter note A3, a quarter note G3, and a quarter note F3. A slur with a '3' indicates a three-note descending run. The string accompaniment (Vln. and Vlc.) features tremolos. The violin part has a five-note descending run in bar 20, and the viola part has a five-note descending run in bar 21. The piano part has a tremolo in bar 19. The instruction 'with trepidation' is written above the vocal line in bar 20.

¹⁶ See Appendix B, Recording Track 4.

Vocally, the tonality of the piece is quite difficult and filled with dissonance. A great awareness of intervals is needed, as there is very little help from the piano and strings for the tonal centre for the singer. Smith again chooses to use accidentals in lieu of key signatures and uses that freedom to wander tonally. The singer must be aware of the loud dynamics and accents required, and be sure not to weight the voice. I encouraged the instrumentalists to view this piece from the outset from a storytelling point of view, allowing them to take liberties in terms of interpretation of the length of and timbre of the anxious trills. Smith prioritizes characterisation and imagery with this piece, and uses his wandering tonality and specific markings to create a tense and anxiety filled song.

5. 'The Face of the Earth'

Date: 14 May 1850

Tempo and Time: 'Very expansively' quarter = ca. 50

Key: A major – lots of accidentals

Vocal Range: d' - d''

Text: 'We were safely across the wide and muddy-colored stream by eleven o'clock this morning. Now that we are over, and the wide expanse of the great plains is before us, we feel like mere specks on the face of the earth.'¹⁷

In another complete and total shift in mood and tone, 'The Face of the Earth' acts as a legato and tonal palate cleanser for the listener. With only voice and piano, the long legato lines required by the singer are on full display, with a chordal accompaniment in 3/4 time. Marked 'very expansively', the music is contrasting to the turbulent and frightened experience that the Frinks had as they crossed the Missouri River. As it was one of their first physical and mental challenges on their travels, they were anticipating the dangers and risks associated with it. The relief they feel with the rest of the journey outstretched before them is shown in the warm piano line and stepwise and tranquil vocal line. Carman notes the 'widely spaced chords in the piano move slowly to suggest the vast expanse of the featureless land.'¹⁸

¹⁷ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 79.

¹⁸ Carman, Review: *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman: From the Daily Journal of Margaret Alsip Frink, 1850* by Alan Louis Smith, 604.

Although Smith uses his trait of accidentals versus key changes, the piece does not seem to wander tonally and sounds like it lives in a tonal centre. The sweeping chords in the piano are filled with hope and pride. Smith once again displays his text painting, with the legato and step wise motion in the voice. He text paints the ‘wide and muddy coloured stream’ with wave-like motion in the voice with step wise quaver notes, as demonstrated in Example 6, bar 7 and later when they have crossed ‘over’ the voice jumps a fifth to demonstrate the great leap they are making in their adventure as demonstrated in Example 7, bar 14.

Example 6: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 5 ‘The Face of the Earth’, bars 4-7

with quiet warmth
mp

Mez. 4
We were safe-ly a - cross the wide and mud-dy - co-lore'd

Pno. 4
Ped. Ped. sim.

Example 7: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 5 ‘The Face of the Earth’, bars 12-15

Mez. 12
Now that we are ov - er and the wide ex -

Pno. 12
Ped. Ped. sim.

Throughout the piece, the repeated legato line in the voice represents the plain outstretched before them, filled with uncertainty. The singer must show this with facial expressions, picturing the wild west off in the distance. This will also help to colour the voice and keep the singer focused. The piano is grounding in the soundscape with the rich and full chords.

Although it is quite exposed with the lack of strings and minimal accompaniment, this song is an opportunity for the singer to display the beauty of her voice and she must be aware of the challenges of the piece. She must display the colour 'with quiet warmth' at the beginning of the work, and the most effective way to create this sound is to keep her posture aligned, with all of her available resonators such as the chest and head open. In my own performance, I took long deep breaths between this piece and the previous piece, 'Considerable Excitement', so as to prepare for this extreme change in mood and tempo. My approach was to create a warm sound by softening and rounding my articulators, and start on a quieter dynamic, while executing a crescendo through long repeated phrases such as bars 20-30. With light diction and focus on legato rather than the square rhythm, the singer can create a stunning effect for the audience.¹⁹

6. 'Buffalo Chase'

Date: 22 May 1850

Tempo and time: 'Rapidly', quarter = 80

Key: none

Vocal Range: c' – f#"

Text: 'After we had started this morning, there was great excitement over a buffalo chase ... As far as we could see, every one that was on horseback went flying in the direction of the buffalo. Our men gave the saddle-horses a fatiguing run, but not without reprimand from Mr. Frink when they returned. He informed them very distinctly that he had not started for California to hunt buffalo. But I really could not blame the men very much, thought the chase was bad for the horses. The animation and excitement of the moment beat anything I ever saw, and I would not, for a good deal, have missed the sight of that great chase over that grand plain. Some one brought us a piece of buffalo steak. so that we were not without a share of the prize.'²⁰

¹⁹ See Appendix B, Recording Track 5.

²⁰ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 86-87.

The great excitement of this day in the diary is embodied in the active and upbeat vocal line and in the virtuosic accompaniment. With rolling sextets in the piano and jagged staccato lines in the strings, Smith successfully tries to ‘represent pictorial ideas such as running buffalo’, with a frantic and disjointed energy.²¹ Smith was aware of pianist Warren Jones who would be premiering the work, and knew of his skill and prolific playing before composing the movement and knew he could handle such a fast and difficult piano part.²² Carman notes Smith’s virtuosic piano writing with ‘a long agitated piano introduction, making use of running eighth-note triplets in the left hand under punctuating chords in the right, leads to the opening vocal line, which engages in numerous melismas that express fear and agitation.’²³ While the piano is continuously moving, the strings and singer must be breathing together and keeping the melody in the forefront. The use of the open 5th interval in the strings and voice is apparent and creates a ‘Western Americana sound’ reminiscent of the sounds of Aaron Copland and creates a wild and exciting affect.²⁴

Smith uses dotted rhythms and specific articulation again as a tool for expression, such as staccato markings, accents and tenutos. When the singer is aware of these particular markings and plans for their execution in advance, it will enhance the textures and colours in the piece. With great contrast in articulation, the singer must have clear diction and have flexibility in the voice. When writing for Stephanie Blythe, Smith wanted to highlight her vocal agility, as demonstrated in the coloratura passage in Example 8.

²¹ Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850*, v.

²² *Ibid.*, v.

²³ Carman, Review: *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman: From the Daily Journal of Margaret Alsip Frink, 1850* by Alan Louis Smith, 604.

²⁴ See Chapter 3, 49.

Example 8: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 6 'Buffalo Chase', bar 13

The image shows a musical score for bar 13. The top staff is for Mezzo-soprano (Mez.) and the bottom two staves are for Piano (Pno.). The Mezzo-soprano line has a treble clef and a 7/8 time signature. The lyrics are "went fly". A slur is placed over the word "fly". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves with bass clefs. Both hands play sextuplets, indicated by the number "6" above each group of six notes. The piano part is highly rhythmic and complex.

The coloratura on the word 'flying' is another imaginative form of text painting from Smith, and the singer needs to keep calm with the exciting accompaniment so as not to weight the voice. Clear articulation from the singer and a strict punctuation of the tenuto markings at the beginning of each sextet in the piano will help to keep time and create structure. Throughout this frantic song, each member of the ensemble must be in tune with the other, so as to not become ahead or behind one another. With a reliable pianist marking the subdivisions throughout, every member of the ensemble needs to stay aware of the other to make sure the melody is heard. Smith is first and foremost a pianist but his main goal is to bring the text to life. This piano part can be a major challenge but, when approached with flexibility and ease, it can create the dramatic effect of a stampede. These sextuplets in the piano are demonstrated in Example 9.

Example 9: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 6 'Buffalo Chase', bar 2

The image shows a musical score for bar 2 of the piano accompaniment. It consists of two staves with bass clefs. Both hands play sextuplets, indicated by the number "6" above each group of six notes. The piano part is highly rhythmic and complex, featuring many accidentals and a fast tempo.

The strings interjecting, like the violin at bar 14, continues to add to the chaotic sound. In another distinct shift in tone at bar 16, Smith takes the strings in opposite directions, ascending and descending in a 'detached' and agitated style. The strings continue to interweave themselves with Margaret's storytelling, almost sounding like an echo at bar 21. When Mr Frink is scolding the men for tiring the horses, Smith briefly changes to 3/4 time, stopping the piano for the space of the bar almost mimicking the men stopping and listening, and then immediately jumps back into the dizzying sextets.

At bar 36, Smith utilises fioratura in the vocal line, with the voice jumping and trilling over the piano and strings ascending and descending in opposition. The voice is almost mimicking galloping buffalo and the entire soundscape is chaotic. The high tessitura trill in bar 38 for the strings is another device to show anxiety and excitement that Smith has utilised in other parts of the cycle. The piano and strings then echo similar themes to the introduction of the piece with the running sextets in the piano and the jagged dotted quaver melody in the violin.

When the voice enters again at bar 45, the singer is completely unaccompanied, showing that the excitement of the stampede has ended, which is another moment that creates contrast.

With the notes 'A little broader, and amazed and consternated,' the singer needs to make her entrance *forte* and bring out the tenutos and accents that Smith has written. As it is unaccompanied, the singer can take time to bring out the words that are most expressive and important and define a unique version of 'amazed and consternated'. Smith ends the piece with short snippets from the strings and piano, with accented and short excerpts of previous themes, almost like a rogue buffalo is running to catch up with the pack.

This piece provides a great challenge collaboratively because the accompaniment is quite frantic. To keep the instruments together with the vocal line, I accented the beginning of each

sextet and phrase with my pronunciation of the text.²⁵ I kept my posture tall and resisted the urge to sing with a heavy production, as this would not serve the intention of the piece which is meant to be exciting and watching the chaos from afar. Calming myself before the piece started and focusing on the accents and articulations helped me to not sing too loudly throughout. In my performance, I utilised different viewpoints in the room to focus on, showing the excitement of watching the buffalo run in my facial expressions and movements. This piece has the potential to craft an exciting picture for the audience and challenges the singer both vocally and collaboratively.

7. ‘The Sioux Tribe and the “White Squaw”

Date: 3 June 1850

Tempo and Time: Moderato (quarter = ca. 100) (more in “two” than in “four”)

Key: None

Vocal Range: c# - e

Text: ‘We travelled ten miles to-day and stopped on good grass. In the afternoon we passed an Indian encampment numbering seventy tents. They belonged to the Sioux tribe, but were quite friendly. The squaws were much pleased to see the “white squaw” in our party, as they called me. I had brought a supply of needles and thread, some of which I gave them. We also had some small mirrors in gilt frames, and a number of other trinkets, with which we could buy fish and fresh buffalo, deer, and antelope meat. But money they would not look at.’²⁶

This next piece, ‘The Sioux Tribe and the “White Squaw”’, is among the most unique of the entire cycle. Based on a traditional Sioux Chant, the voice is only accompanied by the cello, playing in harmonics.²⁷ Smith found the chant in a book of traditional melodies for the native wooden flute and states

I had identified the text and thought how great it would be to include actual indigenous music. I searched online and found the wonderful melody quoted in the cello. I set the tune with many harmonics in the cello to create the sense of timelessness, otherworldliness, and to capture something of an indigenous wood flute. I learned from an audience member that the tune exists in some hymnals.

That was a nice realization.²⁸

²⁵ See Appendix B, Recording Track 6.

²⁶ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 92.

²⁷ Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850*, iv.

²⁸ Alan Louis Smith, email correspondence, 4 May 2022.

Included in the title of the piece, it is imperative for the singer to be aware of the terminology used in the diary, such as the word, ‘Squaw’. As performers, it is important to understand the usage of different words within the context of the time in history, along with the different connotations and stigmas that may surround them today. Bill Chappell writes

The origin of the word “squaw” has been traced to the Algonquian language, in which it meant simply “woman.” But its meaning was skewed by centuries of use by white people, including colonists in the 1600s. “The term has historically been used as an offensive ethnic, racial, and sexist slur, particularly for Indigenous women,”²⁹

When asked ‘How did you navigate the racial biases and the use of slurs in this work? Did you feel the need to address them?’ Alan Louis Smith states

Mrs. Frink’s diary first speaks of potential encounters with indigenous people with real terror. Later in the diary (and in the song cycle) there is a bucolic description of trading with them and interacting in a peaceful and enjoyable way. In looking through her historical lens we experience her xenophobia toward indigenous persons, including the use of the word “Indian,” which is abjectly wrong. We also find her use of the word “squaw.” In the United States a number of geographical locations that include that word in their designation (Squaw Valley, for example) are being renamed because of derogatory associations with that word, which some, many, find demeaning. In my own limited research into the issue, not all indigenous persons object to the term but that decision should be up to those most impacted in my opinion.³⁰

This point of view opens up many opportunities for performers to take this subject matter and create an even greater impact on audiences. Bringing sensitivity to this subject in an artistic setting can spark dialogue and awareness. As Smith suggested, a panel discussion on the subject matter is an option and the singer can take this further, such as pairing the music with lectures from Native peoples about their traditional music and instruments or their own

²⁹ Bill Chappell, ‘Interior Secretary Deb Haaland moves to ban the word “squaw” from federal lands’, *National Public Radio*, 19 November 2021.

³⁰ Alan Louis Smith, email correspondence, 4 May 2022.

histories and stories.³¹ Included in my program notes was a detailed footnote outlining the challenges facing Native peoples today.³² David Nichols notes this rich history and states

American Indians are the heirs to an enduring musical heritage that is as impressive in its modern richness and variety as in its historical depth and continuity. Each of the more than 200 tribes now in existence has its own historic musical culture, with unique repertoires, styles, instruments, theories, and practices.³³

This is a topic that has major potential and is lacking in research and would be a valuable contribution to knowledge. A singer can also take the process of performing the cycle farther and create an interactive experience where the journey is seen through the eyes of a Native American tribe. As Smith has stated, the possibilities are endless.

The cello is well suited for this movement, especially when played in harmonics, as its colour reflects the hollow and warm tone of the flute. Throughout the piece, the cellist is required to execute many different articulations. In the diary, this is one of the first recorded interactions with a Native tribe, and the overall reaction from the party was positive, even with Margaret's fear recorded in earlier sections of the diary. The piece is in 4/4 time, but is marked 'more in "two" than in "four"', creating a more suspended and latitudinal sensation for the listener than a vertical, beat by beat, 4/4. The main melody is presented in the cello and a knowledge of the wooden pipe is key to creating the right colour. The introduction presents the main melody on the cello while playing in harmonics and this tone should be even and legato to create the sense that the piece is 'More in "two" than in "four"'.³⁴ This is demonstrated in Example 10.

³¹ See Chapter 2, 36.

³² See Chapter 2, 30.

³³ David Nichols, *The Cambridge History of American Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

³⁴ Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850*, 45.

Example 10: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 7 ‘The Sioux Tribe and the “White Squaw”’, bars 1-6

Moderato ♩ = ca. 100 (more in "two" than in "four")

Mezzo-Soprano

Moderato ♩ = ca. 100 (more in "two" than in "four")
Traditional Sioux chant

Cello

pp

The voice enters in a declamatory way, simply setting the scene for the listener and the cello enters on a bowed articulation. Marked ‘assured’ when stating that the Native Americans were from the Sioux Tribe and were ‘quite friendly’, the singer needs to keep the voice even and secure. The singer and cellist must remain steady in their duet, as the intervals are often lined up in unison, thirds, or fifths, mimicking the traditional melody’s shape. This is demonstrated in my own performance of the work, where I prioritized the legato line in my voice to match the colour of a wooden flute in the beginning of the piece and can be found on Track 7.³⁵

Smith forgoes his use of accidentals and quickly changing keys until bar 41, which is marked ‘somewhat faster’. By bar 42, another shift occurs and this change in tempo and tonality illustrates the Native Americans interacting with the Frinks. The cello changes to a ‘sul ponticello’ articulation, to create a rough and intense sound. Smith also incorporates changes in meter and his specific articulations to create movement and to illustrate the meeting. As the two parties are communicating and trading goods, the cello illustrates their chatter with a pizzicato articulation. Marked ‘pleased’ above the ‘fish and fresh buffalo, deer, and antelope meat’, the singer must demonstrate the pride in Margaret’s voice after this successful and

³⁵ See Appendix B, Recording Track 7.

exciting interaction. In terms of body language, the performer can start the piece more closed off and hesitant and grow to an open and tall posture throughout.

Changing to tempo primo at bar 60, and back to the 4/4 meter from the beginning of the song, the reflective tone returns to the voice, as Margaret recalls that the Sioux people were so friendly, but rejected their modern money. Smith also includes many slurs in the cello to illustrate the possible confusion or tension that might occur as these two groups meet. As this movement is a duet between the cello and voice, the piano and violin can take a moment to listen and rest.

Paying special attention to colour of the voice and cello, along with the execution of the specific articulations is key. The articulations are featured above key words that Smith would like to enunciate and feature. A sense of trust between the cello and singer is required as the piece must remain steady at the beginning and end and features a middle section that moves and flows between different meters. The singer must present the story in a matter of fact way and also show the gravity of the situation at this time. Margaret's novelty as a woman on the trail and a White woman to the Sioux people adds an element of nervousness and excitement. While keeping my voice steady and relaxed to show respect in my performance and interpretation, I used gestures and facial expressions to show the audience Margaret's feelings of anxiety. This interaction could have quickly turned violent, had there been a misunderstanding from either party, and the enormity of this situation must be understood to most accurately portray this meeting to an audience.

8. 'Lost Boy'

Date: 27 July 1850

Tempo and Time: Agitated (quarter = 124)

Key: Starts in B flat major, constantly changing

Vocal Range: c' – g#"

Text: 'Our boy Robert took up a horse near the road, it having the appearance of being lost, and by so doing got separated from us. During the afternoon we became quite anxious about him, but reconciled ourselves with the thought that we should find him at the river. But when we reached the river, Robert was not there, and it was getting late ... I was almost frantic for fear the Indians had caught him ... But Aaron Rose had unhitched the best horse, and started back over the hills. Never can I forget those minutes. The thought of leaving the boy, never to hear of him again! But just at dark, Aaron came in sight, having the lost boy with him. My joy turned into tears. It was some time after dark before we got into our camp for the night.'³⁶

In a complete change in mood, the song, 'Lost Boy' starts marked 'agitated' and 'not legato' in the piano with jagged arpeggiated triplets and chords sounded off the beat. These piano acrobatics illustrate the frantic and terrified state that Margaret is in, as the party realises that they cannot find the young boy, Robert, who has accompanied them. As the piano part seems to become more and more chaotic, melodic moments and square rhythms start to appear, such as at bar 15, almost echoing a frantic call from a motherly figure. This frantic energy continues in the piano with rising chords until the voice enters on the offbeat. The voice and piano continue in complete isolation from the other, creating this frantic chaos. The vocal line also features the triplets in a downward motion while the piano is ascending. This downward coloratura illustrates a wailing or weeping from Mrs Frink. When they realise that Robert was not waiting for them at the river, the voice enters with staccato tenutos at an 'alarmed' *mezzo forte* dynamic. Smith uses these different articulations here to help differentiate the line from the *forte* at the beginning of the piece. The piano mimics the coloratura on the word 'late' at bar 49 to demonstrate an echo from the group looking and shouting for Robert as demonstrated in Example 11a and 11b.

³⁶ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 118.

Example 11a: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 8 ‘The Lost Boy’, bars 48-

50

Mez. 48 and it was get-ting late... late... 3 3

Pno. 48 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

Example 11b: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 8 ‘The Lost Boy’, bars 51-

52

Lost Boy

Pno. 51 f 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

The use of trills at a loud dynamic and jagged rhythms builds tension from here in the piano, until Margaret reveals her greatest fear: that the Native Americans may have captured the boy. The voice stays at the top of the staff as she describes Aaron Rose leaving on horseback to go in search of the boy. With a seamless transition between key, and a continuation of the jaunty and arpeggiated triplets, Margaret enters, ‘almost sobbing, terrified’, thinking they may never see Robert again.

The piano hearkens back to the beginning of the movement with the subito *piano* at bar 71 and the similar entrance of ascending chords, when it is echoed in the voice ‘but just at dark’.

These arch-like phrases also mimic an echo into the darkness in the piano and voice. The

piece reaches a climax when the party sees Aaron Rose come into view, the lost boy, Robert, with him. With the voice at the top of the staff marked *forte* and ‘exultant’ and the piano in great contrast with block chords in both hands, the joy and shock from the camp is apparent. After a couple of beats of silence, the piano enters on the ‘Hopeful A’ motive, at a *fortissimo* dynamic and ‘very broadly’. This section features legato singing at the top of the staff for the voice, and use of portamentos to demonstrate and text paint Margaret’s ‘joy’ turning ‘into tears’, as demonstrated in my performance of the piece.³⁷ ‘Warmly and expressively’ the work calms down to a quiet dynamic and a lower tessitura, as the members of the party calm themselves and settle for the night.

As this movement is for only piano and voice, Smith uses jagged and off beat rhythms, copious and specific markings and accidentals to create a frantic sound in this piece. He builds the tension throughout the song and utilises text painting to reveal Margaret’s mental state and tell the story. The audience’s attention is constantly held with the fast paced changes of key and virtuosic piano part. The frantic nature of the piece needs to be grounded by the singer and this is done by making clear choices in dynamic, articulation, and vocal colour. In my preparations with my pianist, this piece required the most rehearsal time as it is incredibly complex. Clearly marking out the changes in the movement will help to keep the focus of the singer and having specific ideas and plans for each colour change and section is key to creating the most effect. Smith uses dramatic and musical directions for which the singer must create an effect such as, ‘alarmed’ (bar 44), ‘amazed’(bar 59), ‘almost sobbing, terrified’ (bar 66), ‘exultant’ (bar 81) and ‘warmly and expressively’ (bar 98). Having access and flexibility to be able to sing at a high tessitura at a loud dynamic, along with a warm middle voice, is required. The piano part is often independent of the voice, so the singer must be strong both rhythmically and aurally. This song shows another side to Margaret, and her motherly

³⁷ See Appendix B, Recording Track 8 (02:48).

affection towards Robert can be portrayed by a different colour than the previous pieces and can influence the rest of the work.

9. 'Upon Them She Depended'

Date: 27 August 1850

Tempo and Time: Moderately quick, not dragging (quarter = 120), 'Waltz-like'

Key: N/A

Vocal Range: d' - e''

Text: 'At noon we stopped in the canyon and took our lunch. Here we met some emigrants, among whom was a lady who had lost or left her husband behind. Their horses had been stolen by the Indians, and he went after them, but never returned. The mother, with seven children, had been brought thus far by strangers, and upon them she depended to get through to California.'³⁸

Margaret's empathy and worry is also demonstrated for a woman that she meets on the trail in this next piece, 'Upon them she depended'. With a beginning marked, 'moderately quick, not dragging' and 'waltz like', the piano opens with sustained octaves and pizzicato and accented notes in the strings. The song opens with a recitative-like vocal line which is setting the scene and the accompaniment's purpose is to establish a tonal centre. This shifts at bar 24, when the piano plays moving chords, and the vocal line changes to a duple rhythm that features an underlying waltz. These hemiola-like rhythms express Margaret's disbelief at this woman's plight: that she had lost or had to leave her husband behind and continue on alone with seven children. The strings echo this sustained line, dramatically illustrating Margaret's disbelief. The piece speeds up at bar 39, where Margaret explains that the couple's horses had been stolen and reaches the climax when she reveals he never returned from looking for them. Smith utilises *fortissimo* tenutos on the words 'never returned' and a descending vocal line to show the woman's pain and weariness, having to take care of seven children. This is demonstrated in my own performance of the piece, where I used a sustained and bright vocalism with crisp diction to show her anxiety and which is shown in Example 12.³⁹

³⁸ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 136.

³⁹ See Appendix B, Recording Track 9.

Example 12: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 9 'Upon Them She Depended', bars 51-57

The piano continues with the blocked and sustained chords, supported by the duplet meter octaves, and the strings play a counter melody in a canon. The work ends much like it begins, with the declamatory tone in the voice, pizzicato in the strings and sustained chords in the piano. The final line, 'to California', is *Acapella*, demonstrating that the woman is truly on her own. The final pizzicato and portamentos in the strings illustrate the discomfort and worry that Margaret feels for the woman.

Aurally, this piece tends to wander and Smith uses accidentals rather than key changes to keep the transitions clean on the page. The singer needs to really take the lead in this song, establishing the different tempos and creating a sense of suspension with the duplet rhythms that are in contrast to the accompaniment. I achieved this with slightly audible intakes of breath to notify my collaborators of my tempo. The ensemble needs to be aware of the shifts in colour, starting out in a recitative-like fashion, and shifts in tone when the singer begins to describe the woman and her situation. A steady vocal production is needed, as the phrases are

sustained and require many crescendos and decrescendos. This movement provides the performer an opportunity to portray different emotions that have not been featured or expressed previously in the cycle. Margaret is aware that this very easily could happen to her, or another person she cares about, and this is a constant source of worry for her on the trail.

10. 'The Mountain'

Date: 30 August 1850

Tempo and Time: Andante quarter = ca. 80

Key: N/A

Vocal Range: a flat' - f'

Text: 'After traveling one mile from the edge of the lake, we came to the foot of the mountain. It was very steep and high and looked impassable. The road turned to the left and went up slanting, which was an advantage. But it was a hard struggle for the weak horses. Though the wagons were nearly empty, we had to stop often and let the animals rest. After great toil, we had climbed by noon to the steepest part of the road where it seemed impossible to go any further ... The snow in the road was melted down to the ground, leaving the bare rocks to travel over. The snow walls on each side of this passage were twelve or fifteen feet high ... We halted here and took our lunch, and fed to the tired horses the last of the hay that Mr. Frink had provided for them ... We first took everything we could out of the wagons, in order to lighten them, and packed them on Mr. Russell's mules. Then Mr. Frink unharnessed the two horses from the small wagon, and hitched them with the four horses on the large wagon. Then he tied long ropes to the tongue, and strung them out in front. Four or five men put these ropes over their shoulders and pulled with the horses. Others lifted at the wheels, and when the horses stopped, they held the wheels to keep the wagon from rolling back. Robert and I went ahead leading the pack mules ... We had to stop often and take breath. The air was getting lighter at every step, and the climbing was hard work. At last Robert and I got to the top with the mules and their burdens. I was utterly exhausted. I took a buffalo robe from the packs and wrapped myself in it, and lay down by the side of the road on top of the mountain and went to sleep. I told Robert to keep watch over me and the mules.'⁴⁰

Throughout the diary, Margaret mentions that the greatest challenge that they will face lies at the end of the journey, the mountain. With the guidebooks that the family took along the trail, they were able to plan for different challenges, such as river crossings, deserts and treacherous mountains. As this mountain was towards the end of the journey and in the desert, the Frinks were aware that they would be tired and low on supplies at this point. Smith states in his compositional notes that the climax of the entirety of the work, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon*

⁴⁰ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 139-140.

Woman, imitates the structure of the golden mean and culminates with 'The Mountain'.⁴¹ The piece begins with unsettling leaps of 7ths in the violin high on the staff, and low parallel 5ths moving at a half step in the cello. Smith uses silent bars to create a sense of tension and rocking, almost to illustrate the rocking and tilting of the wagons and the uneasiness that the party feels as they approach the mountain. As the music gains intensity and grows in dynamic, the voice enters on a wandering and disjointed melody. Smith uses accidentals to craft the line and changes meter to demonstrate Margaret's hesitation and unease as she looks up the mountain. This keeps the listener's attention and sets the scene very effectively.

The piano starts at a high tessitura on a wandering and descending line with many accidentals to illustrate the scene of a stray pebble or rock falling and tripping down the side of the mountain. Smith continues to use text painting as Margaret states 'It was very steep and high', crafting leaps in the voice to demonstrate dangerous cliffs and tall landings. The piano then duets with the voice in a chordal motion, as the voice ascends, 'a little slower and molto espressivo'. Smith uses tenuto markings to help bring out the aspects of the text he sees as most important and to also shape the wandering phrases that can become quite long and contain many accidentals.

Alternating between activity and rest, Smith builds tension throughout the piece, starting slowly and, with little accompaniment and an ascending vocal line, the listener is taken on the journey up the treacherous mountain. Text painting in the voice continues, with descending triplets at bar 50, echoed in the violin, to illustrate that the snow had melted down to the bare, rocky and rough terrain. Smith uses dotted rhythms with a jaunty 7th interval jump again to demonstrate travelling over these rocks in bar 52. Carman observes

⁴¹ See Chapter 3, 54.

The musical devices used to build intensity include volume only once (*ff* at “they held the wheels to keep the wagon from rolling back”); otherwise, intensity is achieved with rhythmic patterns, short string figures, and high register passages that reflect the ever thinning air. The vocal line describes every step.⁴²

Smith’s goal is to illuminate the text and in this piece he paints the story for the listener.

The travellers find rest again as the song settles into a ‘Free recitative’ at bar 56. The declamatory text setting gives the listener a break aurally and the changes in meter seem to slow the tempo and illustrate rest. Planning ahead for rest is important for the singer, so as not to exhaust themselves or the voice.

There is a quick change at the Moderato at bar 60, with block chords in the piano demonstrating the group unloading and transporting supplies from the wagons to the pack mules. The audience is reminded about the dangerous height and closeness to the cliff with similar chords from the beginning echoed in the strings. In an ascending and sustained vocal line that spans two pages, Margaret describes the rearranging of the teams of horses and men to tie the wagons together and pull them up the steepest part of the mountain. The men are helping the wagon not to roll back if the horses stop and the jagged and jumping vocal line illustrates this physical struggle. The strings are slurring intervals of a 7th in building tension until the piece reaches its climax at the allegro at bar 93. Smith utilises his specific markings of accented tenutos to demonstrate the physical strain put on the men and horses during this part of the journey. After a long and silent pause, the piano enters again on the wandering and descending line, ‘wearily’ at a pianissimo dynamic as shown in Example 13.

⁴² Carman, Review: *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman: From the Daily Journal of Margaret Alsip Frink, 1850* by Alan Louis Smith, 604.

Example 13: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 10 ‘The Mountain’, bars 27-30

pp
molto espressivo
p
Ped.
 66

Smith employs text painting in these final pages and combines the haunting slurred leaps in the strings and wandering line in the piano. The voice echoes this wandering piano line when she states ‘The air was getting lighter at ev’ry step’, at bar 108, almost creating a dizzying effect for the listener. I chose to use a breathier and non- vibrato sound in this passage to create the light headed effect, as shown in Example 14.⁴³

Example 14: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 10 ‘The Mountain’, bars 107-110

107
 Mez. *pp* The air was get-ting light - er at ev'-ry step,
 107
 Pno. (Qua)

Smith uses half steps in the voice to create a speech-like vocal pattern and pauses to illustrate how physically and mentally exhausted Margaret is. The singer could employ a breathier or

⁴³ See Appendix B, Recording Track 10.

more laboured vocal colour to create this effect for the audience. Finally, after they reach the top, the piano enters with block chords and free recitative, giving the listener a calm and tonal vocal line to hang on to. Smith uses frequent tenutos and markings to shape the text in a speech like manner and the music continues to become quieter until the voice is almost inaudible, showing that Margaret is finally relaxed and asleep.

There are difficulties hiding in this piece in terms of intonation, finding a sense of ensemble and shape. In terms of collaboration, this was the most difficult piece to put together and rehearse for my ensemble and I. We took the time to rehearse the piece in sections, to find the appropriate sound and tempo for each part, and slowly put the sections back together. It is important for the ensemble to breathe together to find the sense of tempo and move through the song together. With Smith's use of accidentals over key signatures and constant change in meter, this lengthy piece needs an attentive ensemble to be effective. Mapping out the climaxes and softer aspects throughout the movement will help to create shape, along with specificity in terms of text expression and markings.

The singer must be aware of her own stamina, as this large piece is the tenth in the entire cycle. Pacing vocally is key and keeping in mind that there is a passage at the end with a low tessitura is vital as to not push or strain the voice. The singer should be aware that there is no need to push the voice at this lower passage and employing a more nasal sound can help to keep the voice audible. Effective resonance and balancing of the body's registers and resonators throughout will help to make this part easier for the singer to be heard. The singer must also be aware of the various intervals and wandering tonal centre throughout this movement which will be helped by an awareness of the ensemble and planning the tonal shifts. There are many different vocal colours, dynamics and a wide range required for this piece, and it is important to build stamina. In my own performance, I utilised different

coloured sections in my score to highlight the various changes. Vocal agility and planning is key to keep the singer from straining or becoming fatigued. From ‘murmuring and barely audible’ below the staff, and fortissimo and accented at the top of the staff, the performer must be prepared both technically and mentally to create the most beautiful effect with this difficult and impressive movement.

11. ‘Margaret’s Dream (Instrumental)’

Date: N/A

Tempo and Time: Andante (quarter = ca. 70)

Key: N/A

Vocal Range: N/A

Text: N/A

Smith excels at creating great contrast with the next movement, ‘Margaret’s dream’. As this piece comes from Smith’s own imagination, there is no text featured from the diary. Including the violin, cello and piano only, the piece comes at the perfect time as the vocalist may be in need of a break. This song can be a moment for the listener and singer to settle after the climactic movement preceding it and will also feature the talents of the string’s virtuosic playing as well. Smith states

“Margaret’s Dream”, the piece that follows “The Mountain” stems from my own imagination, not from the diary, and portrays both the bliss and anxiety of following her and her husband’s dream to emigrate to The West.⁴⁴

With warm chordal progressions in the piano, the piece presents a simple and beautiful opening with sustained crescendos and decrescendos in the violin, starting on the ‘Hopeful A’ as demonstrated in Example 15. Smith notes

“Margaret’s dream” – sustained long, high A ‘that represents the huge distance of Mrs. Frink’s journey from both a physical and an emotional perspective.’ Comes back in the cello and reflects Mr. Frink’s inner state’⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850*, vi.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, v.

Example 15: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 11 'Margaret's Dream', bars

1-6

The musical score for 'Margaret's Dream' (bars 1-6) is written for Violin, Cello, and Piano. The tempo is marked 'Andante' with a quarter note equal to approximately 70 beats per minute. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The Violin part is in the treble clef, starting with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and playing a series of sustained notes with a long slur. The Cello part is in the bass clef, also starting with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and playing sustained notes. The Piano part is in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs), starting with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and playing arpeggiated chords. The piano part includes dynamic markings like '*sim.*' and '*pp*'.

Creating awareness of the composer's intentions and of the various characterizations for the audience is important, otherwise these connections could be wholly missed. This can also be facilitated in programme notes.⁴⁶

The middle section of this song sounds almost like a conversation between the Frinks and can be interpreted as a discussion about their hopes and fears while travelling west. This tension is created by arpeggiated triplets in the piano along with the strings entering with large leaps, staccato notes and pizzicato playing. The piece settles back similarly to the tonal opening, with a duet added in the strings. Smith is recognizing that, in the end, their journey is worth it. The sustained and warm chords sound like the broad and bright horizon towards which they are travelling. Smith once again uses accidentals in lieu of key changes but creates a tonal landscape to which the listener can easily connect. There is great contrast with his use of tenuto markings and sustained phrases in the beginning, versus the rhythmic and agitated middle section. The strings are required to create a warm, sustained and legato tone at a high tessitura, along with the pizzicato and accented middle section. Smith also continues to return

⁴⁶ See Appendix B, Recital Program.

to the Hopeful A', using it as a home base for both the ensemble and the listener. The Frinks have travelled a long way, with more of the journey behind them than in front of them. This movement acts as a reflection on how far they have come.⁴⁷

12. 'Here We Are'

Date: 7 September 1850

Tempo and Time: 'Moving' (quarter = 80)

Key: F # major

Vocal Range: g - d''

Text: 'During the last eight days of the journey, we had descended, in traveling ninety miles, from a height of nine thousand three hundred thirty-eight feet, to within thirty feet of the tide-level of the Pacific Ocean. We had left home just five months and seven days before. Our friends the Carsons came into camp with us. They had crossed the Missouri River with us ... but after that were separated from us for weeks and months at a time. They were strongly of the opinion that Mr. Frink would never get through, because he brought his wife with him. Yet here we are, all together once more, safe at the end of our long and eventful journey.'⁴⁸

In a quick change for the audience, the piano and strings enter the next piece, 'Here we are', with heavy accents, a *forte* dynamic and an accented trill in the violin. This jolt and change in colour is reflected in the voice and echoes back to previous movements where Margaret is setting the scene, such as the opening vocal piece 'Prologue to the Journal'. In both works, the voice moves in arch-like phrases, moving in triplets with various articulations to bring out important pieces of text. The accompaniment continues in the same way, with accented chords and tremolos and Smith paints the text when speaking of their journey down the mountain, punctuating the descending phrase, 'From a height of nine thousand three hundred thirty-eight feet' with staccato markings. This text painting continues in the voice, which is marked 'with awe and satisfaction', when it expands and creates a very legato line to illustrate the vast pacific ocean outstretched in front of them. This text painting creates a wave like effect and is shown in Example 16.

⁴⁷ See Appendix B, Recording Track 10.

⁴⁸ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 145.

Example 16: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 12 'Here We Are', bars 7-10

Mez. tide - lev - el of the Pac - if - ic O - - - cean.

Vln. move forward quite a bit; rhapsodically

Vlc. *p*

Pno. *p* Ped. Ped.

86

This line is then mirrored and echoed in the cello, moving in a stepwise motion and blending beautifully with the harmonies provided by the violin and piano. There is another quick change of key in the next passage of the piece, where Margaret continues to recall the timing of their adventure at bar 16. Smith employs changes in meter here to create different accented points in the phrase to emphasise the text and keep the attention of the audience.

As he hearkens back to the crossing of the Missouri River, Smith illustrates the stressful experience by dropping the voice low beneath the staff and then jumping to a high pitch to evoke the group crossing over the river, while the piano arpeggiates on triplets quietly beneath. This piano part is meant to represent the rolling and noisy river. The beautiful legato phrase also mirrors the broad horizon towards which they are heading. By bar 26 there is another quick shift in mood, as Smith references back to the piece 'There's a lady', with his

use of dotted rhythms, broad jumps in the voice and copious amounts of directions in the score to bring out the humour in this moment. ‘Pointed and amused’, Margaret describes the Carsons shock that she was able to come on the journey, as they believed she would never make it: ‘Yet here we are, all together, once more, safe at the end of our long and eventful journey.’ This final phrase is poignant in the voice, with leaps of a seventh and a long, legato line, duetting with the cello in a stepwise motion. The voice then carries this melody to the violin line, Margaret again getting lost in her own thoughts and memories. ‘Suddenly’ Smith ends the piece with his typical humour, with the accented open chords in the piano and cello and the tremolo in the violin. This mirrors Margaret’s own pride and excitement that they have reached the end of the journey.

Throughout this song, Smith combines his declamatory story telling with his descriptive text painting. As Margaret recalls their travels, he pulls themes and devices that he has used throughout the cycle to make connections for the listener. He keeps the piece interesting with his quick changes of key and meter, use of accidentals and dramatic shifts. The main obstacle facing the singer at this point in the cycle is this lower tessitura. The singer is aided by the accompaniment in expressing particular colours and moods but needs to be aware of the sudden changes throughout this movement. Typically, a vocal cycle of this size will rise in tessitura gradually but this movement includes many quick jumps below the staff after a lengthy and dramatic series of songs. The vocal production needs to stay flexible and ‘in the mask’ at a high placement so these lower pitches are audible and light in production.⁴⁹ Also evidenced in my performance of the work, my instrumentalists and I used a ‘Musical Theatre’ sound in the more virtuosic portions of the piece, such as at bar 7-10, or Example 16. This was a satisfying piece to collaborate with my instrumentalists on, as it gave us all the feeling like we were arriving in California together.

⁴⁹ See Appendix B, Recording Track 12.

13. 'Epilogue to the Journal'

Date: N/A

Tempo and Time: 'Leisurely rocking' (dotted quarter = ca. 40)

Key: G major

Vocal Range: g - e"

Text: '...We had traversed the continent, from the far east to the farthest west, and were now on the verge of its broadest ocean. But we had no wish to tempt the perils of the great deep. The future ... seemed to us full of promise, and here we resolved to rest from our pilgrimage.'⁵⁰

This final piece, 'Epilogue to the Journal', opens with the cello in 6/8 time, 'Leisurely rocking'. This device aims to sound like an old rocking chair on a front porch, as an older couple is reflecting on their life and adventures. As previously discussed, Smith notes the rocking chair motive and states that the strings often represent different images throughout the diary.⁵¹ This creates a calming soundscape, and supports the lullaby like melody in the voice. This theme is represented in Example 17a.

Example 17a: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 13 'Epilogue to the Journal', bars 1-5

The musical score for Example 17a consists of three staves: Violin, Cello, and Piano. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 6/8. The tempo is marked 'Leisurely rocking' with a note equal to approximately 40 beats per minute. The Violin and Piano parts are mostly rests, while the Cello part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a 'p' (piano) dynamic marking. The Cello part is marked with a slur over the first four bars and a fermata over the fifth bar.

⁵⁰ Frink, *Journal of the Adventures of a Party of Gold-Seekers*, 152.

⁵¹ Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850*, v.

The voice enters on an [u], or hum, introducing the ‘Nostalgia Theme’ which is demonstrated in Example 17b.⁵² The simple melody sounds as if it could be a song Margaret sang as a child, and creates a reminiscent and hazy effect. In my own performance of the work, I chose to sing this lullaby melody on an [u] as it was the best way for my line to be heard in this particular venue with my ensemble.⁵³

Example 17b: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 13 ‘Epilogue to the Journal’, bars 6-11



This warm tone in the cello should be mirrored in the voice and this duet creates an evocative and intimate effect. I achieved this in my own performance by keeping my posture open to pick up on my own body’s harmonics and create a warmer tone.⁵⁴ The duet then shifts to the piano and violin, slightly changing the colour of the ‘Nostalgia Theme’ and giving the violin a virtuosic and legato passage at a higher tessitura.

In a total shift to 2/4 time, the piano introduces a rolled chord and the voice has a recitative-like quality as Margaret reflects on their enormous journey. Smith utilises arch-like phrases and plenty of articulation markings to bring shape to the most important words of this piece. In a glittering and fantastical shift, Smith has the piano roll chords on each beat at bar 26, as the singer describes the ‘Broadest ocean’. These rolled chords almost mirror the light

⁵² See Chapter 3, 52.

⁵³ See Appendix B, Recording Track 13.

⁵⁴ See Appendix B, Recording Track 13.

glistening off the sea. This vocal line is another example of text painting as he lengthens the amount of notes for the word ‘broad’ and creates a beautiful and dramatic effect. Immediately after, in bar 29, at a *pianissimo* dynamic and ‘Quicker and with a sense of humour’, Smith uses staccato, accents and tenutos on the descending line that lands on a ‘g’ below the staff. These articulations and great change in tessitura can create a suitably dramatic effect and paints the text as Margaret describes finding their home. Smith then starts the next section with the ‘Hopeful A’ chord in the piano, followed by a brief excerpt of the ‘Mr and Mrs Frink Duet’ in the cello as demonstrated in Example 18.⁵⁵

Example 18: Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, no. 13 ‘Epilogue to the Journal’, bars 52-53

Epilogue to the Journal

The musical score for 'Epilogue to the Journal' (bars 52-53) consists of three staves: Mezzo-soprano (Mez.), Violin (Vlc.), and Piano (Pno.). The Mezzo-soprano part begins with a rest in bar 52 and a long note in bar 53, marked 'port.' and '* Mm'. The Violin part starts in bar 52 with a descending line marked 'pp'. The Piano part features a rocking chair motive in both bars, marked 'pp' and '10'.

The trend of ending the cycle at a lower tessitura for the vocalist continues and Smith keeps it at a *mezzo-forte* dynamic and with short rhythms to keep the line speech-like. The singer enters with an *Acapella* line with one interjection from the cello, as Margaret states ‘and here we resolved to rest from our pilgrimage’. As Margaret reflects on this statement, the violin enters with the ‘Nostalgia Theme; and the piano returns to the rocking chair motive. The piece

⁵⁵ See Chapter 3, 52.

then weaves the ‘Hopeful A’ in the piano, the ‘Nostalgia Theme’ in the violin and cello, and then combines with the ‘Mr. and Mrs. Frink’ motive in the voice to harmonise together.

Smith’s original intention did not include the voice and he notes

There is a story about the epilogue which is dear to my heart. When Stephanie and I first read through the piece at my house at Tanglewood the epilogue ended originally with only instruments in the final measures, no voice. Stephanie had the wonderful idea which she expressed in a perfect way when she suggested, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we all arrived in California together?” I rewrote the ending to use all the performers, including the voice, to the very end. Stephanie was right! And I love that about the rewritten ending, and I love that about Stephanie.⁵⁶

With this lower register, the singer may feel exposed at the quieter dynamic. This requires keen awareness of the fact that as the cycle ends, the tessitura lowers and the colour becomes more nostalgic. With a tall stature, the singer can express all of the emotions on the face, while portraying the older and wiser Mrs Frink. Keeping the lengthened body aligned will help with the production of these lower pitches and keep the sound free and resonant. Judith Carman notes, ‘All of the opening motives combine and play out softly to the end under a contented humming vocal line.’⁵⁷ Margaret is reflecting and is telling the audience that the story has now ended. This must be reflected in the colours in the accompaniment and this can also influence the way the themes are played that have already been heard throughout the work. As the piece ends, the singer and instrumentalists can let the sound fade, and hold their posture tall to give the audience a chance to reflect on this journey.

4.3 Conclusion

When selecting repertoire, it is important to note the various challenges associated with a specific work. Anthony Tommasini states: ‘Ms. Blythe sees recital work as not so different from opera. It is still an art that calls for creating drama through music, she said. It is still

⁵⁶ Alan Louis Smith, email correspondence, 4 May 2022.

⁵⁷ Carman, Review: *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman: From the Daily Journal of Margaret Alsip Frink, 1850* by Alan Louis Smith, 605.

theatrical.’⁵⁸ For singers, the dramatic elements of the piece are brought out with contrast which is created with major shifts in tone and tempo from piece to piece. Planning for these shifts is vital and each singer must maintain composure to execute the different dramatic high points and low points of this work. The vocalist must also prepare for clarity of diction when executing different articulations. From fast coloratura passages, to accented singing at a high tessitura, along with short and melismatic passages in the middle voice, a singer must plan for these shifts. Approaching the cycle with a sense of flexibility in the vocalism and plans throughout the work to rest the voice will help the singer perform this work to her best ability.

As this is a chamber piece, it is important to take into account the various requirements for the strings and piano. Creating a collaborative environment where each instrument can confidently take the lead and bring out the various colours and images in the work is key. Empowering ownership over their part and the specific devices Smith employs can help to create magical musical moments. Referencing the words of Judith Carman may help unify the thoughts of the ensemble when starting rehearsals. Carman states

The violin stands for Margaret’s inner thoughts, the cello for Mr. Frink’s inner thoughts. A shimmering chord that opens the work and is heard in many guises throughout is a metaphor for the infinite possibilities of the trip, and the pitch A is significant. The instruments never get in the way of the text, which is always at the forefront.⁵⁹

The strings are required to play various musical themes that can be brought out as musical checkpoints throughout the work, along with various duets between violin and cello such as the ‘Nostalgia Theme’, and ‘Mr and Mrs Frink duet’. A broad variety of articulations is required, including pizzicato and bowed playing, along with a passage of playing in harmonics in the cello. Smith composes these string parts to illuminate the story and create a soundscape that brings the audience on the adventure out ‘West’. Imagination is required

⁵⁸ Anthony Tommasini, ‘A Future So Bright It Can Handle Dark’, *New York Times*, 17 February 2008.

⁵⁹ Judith E. Carman, ‘Singing our History: People and Events of American History represented in American Art Song Part I: 1620 to the Civil War’, *Journal of Singing*, 72 (March/April 2016), 426.

among all collaborators and the piece that features only strings and piano, ‘Margaret’s Dream’, is a chance to highlight each part’s artistry.

While the voice and strings get to portray various images and characters, Carman notes, ‘The piano undergirds the whole structure and reflects the settings, moods, and motions of the text, often engaging in tone painting.’⁶⁰ The pianist must be sensitive to the overall dynamics in the work, as the main focus is to highlight the text and story. There are many chances for a pianist to shine via virtuosic playing and the highlighting of themes. With the ‘Hopeful A’ theme, the pianist needs cultivate the sound by playing with a colour of ‘shimmering gold’ and with hope. ‘The Lost Boy’ and ‘The Mountain’ afford the pianist opportunities to take the lead and create a jagged and dynamic soundscape for the listener. The piano is also a major leader in this cycle, as it often sets the tone, tempo and emotion for each piece.

The singer of this work must take into account all of these implications for performance, whether that be forming an ensemble, providing background information of the work and the various themes and characterizations and her own artistic contributions to the cycle. A challenging vocal feat, the singing of Alan Louis Smith’s *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman* is well worth the investment.

⁶⁰ Carman, Review: *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman: From the Daily Journal of Margaret Alsip Frink, 1850* by Alan Louis Smith, 603.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Alan Louis Smith's song cycle, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*, is both musically versatile and rich, along with being filled with historical significance. This thesis has examined the historical context of the time period in which the diary was written, the way the cycle came about, Smith's compositional style, conducted a musical analysis and explored the implications for performers of this work. This song cycle has the potential to create great discussions amongst audience members about the social and political themes in this material and the ways they influence the world in the present day.

The diary of Margaret Frink provides the reader with a rich history of her life travelling west in a covered wagon during the California Gold Rush in 1850. It is a vibrant picture of life on the trail and a unique account as one of the few women at the time to make the journey. With months of planning and preparing, the risk filled journey came with physical and emotional challenges without any guarantees for success or survival. Navigating the rugged terrain and surviving the unexplored portions of the remote western parts of the United States, it took great bravery to make this journey. The diary addresses many of the social and political issues of the time including slavery, the rights of Native Americans, and Women's roles in society. Filled with excitement, drama, despair, and triumph, her writing style provides composer Alan Louis Smith with rich material to compose for.

The relationship between the composer, Alan Louis Smith, and his muse, Stephanie Blythe, has blossomed to creating two chamber works or song cycles for mezzo-soprano, *Vignettes: Ellis Island* for mezzo-soprano and piano and *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman* for mezzo-soprano, violin, cello and piano. Both works utilize texts that are personal accounts of immigrants and migrants in the United States during times of great change. For any singers or instrumentalists that are looking to perform this cycle, it is vital for them to acknowledge and

embrace Smith's style of composition to best execute these works. A way to connect quickly to his music is to begin with an analysis of the text. Smith takes these excerpts and brings them to life with his use of text painting, vibrant imagery provided in the piano and strings and his detailed articulations and text settings. Stephanie Blythe notes his devotion to the power of the text when she states

I love the fact that everything he does is text driven. Everything gets out of the way for the text. He takes his own ego out of the mix. I think composers and singers who can do this are the best. I realize that the music is going to be around a lot longer than me. We are the conduits, which I think is a very important thing.¹

Smith's compositional style is greatly influenced by the voice of Stephanie Blythe, providing many opportunities for coloratura, long legato phases and detailed articulations and instructions, Smith hopes to bring out all of the colours of her vocal arsenal.

Smith also utilises modern American techniques in his writing. With influences such as Samuel Barber, Charles Ives and Aaron Copland, Smith creates beautiful melodies while embracing newer methods. Forgoing key signatures and instead embracing the utilisation of accidentals lets the music wander tonally and prevents strong shifts when they are not needed. Along with a constant change in meter, Smith utilizes these techniques to promote proper emphasis which is all in service to the text. Throughout the work, Smith aims to cultivate contrast from piece to piece, whether that is with tempo, tone, style or instrumentation and it is reflected in this dramatic and constantly changing cycle.

¹ Leslie M. Holmes, 'A Conversation with Stephanie Blythe', *Journal of Singing*, 64 (2008), 641.

In terms of collaboration, the singer and instrumentalists must be flexible and find their way through the work with finesse to be prepared for all that the piece requires. Planning out each piece and the overall structure of the work is key. Noting and preparing for the various musical themes Smith employs, along with the multitude of articulations and markings, will create the most dramatic effect for the audience. My own journey of preparing the music was both mental and physical. Mental preparation included analysing the various thematic elements of the music, along with the text. Physical preparations included pacing myself vocally and planning the dramatic aspects of my performance, along with collaborating with my pianist, violinist and cellist with discussion and rehearsal. As evidenced in my own performance of the work, the vocal complexities, thematic elements, and virtuosic parts for piano and strings, make this cycle a unique and fascinating journey for the audience.²

In summary, the historical significance and musical complexity of this work makes it worthwhile for performance and future study. Research can be furthered by analysing the various parts of the diary that are not included in the work but are of note. These texts could also be set to music, along with expanding the entirety of the existing work to full orchestra. Staging the work, or creating additional narratives for the audience is also a possibility, along with cultivating a space for discussion and reflection on important issues. Smith's work is a 'wonderfully effective work as chamber music and fully worth the work to bring together such a long cycle. In performance it does not seem long at all to the listeners because of its musical variety and compelling text.'³ Margaret Ann Alsip Frink's journey across the United States in a covered wagon will live on in this beautiful chamber work and Smith's valuable contribution to the repertoire is undeniable.

² See Appendix B, Recording.

³ Judith Carman, Review: *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman: From the Daily Journal of Margaret Alsip Frink, 1850* by Alan Louis Smith, *Journal of Singing* (2012), 605.

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Appendix A

Email Correspondence with Alan Louis Smith 4 May 2022

Signed Consent form for interview of Alan Louis Smith

1. Text selection and the Diary

- a. How did you select the text excerpts? Was it a similar process to Ellis Island with the strips of paper?

ALS: Having received the commission from Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, I began to open myself up to the words I might set. For me, ALL begins with and comes out of the words. The commission, other than including Stephanie and Warren, was left up to me as far as the make-up of the ensemble, the subject matter, and the length of the composition. The only request was that the ensemble be larger than just voice and piano. That freedom was both freeing and daunting. I had faith that the right creative sparks would reveal themselves and they did. One late summer morning in wandering the shelves of a small, independent bookstore in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, near the Tanglewood Music Center where Stephanie and I teach and perform in the summers, I came across and purchased one of the eleven volumes of women's diaries that would occupy my creative life for more than a year. A fire was kindled. I continued my research online and discovered several sources of first-hand accounts by women pioneers. The largest assembled body of collected work was the eleven-volume collection from University of Nebraska Press, *Covered Wagon Women*, edited and compiled by Kenneth L. Holmes. I ordered the other ten volumes of diaries. My original intention was to use the voices of many women, echoing the process I had followed in *Vignettes: Ellis Island*. In reading the eleven volumes I used many Post-It notes to mark pertinent pages as well as much underlining in pencil of emotive passages along with notes to myself in the page margins. Mrs. Frink, because of her wonderful writing and the completeness of her story from beginning to end, kept standing out in my imagination. I resisted for a good while setting only her words rather than several women's. Once I switched my thinking to use only her diary as the source, the scope of the words to be set fell into place fittingly. I began to feel as though I knew her. Then the task of paring down a full and amazing diary (114 printed pages) into song texts followed. I followed my instinct to narrow the texts to ones I found to be the most powerfully emotive, believing that immediacy of feeling would translate best into a musical work which would be encountered by listeners. There was much about her journey which had to be left out of my composition, of course, but anyone who wants to enrich themselves can read her diary for themselves and I strongly encourage it. Her diary is in Volume 2 of the collection. I wrote to University of Nebraska Press for permission to set the words and they very kindly gave me permission in exchange for a citation in the published music and in printed program notes.

- b. What sparked your interest in this time period and women's stories in particular?

ALS: I was not attracted most strongly by the time period, but by the power and courage of those remarkable women. They could have come from any time period. I come from a family of humble, courageous, strong women and Margaret Frink feels like she could be one of them. As I read the many diaries I was drawn into that world and of that time of mass migration and its concomitant effects on indigenous people.

- c. How did you navigate the racial biases and the use of slurs in this work? Did you feel the need to address them

ALS: Mrs. Frink's diary first speaks of potential encounters with indigenous people with real terror. Later in the diary (and in the song cycle) there is a bucolic description of trading with them and interacting in a peaceful and enjoyable way. In looking through her historical lens we experience her xenophobia toward indigenous persons, including the use of the word "Indian," which is abjectly wrong. We also find her use of the word "squaw." In the United States a number of geographical locations that include that word in their designation (Squaw Valley, for example) are being renamed because of derogatory associations with that word, which some, many, find demeaning. In my own limited research into the issue, not all indigenous persons object to the term but that decision should be up to those most impacted in my opinion.

So what do we do with this information in looking at Mrs. Frink's diary and others' through our own lenses from our own time? One very real option in our world is to follow cancel culture and ban the diary and my composition. Speaking for myself, I would support with respect anyone who felt this is the right answer for themselves, though my choice would be different. Better in my opinion would be to leave the diary and the song cycle as it is and use them as springboards for discussion. Imagine a planned performance of the songs that included a panel discussion on the same event and in the same venue that discussed historic perspectives with modern ones. What richness might be gleaned? Who in taking part in such a discussion might find their lives changed for the better and become an advocate for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in new and changed ways?

2. The Music

- a. What made you decide to expand the song cycle to feature strings?

ALS: As noted above, the commission was broad and left the final choices up to me. I have written for both violin and cello (as well as viola), including vocal works which include these instruments one at a time (Ex: voice, cello, piano) and I felt that combination of piano trio and voice would be just the right combination for the range of storytelling and range of colors. Also, the ensemble would be intimate enough to create a

wonderful sense for each participant in the piece to feel powerfully involved in the storytelling. I was immensely gratified at the dress rehearsal when the two artistic directors of Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, David Finckel and Wu Han, expressed to me that my composition was exactly the type of piece they were looking for. That was tremendous validation and most gratifying.

- b. How did the violin and cello become ‘voices’ for the Frinks?

ALS: The idea for this revealed itself as I was writing the piece and saw how the two instruments were being deployed. It was not at first a conscious decision.

- i. Had you ever written for strings before?

As above.

- c. Did the musical themes and ‘A’ motive come about thoughtfully during the writing process or were they noticed after further examination?

ALS: This is another aspect of my composing that revealed itself in the process of writing the piece.

- d. How did you find the traditional Sioux chant what drew you to that specific tune? Did you select the text or the melody first?

ALS: I had identified the text and thought how great it would be to include actual indigenous music. I searched online and found the wonderful melody quoted in the cello. I set the tune with many harmonics in the cello to create the sense of timelessness, otherworldliness, and to capture something of an indigenous wood flute. I learned from an audience member that the tune exists in some hymnals. That was a nice realization.

- e. With the shape of the cycle and the ‘golden mean’, was that a conscious decision as you were composing or did the texts reveal that shape to you?

ALS: The arc revealed itself in the process of writing. I think that the point of the golden mean is in my musical DNA due to performing and teaching so many pieces that follow that arc. For me everything springs from the words.

There is a story about the epilogue which is dear to my heart. When Stephanie and I first read through the piece at my house at Tanglewood the epilogue ended originally with only instruments in the final measures, no voice. Stephanie had the wonderful idea which she expressed in a perfect way when she suggested, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we all arrived in California together?” I rewrote the ending to use all the performers, including the voice, to the very end. Stephanie was right! And I love that about the rewritten ending, and I love that about Stephanie.

Thesis on *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*

Consent to take part in research

- I, Aleen Smith, voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves taking part in an interview which will be audio recorded.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will **not** remain anonymous.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in OneDrive where the files will be password protected. I understand that Madeline Judge will have primary access to files but will share the data with her supervisor, Dr. Denise Neary, in line with GDPR. I understand that this information will be retained until the degree has been conferred.

• I understand that a transcript of my interview will be retained for a further two years from the date of the exam board.

• I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

• I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Researcher

Madeline Judge contact: madelinejudge@riam.ie

Academic supervisor

Dr. Denise Neary contact: deniseneary@riam.ie

Signature of research participant

Alan J Smith 2 May 2022

Signature of participant

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Madeline Judge

January 17, 2022

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix B

Website Access containing Recital Recording of *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*

Simply copy and paste the link below into your preferred browser:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3cb04q9db3ov9up/AABn-of2R9LemQ3xgF_dhyjMa?dl=0

Recital program for performance of *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*

‘A New Frontier: Trailblazing Women in American Song’

Madeline Judge, mezzo-soprano

Andrew Synnott, piano

Francesca De Nardi, violin

Davide Forti, cello

May 6, 2022 at 12:00

Museum of Literature Ireland

Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman

From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink (1850)

Alan Louis Smith (b. 1955)

Texts by: Margaret Ann Alsip Frink (1817-1893)

1. The Allure of the West (Instrumental)
2. Prologue to the Journal
3. There’s a Lady
4. Considerable Excitement
5. The Face of the Earth
6. Buffalo Chase
7. The Sioux Tribe and the “White Squaw”
8. Lost Boy
9. Upon Them She Depended
10. The Mountain
11. Margaret’s Dream (Instrumental)
12. Here We Are
13. Epilogue to the Journal

Iconic Legacies: First Ladies at the Smithsonian

Jake Heggie (b. 1961)

Texts by: Gene Scheer (b. 1958)

1. Eleanor Roosevelt: Marian Anderson’s Mink Coat
2. Mary Todd Lincoln: Abraham Lincoln’s Hat
3. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis: White House Christmas Card, 1963
4. Barbara Bush: The Muppets

This recital is presented in partial fulfilment of the degree of Doctor in Music Performance at the Royal Irish Academy of Music and Trinity College Dublin

‘A New Frontier: Trailblazing Women in American Song’
Madeline Judge, mezzo-soprano
Program Notes

Throughout my Doctoral studies, selecting a suitable research topic for my dissertation was a huge challenge. It was only when searching for lesser known compositions for my lecture recital that I came across the works of Alan Louis Smith. With the obvious American connection that I felt with his music, his work struck me with its historical significance and unique compositional style. His work, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink (1850)*, has been the focus of my research ever since. When selecting a cycle of songs to pair with the *Vignettes*, I came across Jake Heggie’s *Iconic Legacies: First Ladies at the Smithsonian*. Both cycles were written for and dedicated to famous American mezzo-sopranos, Stephanie Blythe and Susan Graham, respectively, and feature the stories of trailblazing women in history as they face difficult challenges. From crossing the United States in a covered wagon in 1850, to championing the importance of literacy on ‘The Muppets’ in 1990 as Barbara Bush defied tradition, these stories mark the passage of America in a time of great change.

Alan Louis Smith’s *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman*

Alan Louis Smith (b. 1955), is an American collaborative pianist and teacher, along with being a gifted composer. He currently teaches at the University of Southern California and works with singers at the Tanglewood Institute, where he met his friend and muse, mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe when she was a young artist.¹ Smith has a longstanding interest in the stories of women and immigrants, and chose this focus when he was commissioned by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Centre to compose a work in 2008. Smith wanted to look into first account stories of women travelling across the United States in a covered wagon in the mid 19th century. He selected the diary of Margaret Frink because ‘her writing was

¹ Tamara Brook Regensburger, ‘Alan Louis Smith’s *Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle*’ (DMA dissertation, Ohio State University, 2009), 107.

beautiful, human, and compelling; and to top it all off, it was apparent from reading her diary that here was a great soul who faced challenges and fears with nobility, who cared deeply for others, and who seemed to have immense resources of personal strength. It was not lost on me either that Mrs. Frink shared many attributes with my wonderful friend, Stephanie Blythe.²

Smith's success as a pianist, collaborator, and coach have all contributed to his talent for writing for the voice. He usually composes with a specific voice in mind, and makes sure to highlight their particular strengths.³ Blythe's affinity for coloratura and wide range are featured throughout this composition in particular. His number one priority when composing is the expression and clarity of the text and that the soundscape of each piece enhances that meaning. Smith has previously stated: 'My goal is to be honest. Musically honest, textually honest, emotionally honest ... This is another thing where my association with Stephanie Blythe is so important, because she is that. When she sings it's totally honest.'⁴

Throughout *Covered Wagon Woman*, Smith employs text painting to create the soundscape of the piece. The listener can find 'aural landmarks' that Smith has placed throughout the work to hold on to. Written for voice, piano, violin, and cello, Smith has stated that the strings 'often represent pictorial ideas such as running buffalo, the braying of mules, or the back-and-forth motion of rocking chairs; at those times their musical illustration is absolutely equal in importance.'⁵ These musical figures can be found in the pieces, 'Buffalo Chase', 'The Mountain', and the 'Epilogue to the Journal'. With its higher tessitura and often soaring lines, the violin represents the inner thoughts of Margaret, and the cello's warm and lower tessitura represents the practical Mr. Frink. Smith also utilizes musical quotation of a traditional Sioux melody in the piece, 'The Sioux Tribe and the White Squaw', and creates the hollow flute

² Alan Louis Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850* (Fayetteville, AR: Classical Vocal Reprints, 2008), iv.

³ Regensburger, 'Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle', 114.

⁴ Regensburger, 'Alan Louis Smith's Vignettes: Ellis Island: The history, evolution and performance of a modern American song cycle', 119.

⁵ Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850*, v.

effect by having the cello play in harmonics. Smith wants to create an experience for the listener that is filled with contrast and drama, and utilizes a single chord to create an incredible effect that the audience can listen for throughout the entire work:

‘One other important aural landmark that recurs frequently throughout the set of songs is heard in the very opening in the piano part. It is a shimmering chord in close harmony with added chord tones at the intervals of a ninth and an eleventh. The chord vibrates with harmonic possibility, just as the Frinks’ hearts and minds must have vibrated with possibility for what was ahead of them in their journey. The chord is arpeggiated in the very opening, but even when it is played as a block chord, as it is at many places in the cycle, it is luminescent like the shimmering allure of gold.’⁶

Jake Heggie’s *Iconic Legacies: First Ladies at the Smithsonian*

Jake Heggie (b. 1961), is an American composer of operatic works and songs and is a frequent collaborator with the composer and poet, Gene Schreer (b. 1958). Their work, *Iconic Legacies: First Ladies at the Smithsonian*, was originally commissioned by Vocal Arts DC in 2015 to celebrate their 25th anniversary season.⁷ Written for world famous mezzo-soprano, Susan Graham, each piece is inspired by an iconic object at the Smithsonian museum in Washington, DC that has a connection to a first lady of the United States.

The first piece, ‘Eleanor Roosevelt: Marian Anderson’s Mink Coat’, describes Marian Anderson’s iconic performance of ‘My Country ‘tis of Thee’ on Easter Sunday 1939 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Marian Anderson, one of the foremost African American opera singers of the 20th century, had been denied use of a hall for a concert by the Daughters of the American Revolution, because of her race.⁸ When Eleanor Roosevelt heard of this, she

⁶ Smith, *Vignettes: Covered Wagon Woman From the Daily Journal of Margaret Ann Alsip Frink, 1850*, v-vi.

⁷ Jake Heggie, ‘Jake Heggie: Composer and Pianist’, <<https://jakeheggie.com/iconic-legacies-first-ladies-at-the-smithsonian-2015/>> [accessed: April 26, 2022]

⁸ Susan Stamberg, ‘Denied a stage, she sang for a Nation’, <<https://www.npr.org/2014/04/09/298760473/denied-a-stage-she-sang-for-a-nation?t=1651055119204>> [accessed: April 27, 2022]

organized a performance on her behalf on the steps of the Lincoln memorial with an entirely integrated audience. Marian Anderson's performance has gone down in history as a pivotal moment for race relations in the United States. Heggie quotes part of the melody of 'My Country 'tis of Thee' in the piano accompaniment, and builds the piece to Eleanor Roosevelt's famous quote: 'No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.' The image of Marian Anderson in her mink coat singing on the steps of Abraham Lincoln's memorial, who less than a century earlier had abolished slavery gave hope to millions and cemented her in history.

The second song in the cycle takes on a more ominous tone with 'Mary Todd Lincoln: Abraham Lincoln's Hat'. The opening motive in the piano, marked 'haunted' reappears in the final two pieces of the cycle. Mary Todd Lincoln expresses her despair, and when describing her husband's signature top hat, notes that he had tied on a black ribbon as a memorial to their recently deceased son, William. This same hat was worn when he was assassinated, and Mary continues to spiral into depression and madness. The repetition of the text and opening theme in the piano reflects her mental state as she grapples with the grief of losing both a cherished son and husband.

With a total change in mood, we are introduced to the third piece, 'Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis: White House Christmas Card, 1963'. The jaunty opening features conversational vocal writing, as Jacqueline describes excitedly dressing up for her husband to choose her outfit for their next trip. They select the iconic pink Chanel suit, and she casually asks him to sign a Christmas card that she started working on. The 'haunted' theme from the previous piece, 'Mary Todd Lincoln' returns when it is revealed that the trip they took was to Dallas, where President Kennedy is assassinated. Jacqueline Kennedy returns to the White House and sees the signed Christmas card, and wonders what will become of her without her husband.

The final song in the cycle, 'Barbara Bush: The Muppets', ends the cycle in a silly and imaginative way. The opening line states: 'This is Pete, he looks like a piano, but wait ...',

where Barbara is imaginatively pretending and playing. With a jazzy and syncopated accompaniment, the poetry recites a fairy-tale for the listener. Barbara Bush knew the importance of reading for the development of children, and it occurred to her that much of the United States was still illiterate during her time as first lady. She wanted to make the largest difference she could and decided to appear on Sesame Street in 1990 to reach people directly in their homes. At a lower tessitura and faster tempo, the ‘haunted theme’ that was previously associated with death, is transformed to illustrate the chaos of being surrounded by the muppets. The piece ends in a jazzy and almost childlike way, as the cycle closes with Barbara Bush playfully thanking the piano, Pete.

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