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Someone Will Remember Us: A Theatrical Exploration of the Life, Words, and Legacy of Sappho

Rachel Weaver



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

SOMEONE WILL REMEMBER US:
A THEATRICAL EXPLORATION OF
THE LIFE, WORDS, AND LEGACY
OF SAPPHO

By

RACHEL WEAVER

A Thesis submitted to the Department of Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in the Major

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The members of the Defense Committee ap on April 12, 2021.	pprove the thesis of Rachel Weaver defended
	Assistant Professor, Chari Arespacochaga Thesis Director
	Director of Graduate Studies, Virginia Lewis Outside Committee Member
	Specialized Teaching Faculty, Casey Hagwood Committee Member

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Introduction

As an artist — specifically as a writer and theatre-maker — I have always been fascinated by the Ancient Greeks. They are the original great storytellers of the Western world, and they set the precedent for much of American theatre today. As a woman, I have always been in awe of the great women of history, especially those in Ancient Greek stories and myths. As a queer woman, I am always searching for my history. All of these things intersect at one mysterious point: Sappho.

I first encountered Sappho when I was a teenager exploring my identity. In learning about queer identities, I discovered that the word "lesbian" came from her — Sappho was a famous lover of women, and the term "lesbian" comes from her homeland, the Greek isle of Lesbos.¹ It was only later that I discovered her poetry and the fascinating mystery of her life. I became entranced by how little we know about this woman, one whose work has echoed for years and years. A testament to its enduring strength is a quote from *Florilegium* by Stobaios:

Solon of Athens heard his nephew sing a song of Sappho's over the wine and since he liked the song so much he asked the boy to teach it to him. When someone asked why he said, *So that I may learn it then die.*²

Her words clearly commanded great power, yet so few of them are left to us today. Sappho wrote lengthy books of poetry but all that remains are a couple of complete poems and a multitude of fragments.³ As I began reading the fragments — some of which are only a single word — I

¹ Freeman, Searching for Sappho, xxii

² Carson, If Not, Winter, xiii

³ Carson, *If Not, Winter*, ix

began trying to reconstruct the person who wrote them in my mind. I felt that I could relate to her, and because of that I wanted to create her in an image that made sense to me.

The more research I did, the more facets of who she was that I encountered. Some saw her as a teacher, others a priestess, or a chorus organizer, or someone who was not a lover of women at all, but rather a poet putting on a persona. None of these identities lined up perfectly with my picture of Sappho. I saw her as, first and foremost, a writer and a performer trying to get her words out into the world. I saw her as a woman fighting against societal norms in order to live the life she wanted. I saw myself in her. This is what drew me to her, and to this project; I wanted to tell her story, with the research in mind but with her own words at the forefront, and in turn begin to tell my own. If I could understand and develop the story of someone with whom I so connected, I felt that I could become a better writer and a better person. As a writer, I would learn how to build character and story from limited historical sources. I would learn how to turn fragments of someone else's lyrics into songs. As a person, I would gain better understanding of others as well as understanding of myself. How do you build a whole person from fragments and what understanding of myself and of human nature will that give me? That is what I hoped to find out.

Defining Form

I knew from the beginning that my creative piece must involve music. Greek poetry of that time was, after all, set and performed to music.⁵ As such, Sappho's poetry — called "lyric

⁴ Rayor and Lardinois, Sappho, 14

⁵ Freeman, Searching for Sappho, xviii

poetry" — was actually intended to be sung to a lyre. It made sense that any creative telling of her life should involve music, and why not a musical? I knew I would need a collaborator to help me with the composing side of the project, so I began reaching out to and meeting with possible collaborators in the spring before I officially began my thesis. Once I selected a composer, I set out to do my research during the summer and fall of my thesis timeline, all with an eye toward writing a musical based on Sappho's life.

Who Was Sappho? What We Know and What We Guess

Here is what scholars know for sure: Sappho was likely one of the first female Greek lyric poets, composing around the turn of the seventh and sixth centuries BCE.6 She wrote nine books of lyrics, but only two complete poems and 192 fragments survive today.7 Everything else that we know about Sappho is speculation, passed down through ancient encyclopedias and written thoughts about pieces of poetry to which we no longer have access, mostly by male writers over the centuries. Historians have made conjectures about who she was based on these various writings as well as the contents of Sappho's own remaining poetry, but they are just that: conjectures.

Historians speculate that Sappho was a lover of women due to the overt, lesbian sexual content in her poetry as well as her historic reputation.⁸ She was likely a member of the

⁶ Williamson, Sappho's Immortal Daughters, 1

⁷ Rayor and Lardinois, *Sappho*, 8

⁸ Winkler, The Constraints of Desire, 163

aristocratic class, as most women did not learn to read or write. 9 She also makes references to finer things and politics in her poetry. 10 Scholars guess that she had a husband because it was practically required of women of her time — though the only possible name of said husband on record is Kerkylas of Andros, which translates to "Little Prick from the Isle of Man" and is likely a joke. 11 In her poetry, Sappho mentions a daughter named Kleis and two brothers, though other historical records indicate that she had three. 12 As for her daily life, one scholar, André Lardinois, says, "Four modern reconstructions of Sappho dominate the literature about her: Sappho the chorus organizer, Sappho the teacher, Sappho the priestess, and Sappho the banqueter."13 Sappho the chorus organizer would have led choruses of women in song and performance; Sappho the teacher would have taught young students; Sappho the priestess would have led worship to the gods; and Sappho the banqueter would have spent her days lolling in luxury. There is evidence in her poetry for any of these four constructions. These different presumptions attempt to explain the life that her poetry illustrates: a woman who writes and performs freely and has romantic relationships with women, all under the very patriarchal society of Greece in the sixth century BCE. Who is to say which one is correct, if any?

We know as little about Sappho's death as we do her life. One legend claims that Sappho fell madly in love with a man named Phaon and threw herself off of a cliff when he rejected her;

⁹ Freeman, Searching for Sappho, xvii

¹⁰ Carson, If Not, Winter, 195

¹¹ Rayor and Lardinois, Sappho, 4

¹² Freeman, Searching for Sappho. 5

¹³ Rayor and Lardinois, Sappho, 14

though this was likely a construct of later poets and playwrights.¹⁴ Her poems, however, indicate that she lived to old age, as several fragments lament the process of aging and many guess that she died of old age.¹⁵ This is all, of course, assuming that her poetry is autobiographical. Some maintain that it is, while others believe she was writing from the perspective of a character. The interesting thing is, no one will ever know.

A Study of Identity

Initially, my research focus was going to be on myth. I wanted to look at the myths that have been created around Sappho and how they impact the story I wanted to tell. I began by reading up on myths, legends, and their creation, particularly Ancient Greek myths. What I discovered, however, was that I really wanted to look into identity all along. It was not myths or tales about Sappho that intrigued me; it was the way people saw her, the identities they built for her. This piqued my interest so acutely because we all are perceived in hundreds of ways by hundreds of people. There is universality in identity — something that is also so personal.

Sappho is the perfect subject when examining the crafting of identity because hers has been crafted so diversely and so publicly. Through her identity — or identities, as the case may be — I saw a window into understanding my own, and those of the people around me. Thus, my focus shifted.

Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis define "identification" as: "[A] psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property, or attribute of the other and is

¹⁴ Williamson, Sappho's Immortal Daughters, 24

¹⁵ Carson, If Not, Winter, 39

transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified." ¹⁶ Essentially, humans tend to look at different categories, pick out what they think fits, and then become that thing. There are several common ways that human beings identify ourselves today. We use gender identity, racial identity, ethnic identity, national identity, religious identity, sexual identity, and economic identity, to name a few. We also identify based on our careers, our levels of education, our interpersonal relationships, and even our hobbies. Say someone identifies as such: "I am a white, American, agnostic, bisexual woman in the middle class. I will soon graduate with a BA and I work in the arts. I am single with no children, and I am a writer." That paints a pretty clear picture of who that person is. That person is me, in our modern definition of identity. But how else can identity be crafted? What about people who don't fit neatly into these categories?

In *Disidentification: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, José Esteban Muñoz proposes a theory of disidentification wherein people outside the majority can identify with pieces of an identity while rejecting or disidentifying with others. As Muñoz says, "Identifying with an object, person, lifestyle, history, political ideology, religious orientation, and so on, means also simultaneously and partially counteridentifying, as well as only partially identifying, with different aspects of the social and psychic world." Muñoz brings up examples of this in the queer community, where white gay men and lesbians are placed front and center. Queer people of color can identify with parts of the "mainstream" or "majority" LGBTQ+ community, but they will inevitably disidentify with its white-centric elements. In this way,

¹⁶ Muñoz, Disidentifications, 7

 $^{^{17}}$ Muñoz, Disidentifications, 8

minority people are able to take what they identify with and reject and interrogate what they don't. Essentially,

disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology.

Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this "working on and against" is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance.¹⁸

This theory of disidentification allows for a more comprehensive theory of identification. My identity does not simply need to be "bisexual woman." I can use those labels and identify with them, but I do not have to identify with every part of them. For instance, I do not have to identify with the majority patriarchal ideas around womanhood. There is more freedom in identity if disidentity is also an option.

How does this apply to Sappho? Or to my own artistic creation of Sappho's identity? Sappho herself likely did quite a bit of identifying and disidentifying. If she was a performing poet, as many scholars believe she was, she was doing something women did not do — writing, reading, composing, and performing. She likely had a husband and participated in society, but she also did things only men did in Ancient Greece. These two identities, at the time, were in contrast with each other; in fact, Sappho was simultaneously identifying and disidentifying with womanhood as it was in Ancient Greek society. Furthermore, in the centuries after her life,

¹⁸ Muñoz, Disidentifications, 11

scholars and historians have identified her in a myriad of different ways. They are all interpreting the same material; thus, every identification they make also involves a disidentification or counteridentification. Moving forward, any identity I build for Sappho will involve my own perceptions and preconceived notions, my own identity, and ultimately identification and disidentification with the norms of her time based on what I know about her and about her era, and what I find in her writings. Additionally, any identity I build for Sappho will also be fraught with my own identifications and disidentifications. I identify with Sappho in many ways, but not every way. I identify with her as a queer woman, a writer, and a performer. I disidentify from her when it comes to motherhood and her complicated relationship with her family. When I am creating Sappho's character I have to be conscious of both the identifications and the disidentifications because the goal is not to make Sappho in my image, but rather to create Sappho in as much of her own image as possible and find myself within the process. Essentially, I hope to learn about myself through how I recreate her — what resonates with me and what does not — and how I go through the writing process.

Process: Research and Story Building

Now that I had decided on a topic, a way in, and a form, it was time to start preparing to write. I began by gathering as much research as I could about who Sappho was as well as who she was believed to be. I read multiple books on Sappho — Searching for Sappho by Philip Freeman, If Not, Winter by Anne Carson, Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works by Diane J. Rayor and André Lardinois, Sappho's Immortal Daughters by Margaret Williamson — with multiple different reconstructions of what her identity might have been. Once I had a good idea of what scholars and historians had to say — that she was a poet and musician who may or may not have been a lover of women and who could have had many different identities, such as a chorus leader or a teacher — I decided that the next place to look was in Sappho's own words.

Sappho in Her Own Words

I began by going through every Sappho poem and fragment. I divided them into six general themes: romantic love, heartbreak, religion, family, aging, and artistic creation. I wrote them all down on color-coded sticky notes and pinned them to my wall.



Once I had a visualization of the most prominent themes in her writing, I was able to begin to see the shape of the story, at least thematically. I was also able to note which fragments seemed most significant to further help me shape the story. For instance, the most important fragment I found that guided me through the entirety of the writing process was fragment 147:

Someone will remember us I say even in another time¹⁹

This fragment is something I identify with greatly — wanting to be remembered. As the musical itself is a remembrance of Sappho, I used this fragment as my guiding light and thematically steered the story toward the idea of remembrance.

The shape of the story came to me through the organization of Sappho's remaining writings. I saw that the primary forces in her life — at least, the things she deemed worthy of writing about — were romantic love, heartbreak, family, religion, music/writing, and self-growth. With the help of Philip Freeman's book *Searching for Sappho*, Margaret Williamson's *Sappho's Immortal Daughters*, Claude Calame's *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece*, and John J. Winkler's *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece*, I was able to understand the typical timeline of a young woman's life in Ancient Greece. She was born, learned household duties, participated in a religious ceremony signifying her transference into womanhood, married, had children, and lived out the rest of her life. Women participated in various fertility ceremonies and other religious celebrations, but overall this was the basic structure of an Ancient Greek woman's life. I wanted to tell that life story, emphasizing the important themes about which Sappho most frequently and passionately wrote. I decided to structure the musical chronologically, from Sappho's childhood to her death, filling in the gaps

¹⁹ Carson, If Not, Winter, 297

with a love story, a story about family, and a story about the creation of her art. I also found a chronological structure to make the most sense when it came to crafting identity. A person builds their identity from the ground up — from birth to death. In building who Sappho was, I needed to show how she began as a child, how she grew into a woman who disidentified with the role set out for her by society, and how she ultimately carved her own path and thus her own identity.

Creating the Characters

The main character was always going to be Sappho. For a time, I played around with the idea of multiple versions of Sappho representing the different identities that historians and scholars placed upon her, but ultimately I decided that this Sappho would be my own interpretation. I would not follow any one historian's ideas exactly, but rather amalgamate what I thought really fit from a variety of different sources, all led by Sappho's own writings. Sappho will be the central, primary voice and driving force of the show. Her emotions and her choices will push the story forward.

As the show begins with Sappho's childhood, the next characters I focused on were her family. Sappho is believed to have had a mother, father, and three brothers named Erygius, Larichus, and Charaxus.²⁰ One historical writing suggests that Sappho's father died when she was a child.²¹ I decided to create a close relationship between Sappho and her father and then use his death as the impetus that pushes Sappho into womanhood.

²⁰ Freeman, Searching for Sappho, 5

²¹ Freeman, Searching for Sappho, 5

Once Sappho is a woman — and a woman without her father's protection — society would say that she needed to get married. I knew that the central love story had to be between Sappho and one of the women she writes about. In the fragments we have, the woman Sappho wrote most about was a woman named Atthis.²² I put her as a central character and Sappho's husband as a minor character. The final important family member that needed to be represented in the story was Sappho's daughter, Kleis. She became my final central character.

In order to drive the story along, I decided I needed characters who could narrate and explain things to the audience. I also wanted to include religion in the story, as Sappho wrote about it often. It was clearly a driving force in her life — in one of the only complete Sappho poems we have today, Sappho calls directly upon the goddess Aphrodite to help her and Aphrodite answers back, providing assistance. It was clear to me that Sappho saw the gods as guiding forces in her life, forces that helped shape her identity. Not only did the gods serve as a source of identity, but also as one of disidentity as the gods also represented many of the strict societal rules that Sappho opposed. Thus, I decided to create three narrators/characters who would exist alongside Sappho through three stages of her life (childhood, womanhood, and motherhood) to serve both as sources of comfort and conflict. I chose Artemis, the goddess of hunting and patron of young girls; Aphrodite, the goddess of love; and Hera, the goddess of marriage and family. Together, these three characters narrate the story as well as occasionally converse with Sappho as her guardians and companions, as well as the voices of society.

In terms of traditional character archetypes, Sappho plays the role of main character,

Atthis plays the role of romantic interest, and Sappho's family and friends play the roles of

²² Freeman, *Searching for Sappho*, 128

supporting characters. The gods serve an interesting purpose, playing the roles of narrators, supporting characters, and antagonists all in one. As they shape the story, when things go wrong it is they who are the antagonists. Additionally, as they often represent the voices of society, they further serve as antagonists as Sappho learns to identify and disidentify.

I also envisioned a small ensemble of 3-5 women and men who would serve as background characters (Sappho's friends or people of Lesbos) and provide vocals. These ensemble characters would fill out the stage and the world of the play.

Outlining

Once I had my characters and themes selected, I went through and outlined the plot of the musical. I broke it down into scenes, and listed what songs would be necessary for each scene as well as what poems/fragments I intended to utilize.

The musical begins in Sappho's childhood with her learning the rules of society while falling in love with music. Then, her father dies and her brother sets off to sea, leaving her feeling isolated and alone. Next, Sappho partakes in a religious ceremony that officially marks her as a woman. She falls in love with Atthis, even though she is to be married. She gets married but continues her love affair with Atthis. She becomes pregnant with a daughter. Political turmoil on Lesbos, however, causes Sappho's family to be exiled (there is record of her exile to Sicily at some point in her life).²³ This exile is devastating for her, and she lives out many years with just her husband and daughter. Finally, the exile is lifted and she is able to return to Lesbos, only to find that Atthis is gone. Sappho starts a school for girls — a nod to two of the four modern

²³ Freeman, Searching for Sappho, 90

reconstructions of Sappho: Sappho the chorus organizer and Sappho the teacher — and lives out her days as a mother and teacher until her death of old age. This is the outline I set out for the musical, and I was able to follow it during the writing process.

Writing the Musical

When I was preparing to write the musical, I intended to write between 10 and 20 songs accompanied by scenes of dialogue. When I actually sat down to write it, however, I ended up writing 42 songs and no scenes of dialogue — I wound up writing a sung-through musical.

It was an amazing artistic experience for me. The outline made it easy and I was able to churn out multiple lyrics a day. I found that the story seemed to naturally want to all be in lyrics, not dialogue. I was able to play with the format of the lyrics, too. In the opening song, I included multiple sapphic stanzas, which are four-line stanzas with three lines of ten syllables and one line of 5 syllables.²⁴ For instance:

From here where I stand the world is on fire

A much richer man would call me a liar

A much poorer man would sit by the flame

The world is on fire.

Ultimately, the lyric-writing process went very smoothly, thanks to all of the research and preparation I had done beforehand. I shared the lyrics with my thesis advisor and some of my peers for feedback, then did some nitpicking and was satisfied with the results. I began to send the work off to the composer.

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²⁴ Mendelsohn, "Hearing Sappho"

Collaboration and Editing

The time had come in the artistic process for collaboration. I had written the libretto for the show but now needed help with the music. I began by sending my work to the composer, Shawn. It was quite a few more songs than he had been expecting. After several discussions, we decided that the only way to get the work done was to bring on a third composer and have Shawn act as the arranger; the new composer and I would write the melodies and Shawn would add instrumentation.

Building the Team

I spoke with one of my friends who had read and given me feedback on the libretto, Emma. She is a music and theatre double major, making her the perfect candidate for this project. She happily came on board and she and I began writing the melodies of the first few songs. I have some experience with music, though certainly not enough to write detailed and accurate sheet music. Emma has years of experience in music and knows how to annotate perfectly. Thus, our collaboration was born.

To start, I would record myself singing the melody I heard in my head for each song. I would send Emma these recordings. Then, she would transcribe the vocal melody onto sheet music using a computer application. She would also add chords to play along with the melodies. After that, we would send the sheet music and recordings to Shawn, and he would add instrumentation to the sheet music. Then, he would send it back to us and we would have a complete, written song.

In our conversations as a team, we discussed how we wanted the musical to sound. We all agreed the the instrumentation should be simplistic in nature — the voices should be the primary instrument. We found piano a good choice for primary accompaniment. We also wanted to nod to Ancient Greek music, and thus decided that we would like to incorporate strings. We envisioned some light percussion to keep time, but the primary musical force would be voices, piano, and strings. We also wanted to include a lyre, to reflect the way the songs would originally have been sung.

Changing Form

We discovered in the middle of our process that time was not on our side. I had created much more work than I had anticipated in the libretto, and we did not have time to compose and arrange a full 42 songs. We decided, with the help of my thesis director, that the best course of action was to instead create a concept album that highlighted the important themes of our story and gave listeners an idea of the work we were trying to convey.

Writing the Concept Album

Fortunately for us, all of the lyrics were already written. To create the concept album, it was simply a matter of selecting which songs were essential to the story and ordering them for the album. I set to work on that straight away, as Emma and Shawn continued to work on songs that we knew with certainty would be included in the album.

Song Choice

Narrowing down my song choices proved to be a very difficult task for me. It was, as writers often say, a case of having to "kill my darlings." I started by putting in place the songs I knew were absolutely essential to the story I was telling. The first four songs I put in place were: the opening song that establishes who Sappho is and what story she will be telling; Sappho's "I Want" song, a common musical theatre song type where the main character tells the audience what exactly it is that she wants out of life; the love song between Sappho and Atthis; and the closing song where Sappho finally realizes who she is. The rest of the selection process was picking out the most important songs in between that kept the emotional arc of the story intact. When I was done selecting songs, we had a concept album of 19 songs:

- 1. The World Is On Fire
- 2. Ladies of Lesbos
- 3. Long and Seek After
- 4. Unmoored
- 5. The Bearers of Secret Things

- 6. Ode to Aphrodite/Atthis's Interlude
- 7. Out to Sea
- 8. A Wedding
- 9. Chorus of Friends
- 10. For You, Atthis/For You, Kleis
- 11. Farewell, Atthis
- 12. Art and Pain
- 13. Where
- 14. Kleis's Lullaby
- 15. Home/A School Opens
- 16. Megara/Lover, Tell Me
- 17. Reunion
- 18. Kleis's Lullaby Reprise
- 19. The World Is On Fire Reprise

Finding the Focus

During more collaborative work with the composer and arranger and more editing work with my thesis director, we discovered that the 18-song concept album was not focused enough. I was straying too far from the core of the work: Sappho's voice and Sappho's story, a construction of her identity to find my own. I went back through and cut to the essentials. I cut songs that I had put in as filler to explain the story, as my thesis director reminded me that my audience is smarter than I was making them about to be. I altered the lyrics of a few songs to provide any

Aphrodite as a narrator rather than Artemis, Hera, and Aphrodite because in a short concept album it was too confusing to have all these different new characters jumping in. Finally, I changed the final song to one that centered Sappho's voice and also left her in a state of flux. I ended the concept album with Sappho in exile, rather than with her return home. The final song has her finding who she is even when she has nothing, something that turned out to be more profound than the original ending. In all, the final concept album has 13 songs:

- 1. The World Is On Fire
- 2. Ladies of Lesbos
- 3. Long and Seek After
- 4. Unmoored
- 5. The Bearers of Secret Things
- 6. Ode to Aphrodite/Atthis's Interlude
- 7. Out to Sea
- 8. Chorus of Friends
- 9. For You, Atthis/For You, Kleis
- 10. Exile
- 11. Farewell, Atthis
- 12. Kleis's Lullaby
- 13. Art and Pain

Final Product

When I first started this project, I hoped to end up with a fully written and composed first draft of a musical. I hoped to have a staged reading of that musical and get feedback. Instead, I have a fully written and composed first draft of a concept album. I was not able to do a staged reading for this project, but I can in the future.

My final product is the full libretto of a 13-song concept album about the life of Sappho (please see Appendix A). I have also included the sheet music to the songs (please see Appendix B) as well as two song demos (please see Appendix C).

Research Outcomes

Who was Sappho? Who was she as we can see her, in fragments? Who was she, whole? Who am I? Who am I as others can see me, in fragments? Who am I, whole?

These were the questions I was asking at the beginning of this investigation. Though I did not end up with the product I had planned, I did end up with answers to my questions.

Sappho was a poet. She was a writer. She was a performer. She was a lesbian, in both senses of the word. We can never see her, fully, for who she was. We only have some of her words, torn apart and fragmented. Even so, I have a sense of who she was to me. I have created my own version of her, one that I think identifies her as a human being with dreams and loves and desires, not as a legend or myth. As for myself, I have found a way to identify and disidentify with a woman who lived thousands of years ago. I realize that others can see me in my work — they can see what I choose to show them in what I create, and what I don't choose to show them that sneaks its way into my art. I am a collection of all of my experiences and all of my passions. I may not be able to see the whole picture yet, but my discovery of Sappho has given me a pretty big fragment.

What I Learned and What I Would Have Done Differently

The first thing I learned in this investigation is that an academic year is not enough time to write and compose a full, sung-through musical. I learned that collaboration really means constantly and repeatedly meeting each other halfway. I learned that identity is even more complex than I initially thought, and trying to translate that identity into a compact work of art is not an easy task.

If I could go back and do things differently, I would have started with the plan of writing a concept album at the outset. I am incredibly proud of the full musical libretto that I wrote, but I believe that if I had started with a concept album in mind I would have been able to do a staged reading. I also would have communicated more thoroughly with my collaborators from the start to ensure that we were on the same page in terms of what we could accomplish and when we could accomplish it. I think that I have a tendency to be overly ambitious, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but often winds up with me not accomplishing what I set out to because I set my sights too high. I would work on that if I could go back, and I will continue to work on it in the future.

Moving Forward

The completed libretto and music for this concept album are a great start for the continued composition of this musical. Moving forward, I plan to revisit the full libretto I initially wrote and make edits with the streamlined concept album in mind. I then plan to finish composing the musical and do a staged reading of it, hopefully followed by a performance. This thesis investigation has given me an incredible jumping off point for further development of my work. I believe that this work will add to the knowledge about Sappho in giving a new interpretation of her identity as well as her disidentity. I also think it will add the conversation about representation in musical theatre by being a show that has a majority of roles for women. Women are often underrepresented on stage, especially queer women. This show centers queer women in a way that few others do. It is a story about a woman who loves women, but it is not

about her struggle with her sexuality. Rather, it is a story about a woman finding her full, complete identity over the course of her life.

Closing Remarks

I hope that when people read, listen to, or watch my work they feel like they can find a piece of their own identity. In writing this work, I learned quite a bit about myself. I discovered my identity as a writer and further cemented my identity as a woman. I also learned that I do not need to identify with every single aspect of something in order to say that I identify with it; disidentifying is a valid form of identifying that I will bring with me as I move forward. I hope that this work provides more representation for women and queer people on the stage, as well as people of all backgrounds and races. I hope audiences and performers alike feel like they can identify and disidentify with the story, just as I do.

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Appendix A: Concept Album Libretto

Sappho: A Concept Album

- 1. The World Is On Fire
- 2. Ladies of Lesbos
- 3. Long and Seek After
- 4. Unmoored
- 5. The Bearers of Secret Things
- 6. Ode to Aphrodite/Atthis's Interlude
- 7. Out to Sea
- 8. Chorus of Friends
- 9. For You, Atthis/For You, Kleis
- 10. Exile
- 11. Farewell, Atthis
- 12. Kleis's Lullaby
- 13. Art and Pain

The World Is On Fire

SAPPHO

I once knew a girl Beautiful, carved from stone And she held all the knowledge in the world.

For every question I asked She had an answer. For every song I sang She was a dancer.

She was a holder, a knower, a protector She was a vessel, a teacher, a collector She was at home with the greatest minds.

And this girl, she lived by the sea
She stared from its shore
And she called to me
She called far and wide
Drew every man to her side
Even those known for their treachery.

Alexandria
Alexandria
Please don't hunt her down.

ENSEMBLE MEN Alexandria Alexandria It's all over now.

A flash of light And she ignites

ENSEMBLE WOMEN

And we ignite And we ignite And we ignite

ENSEMBLE WOMEN & SAPPHO

How is the world still turning When Alexandria is burning?

How is the world still turning When our library Our history Our legacy Our liturgy Is burning?

ENSEMBLE WOMAN #1

From here where I stand the world is on fire A much richer man would call me a liar A much poorer man would sit by the flame The world is on fire.

ENSEMBLE WOMAN #2

From here where I sit the world is on fire Well, at least it is if you are a writer For a writer's entire world is the page The world is on fire.

ENSEMBLE WOMAN #3

From here where I lie the world is on fire They pile up our stories and light up the pyre A papyrus grave on a flesh and stone stage The world is on fire.

ENSEMBLE WOMEN

Alexandria Alexandria Please don't burn her down.

Alexandria
Alexandria
It's all over now.

Ashes to ashes we all come undone

The pages turn backwards, the songs are unsung History unravels, it cracks and it chokes Stories evaporate in a cloud of smoke.

How is the world still turning When Alexandria is burning?

How is the world still turning When our writing Our trying Philosophizing And fighting Is burning?

SAPPHO

I once new a girl Beautiful, flesh and bone And she held a little knowledge of the world.

She asked questions
And searched for answers.
She wrote songs
And became a dancer.

She was a lover, a wanderer, a crier She was a singer, a fighter, a writer She was at home in me.

Alexandria Alexandria Please don't burn me down.

Alexandria
Alexandria
It's all over now.

My pages crumble to pieces My words fracture to fragments The fire burns me down to shards and splinters.

I can't remember who I was
I just catch a glint of those summer months

In childhood or in love, or maybe in winter.

ENSEMBLE WOMEN How is the world still turning When Alexandria is burning?

How is the world still turning When Sappho is burning?

SAPPHO When I am burning?

And so I sit with Alexandria As she goes down in flames And she sits with Sappho As I do the same.

Oh, take me back to those summers And if not, winter.

I don't know who I am.

Ladies of Lesbos

GIRLS

We run through the meadows in secret Holding skirts barefoot in the groves Oh, life is a dream when you're swimming downstream Wearing violets on the islet of Lesbos.

ARTEMIS

You can feel the pines in a mountain breeze You can taste the ocean in the shallowest of breaths Happiness grows like our apples on trees And our violets smell sweeter than death.

Summers on the island were so pretty With dew like falling snow Summers on the island were like magic With girls born out of blue sea foam.

Girls who loved to dance and sing Girls who loved to think and dream And I, their companion in everything That lover, that light, Aphrodite.

GIRLS

We run through the meadows in secret Holding skirts barefoot in the groves Oh, life is a dream when you're swimming downstream Wearing violets on the islet of Lesbos.

TEACHER

Alright, girls, sit at your looms Skirts tucked in, nice and groomed Weave over and under, in and out Eyes on your work, don't glance about.

GIRLS

Weave over and under, in and out Eyes on our work, don't glance about. Not in secret, we walk through town Lips together, gazes down Life is dull when you're standing small Wearing eyelets on the islet of Lesbos.

Long and Seek After

APHRODITE

And what do you want?
What do you hope for?
When you're dancing through pine
And you feel sublime
What do you long for?

SAPPHO

I long and seek after A love that is long A beauty so rich It demands song

I long and seek after A life that is full More than my place More than I can hold

APHRODITE

So she sneaks into dark corners And hides behind closed doors To find some sort of solace In words she's heard before

Their voices echo sweetly Her brothers, her way in They teach her every letter While the moon is waning thin

SAPPHO & APHRODITE

Achilles and Odysseus Penelope and Helen The poetry within these lines The stories he was telling

SAPPHO

And I'd like to tell them too

Or better yet, tell something new To have a life worth clinging to And worth setting to music

I long a seek after A love that is long A beauty so rich It demands song

I long and seek after A life that is full More than my place More than I can hold

APHRODITE

So she's a liar and a thief

SAPPHO

I add kindling to the fire

APHRODITE

She mimics what she sees

SAPPHO

And I pick up a lyre

APHRODITE

She waits for reproach

SAPPHO

But it does not come

APHRODITE

So she cradles the instrument And she starts to strum

History will thank her For her daring choice

SAPPHO

Yes, radiant lyre, speak to me Become a voice.

Unmoored

SAPPHO

I am trampled now A flower under foot I am beaten down.

I am plucked from home A ripe and ready fruit I am on my own.

My father once said That an army or weapon Is the most beautiful thing On this earth

But I used to think it was love.

I think of Stories of romances, how Helen Gave it all for a chance At love

Or something to write of.

But I am trampled now A flower under foot I am beaten down.

I am unmoored
I can't sail across this sea
I paddle aimlessly.

Those who are gone They float all around Like unfinished songs

I don't know who I am

The Bearers of Secret Things

ENSEMBLE

Girls are the bearers of secret things Flowers, wine, and gold Their hair cascades, falls out of braids Their hands are never cold.

SCHOOL GIRLS

We are the bearers of secret things Flowers, cakes, and roots We're pure and chaste, and so we wait To bear his precious fruit.

APHRODITE

It's a rite of passage, but it feels so tragic To watch them sell their hearts But lest we forget what they know is a threat A woman's survival is an art.

SAPPHO

I am the bearer of secret things A heart that harbors a soul Purity isn't everything When the prettiest things are muddled.

TEACHER

Sappho!

SAPPHO

A child to a woman, I swear to thee I have retained my virginity
My husband shall hold me, provide for me, own me And I will bear his babies.

APHRODITE

It sticks coming out, like blood in the mouth

But she says it all the same What choice does she have, as a lock of hair halves A symbol of womanhood's claim.

SCHOOL GIRLS

We are the bearers of secret things Flowers, cakes, and roots We're pure and chaste, and so we wait To bear his precious fruit.

TEACHER Atthis!

APHRODITE

And time stops.

SAPPHO

I would not think to touch the sky
For I thought I could not do it
But there is something in her big brown eyes
That makes it seem worth doing.

I would not think to hold the stars
I thought they would not be held
But there is something in her falling hair
That demands to be felt.

I would not think to swim the Nile
I thought it could not be done
But there is something in her bright, bright smile
That calls for songs to be sung.

Atthis

The prettiest sound I ever heard Atthis
My new favorite word.

To hold it on the tip of my tongue To swirl it around in my cheeks Now I understand what they meant That love makes you weak in the knees.

I don't know what to do There are two minds in me One that says "you can't" And one that whispers "please."

ENSEMBLE

Girls are the bearers of secret things Flowers, wine, and gold Their hair cascades, falls out of braids Their hands are never cold.

SCHOOL GIRLS

We are the bearers of secret things
Flowers, cakes, and roots
We're pure and chaste, and so we wait...
We wait...

Ode to Aphrodite/Atthis's Interlude

SAPPHO

Deathless Aphrodite on your dazzling throne, Child of Zeus, weaver of snares, I beg you Do not break my heart. But come here now, if ever before You caught my voice far off.

And listening, left your father's Golden house and came to my side Beautiful sparrows drew you over the earth With their whirling wings, from the sky Through midair, they arrived

But you, O blessed one
Smiled in your deathless face
And asked what I have suffered
And why I am again calling out
And what I want to happen most of all in my crazy heart.

APHRODITE

Whom should I persuade this time to lead you back into her love? Who, O Sappho, is wronging you? For if she flees, soon she will pursue. If she refuses gifts, soon she will give If she does not love, soon she will love.

SAPPHO

Come to me now, free me from pain and all my heart longs, accomplish Oh Aphrodite, my sweet Aphrodite You, yourself, be my ally.

ATTHIS

Sappho A name I've heard before Around town, around school Whispered in the meadow

She sings so sweetly

Like a midnight winter rain All I want in this world is For her to sing my name.

APHRODITE

The seeds of love I have sown And in this garden grow.

ATTHIS

She sings so sweetly Like a midnight winter rain All I want in this world is For her to sing my name.

Out to Sea

SAPPHO I did not know that There could be Something prettier Than poetry

But here you are

ATTHIS
I did not know that
I could want
Someone to
Break my heart

But here you are

BOTH

Falling in love is like Falling to your knees The bruises purple and blue

Needing you near is like Needing to breathe I cannot survive without you

My dearest one I have come undone Unwoven, unmoored Out to sea

SAPPHO

You are like a child That wondering look An old wives tale I can't find in any book

And here you are

ATTHIS

You are like a kid That playful song A restless soul I can't hold for too long

And here you are

BOTH

Falling in love is like Falling to your knees The bruises purple and blue

Needing you near is like Needing to breathe I cannot survive without you

My dearest one I have come undone Unwoven, unmoored Out to sea

SAPPHO

I'll never run out Of words again I look at your face And the tide comes crashing in

I'll never run out
Of music now
I whisper your name
And the tide goes rushing out.

Chorus of Friends

APHRODITE

She who does not love her husband Finds solace among friends Where laughter and singing ring For friends jest of their sins.

FRIEND 1

You do realize, dear Sappho, your husband's name Kerkylas is a peculiar style I hope he's living up to his fame For Kerkylas means Prick from Man Isle!

FRIEND 2

You had to go out and find the manliest man For we all know where your heart lies Not with the prick, no, never the dick You lie between Atthis's thighs!

APHRODITE

Yes, she who does not love her husband Finds solace among friends Where laughter sings and rings For friends jest of their sins.

SAPPHO

Enough, enough, my vulgar friends You've made your point quite clear But let's move on to prettier things And perform for all to hear.

These things now for my companions I shall sing beautifully
These things now for our audience
We shall play and dance and sing.

^{*}Harmony of ooh's and ah's

SAPPHO

Not one girl I think Who looks on the light of the sun Will ever have wisdom like this.

No, no one who looks to the sky above Will ever know beauty like this.

For You, Atthis/For You, Kleis

SAPPHO

She meets me in the garden Where flowers grow and water flows She meets me in the meadow Where honey glows and breezes blow.

Barefoot here we feel no pain Even in a winter snow When I saw her in that dress It stirred something in my soul.

I'm cursed, I'm cursed
To wish for here, our stolen, borrowed haunt
I'm cursed, I'm cursed
'Cuz I prayed this word: I want I want.

Wrap me in violets and lay me to rest
Home is lying in the grass, my ear pressed to her chest
She is every little blade brushing by my skin
She is every whispered lie and every silent sin
Wrap me in violets, strung from head to toe
She is every lyric to a song I'll never know
She is a thousand suns and I'm a simple moon
She promised that she'd love me if I said I loved her too
And I do, I do, I do
Because she means the world to me
Because she is the world to me.

Know this, sweet Atthis You could release me from every care Know this, sweet Atthis There are universes in your hair.

Your freckles are a galaxy
I like to fathom constellations
You are a tall drink of wine
I am clouded inebriation.

You are a song in the silence A note sung clear and true You're pain, you're wind, you're violence You are bright and I am blue.

I'm so lucky that the moon I see is the one you see too.

SAPPHO & ATTHIS (in harmony)

Wrap me in violets and lay me to rest
Home is lying in the grass, my ear pressed to her chest
She is every little blade brushing by my skin
She is every whispered lie and every silent sin
Wrap me in violets, strung from head to toe
She is every lyric to a song I'll never know
She is a thousand suns and I'm a simple moon
She promised that she'd love me if I said I loved her too
And I do, I do, I do
Because she means the world to me
Because she is the world to me.

And I loved you without trying A mountain so few get to climb And someone will remember us, I say Even in another time.

And even if we break today
And our song ends without a rhyme
Someone will remember us, I say
Even in another time

Wrap me in violets and lay me to rest
Home is lying in the grass, my ear pressed to her chest
She is every little blade brushing by my skin
She is every whispered lie and every silent sin
Wrap me in violets, strung from head to toe
She is every lyric to a song I'll never know
She is a thousand suns and I'm a simple moon
She promised that she'd love me if I said I loved her too
And I do, I do, I do
Because she means the world to me
Because she is the world to me.

^{*}Echoes of "she is the world to me"

APHRODITE

An old lullaby comes to mind:

Evening you gather back all that Dazzling dawn has put asunder You gather a lamb, gather a kid Gather a child to its mother.

*Echoes of "mother"

SAPPHO

And suddenly
I feel her stir in me
And I know that I am not alone
No, I will never again be alone.

And it pains me
That part of her is him
But I know in my heart
Part of her is Atthis.

And I will hold them both My child and my love And I will pray this word: I want I want I want.

Exile

APHRODITE

All great love stories
Must come to tragic ends
It's how we gods make humans pay
For all their inevitable sins

If a regime falls on a little Grecian island and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?

It ripples out around the town Hitting close to home Husband, wife, and newborn child Are exiled all alone

Two hearts joined, I have to break Do not think it easy I long to look the other way But we all have our duties.

Farewell, Atthis

SAPPHO

I simply want to be dead Weeping, she left me Standing on the boat and With many tears she said

ATTHIS

Oh, how badly things Have turned our for us two I swear, it is against my will That I leave you.

SAPPHO

Rejoice, go, and remember me For you know how I cherished you But if not, I want to remind you Of the beauty before the blue.

For many crowns of violets and roses You put on at my side And many garlands of flowers grazed your Soft throat every night

On the softest bed with the softest sigh You lay delicately To whisper my name like a Lesbian rain And let loose your longing.

ATTHIS

And there was never a holier place than that Nor better sound nor dance

SAPPHO

You came and I was crazy for you And you cooled the fires in my mind The fires that burned with desire for you You robbed the matches blind.

ATTHIS

For many crowns of violets and roses You put on at my side And many garlands of flowers grazed your Soft throat every night

On the softest bed with the softest sigh You lay delicately To whisper my name like a Lesbian rain And let loose your longing.

SAPPHO

We'll always have the grass

ATTHIS

We'll always have the trees

SAPPHO

We'll always have the creek Running wild and free

ATTHIS

We'll always have the sheep

SAPPHO

We'll always have the stones

ATTHIS

We'll always have this hillside To call home

SAPPHO

And tomorrow if I wake And the sky is still blue I will write of you BOTH For many crowns of violets and roses You put on at my side And many garlands of flowers grazed your Soft throat every night

On the softest bed with the softest sigh You lay delicately To whisper my name like a Lesbian rain And let loose your longing.

And there was never a holier place than that Nor better sound nor dance

SAPPHO If only I, o Aphrodite Could win this lot.

APHRODITE I'm so sorry, dear Sappho But you cannot.

SAPPHO

I don't know who I am.

Kleis's Lullaby

KLEIS

Mama, what are you looking at? Is Daddy home?

SAPPHO

It's nothing, sweet Kleis.

KLEIS

Tell me a story.

SAPPHO

Once upon a time, in a place like this A woman and man lived on the edge of the world There was not a soul near, no one, but one Gathering flowers, so very delicate a girl.

Her hair was yellow, brighter than a torch And her smile was wider than the sea She danced and she sang like her mother before But she taught her mother how to be.

KLEIS

Why did she have to teach her mother?

SAPPHO

Because sometimes mothers forget.

KLEIS

Why do mothers sometimes forget?

SAPPHO

Because they're thinking of all they regret.

But this girl, well she could save the world Without a shield or a sword This girl, she needed just one thing This little crown of thorns.

KLEIS

Like mine?

SAPPHO

Like yours.

For the Graces smile on those who wear flowers And turn from those without a crown For the graces smile on those who have a home And turn from those without a town.

I have a beautiful child who is like golden flowers Who I would not trade for the world I only wish that I could give the world To my beautiful, golden girl.

APHRODITE

And you will, dear Sappho In due time Everything, in due time.

Art and Pain

SAPPHO

I've been told when a painter has nothing He paints his masterpiece I've been told when a sculptor has nothing He sculpts the next great thing

I've been told when a musician has nothing She writes a symphony I've been told when a poet has nothing Her words have everything

I've been told that the greatest art
Finds its roots in the greatest pain
That the greatest painters use fresh blood
To capture life on the page

And the greatest sculptors use their bones To fashion their ivory men And the greatest musicians use loud cries To compose their melodic winds

And the greatest poets use their flesh
To fill the libraries
But how do they do it, these artists, these gods
Even the Muses have left me

The music is gone
The waves bellow on the shore
The beauty is wrong
The life I once lived is folklore

The words have fled
The sand grits beneath my feet
That love is dead
I count what I've lost like sheep

As all I have, in my arms, falls asleep

I've been told when a lover has nothing She falls into disrepair I've been told when a woman has nothing

Her seams begin to tear

I've been told that the greatest hearts Find their life in the greatest pain That the greatest lovers take cold steel And pump it through their veins

And the greatest women take their rage And with it build something new A house adorned with reminiscences Of the beauty before the blue

The music is not gone
The waves sing along the shore
The beauty is not wrong
The life I lived was never folklore

The words have not fled
The sand sighs beneath my feet
That love is not dead
I count what I've loved like sheep

As my future, in my arms, falls asleep

And even when I have nothing
I still have myself
I can hear the future singing
As they pull my book off the shelf

(Echoes of "sapphic" and "lesbian")

And even when I have nothing
I still have a lyre
I can hear the future singing
As they pull fragments from the fire

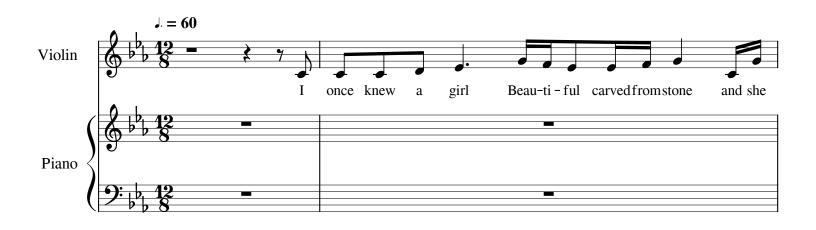
For even if we break today And our song ends without a rhyme Someone will remember us I say Even in another time

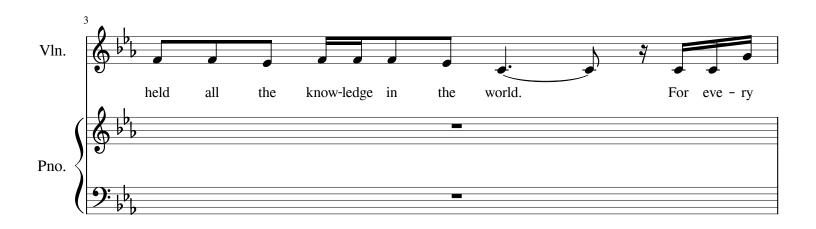
For even if I break today And my song ends without a rhyme Kleis and I will write a new one I say One for all of time

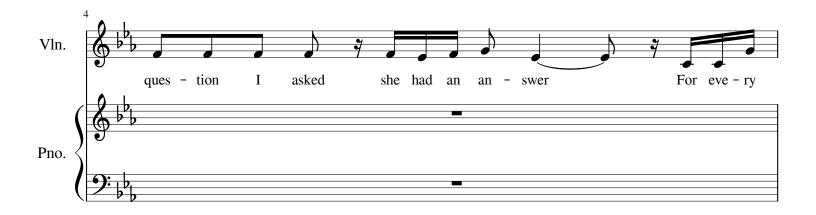
I know who I am.

Appendix B: Sheet Music

The World Is On Fire Melody Line

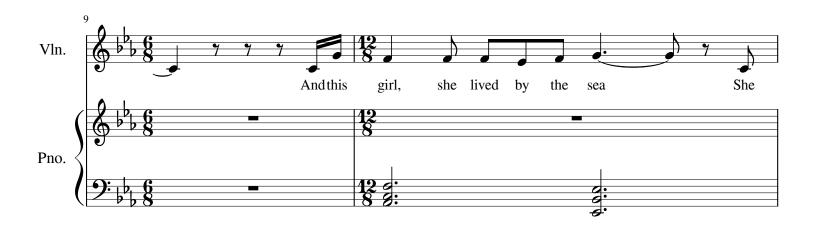


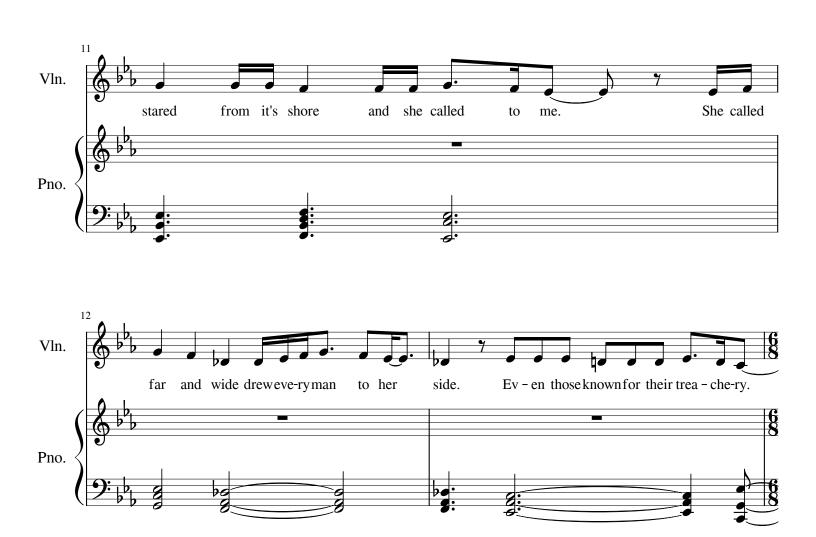


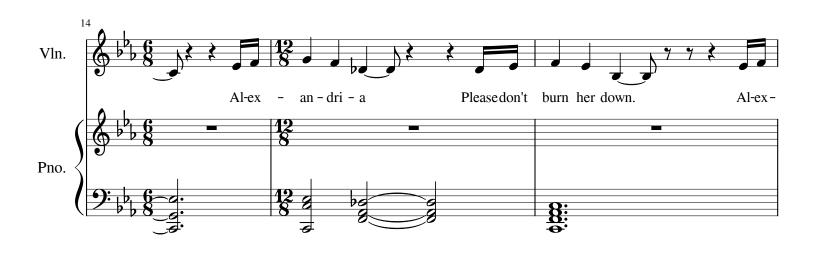


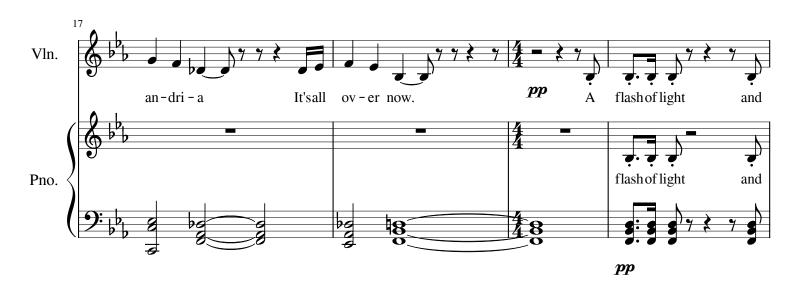




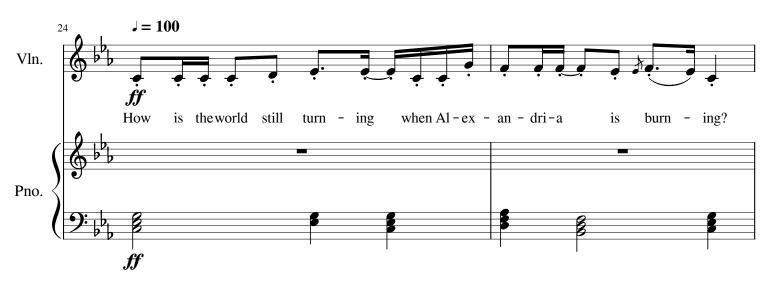




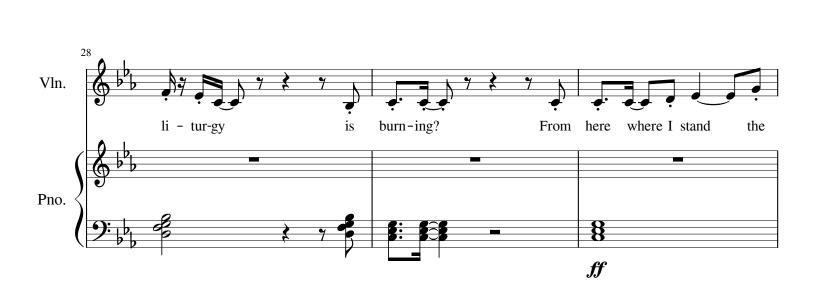


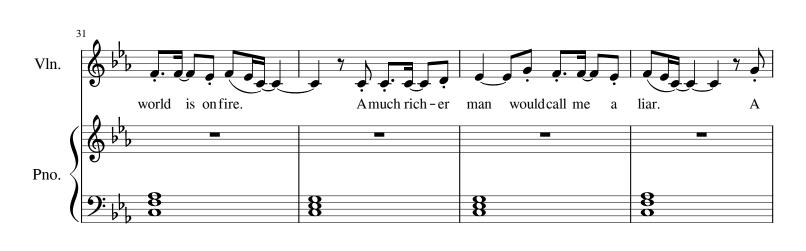


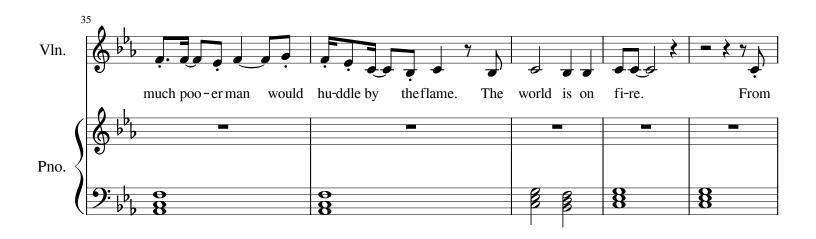








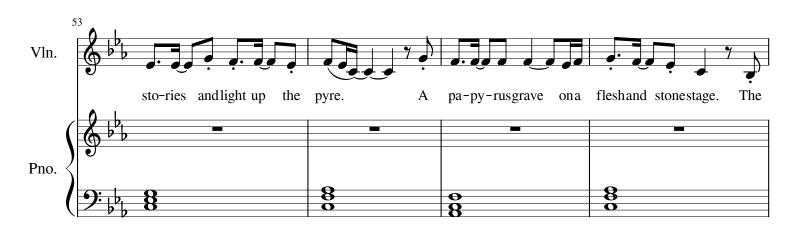




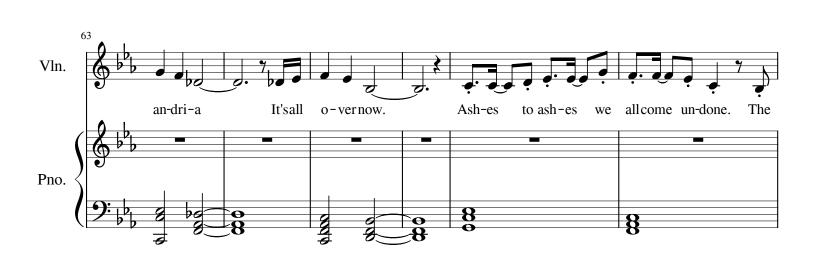


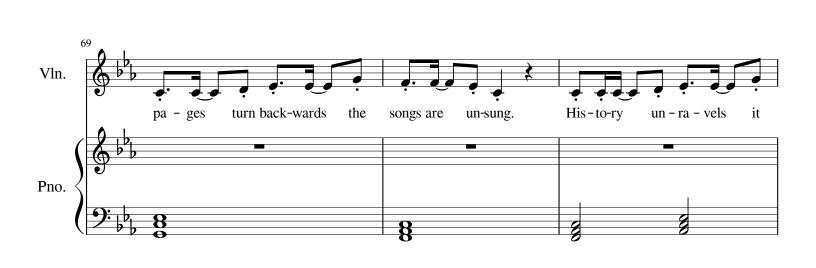


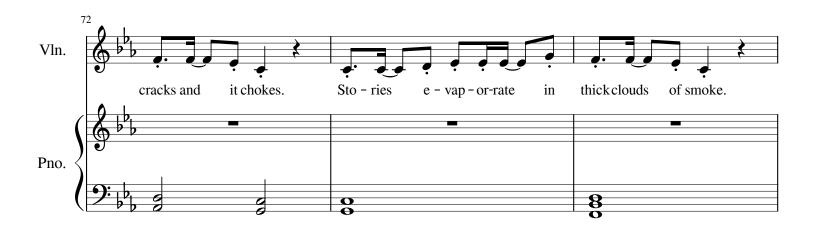


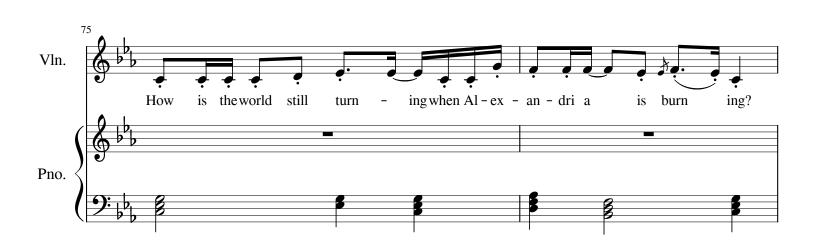




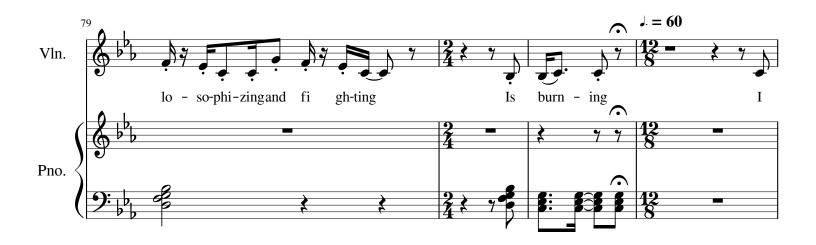


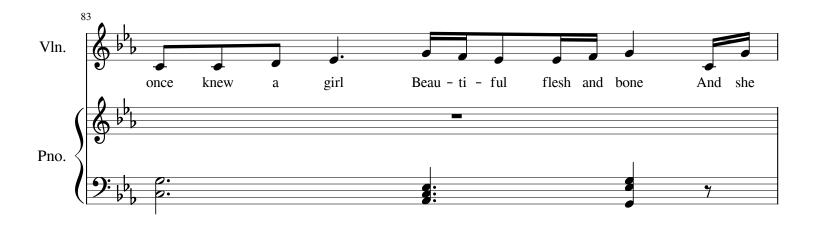


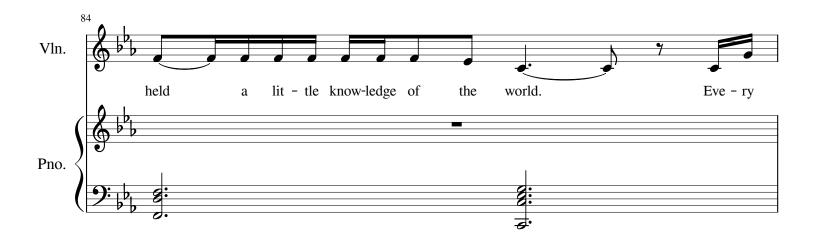


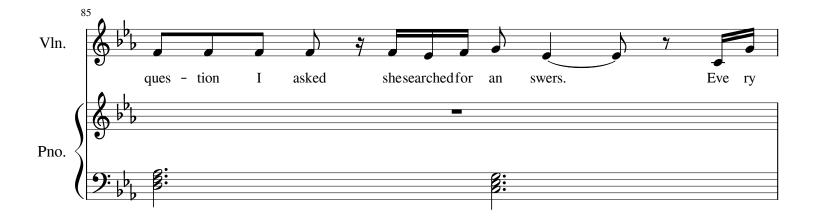






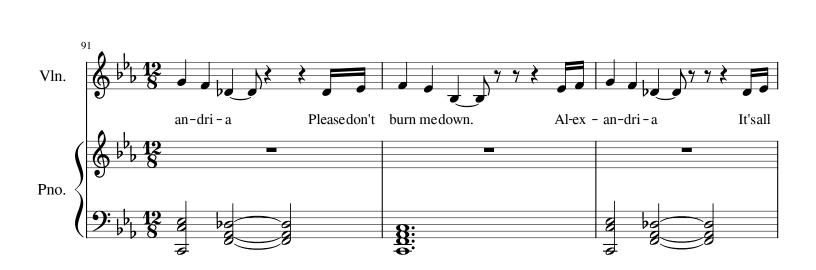


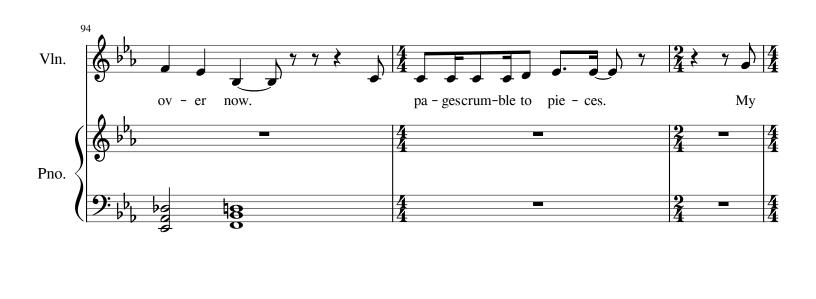


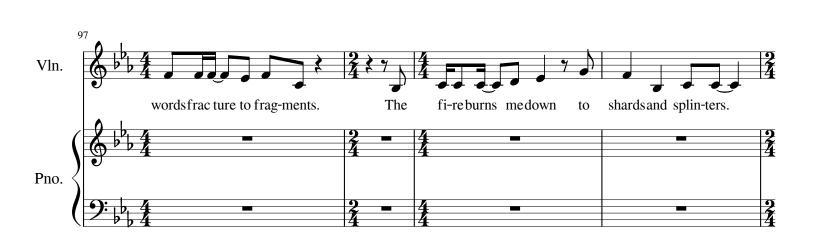




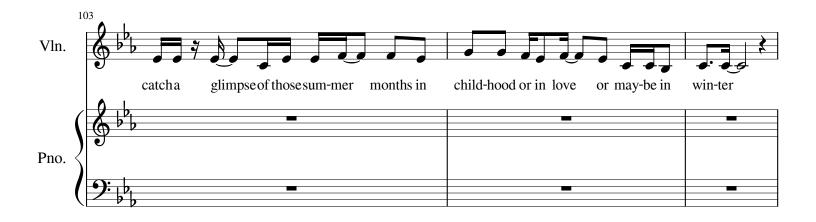


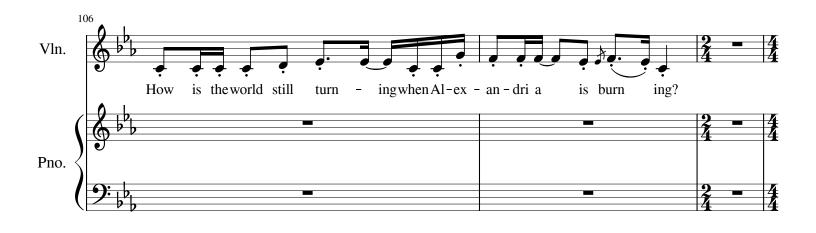




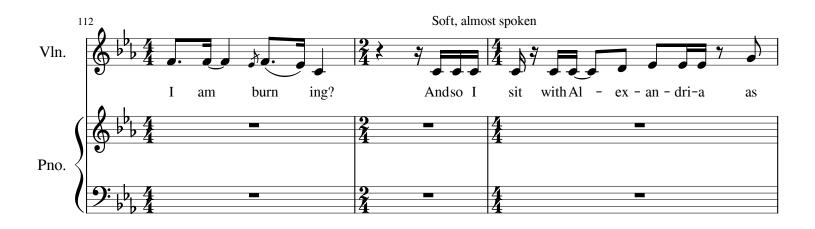


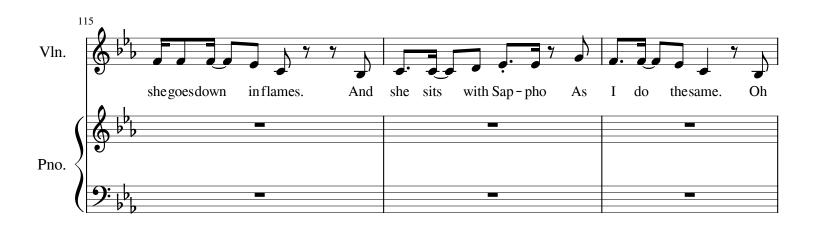


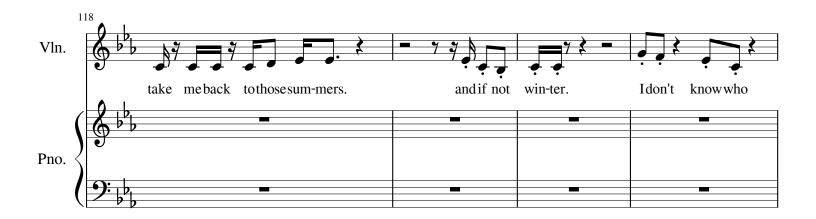


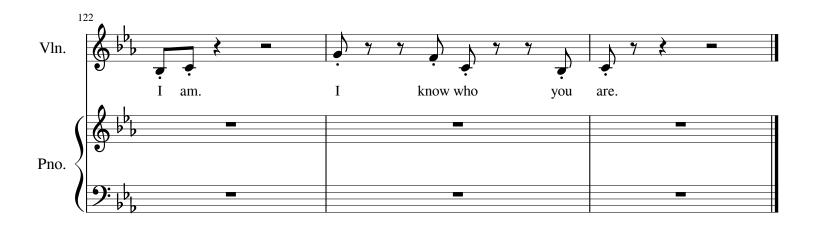






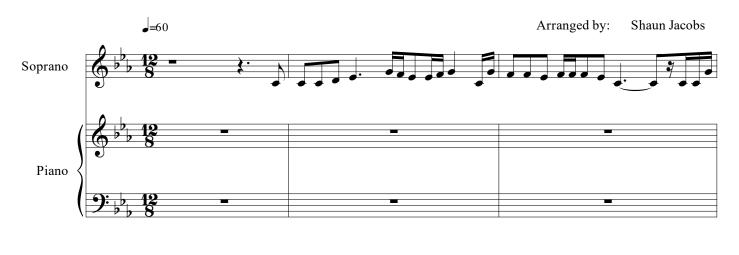




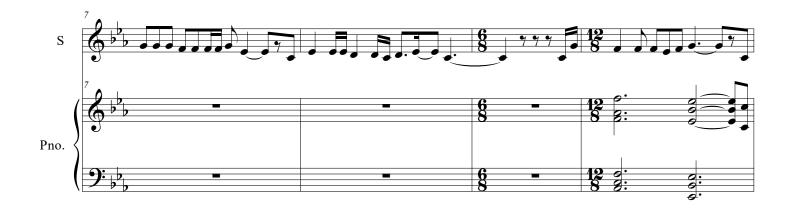


The World Is On Fire Arrangement

Written and composed by: Rachel Weaver, Emma Patten



















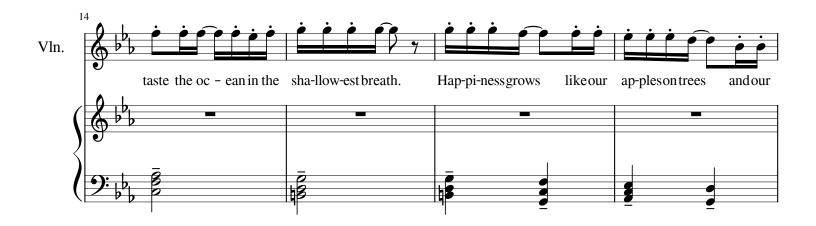


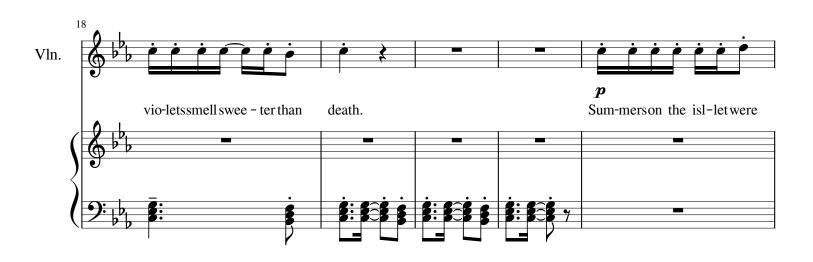
Ladies of Lesbos Melody Line



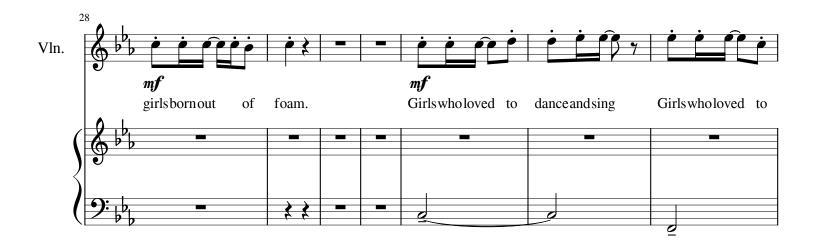




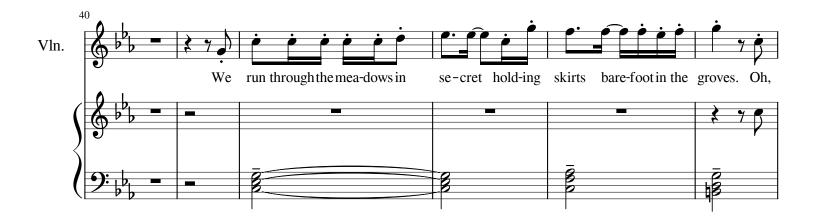




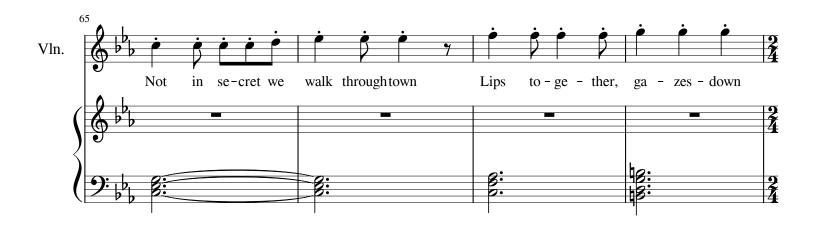




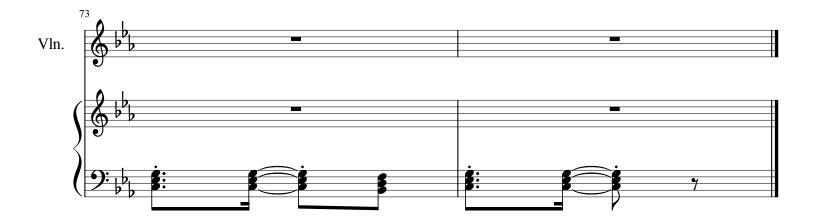












Ladies of Lesbos Arrangement

Rachel Weaver, Emma Patten

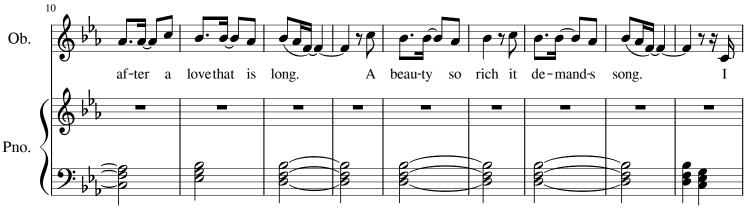


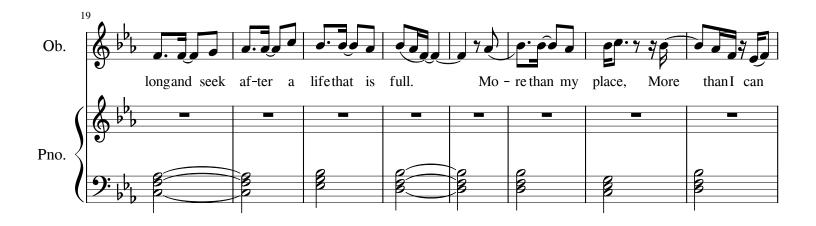


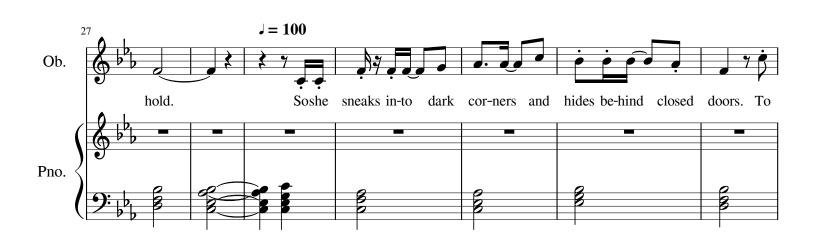


Long and Seek After Melody Line









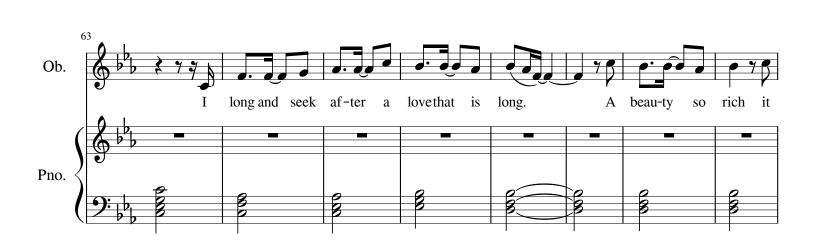








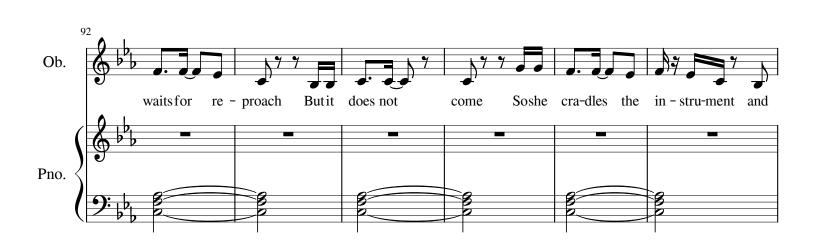




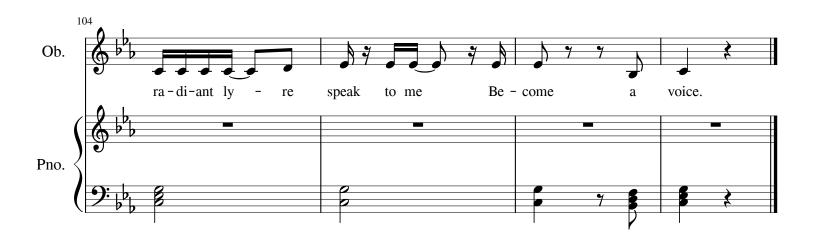












Long and Seek After Arrangement

Rachel Weaver, Emma Patten

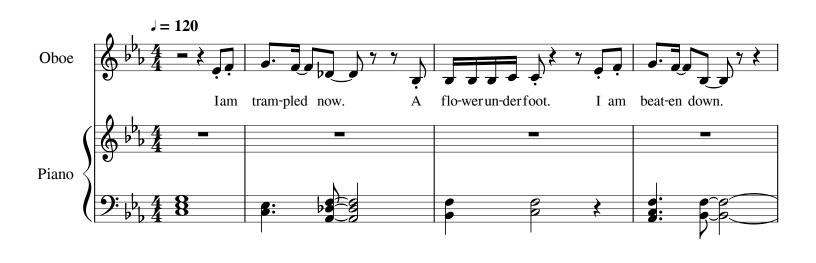
Shaun Jacobs =60



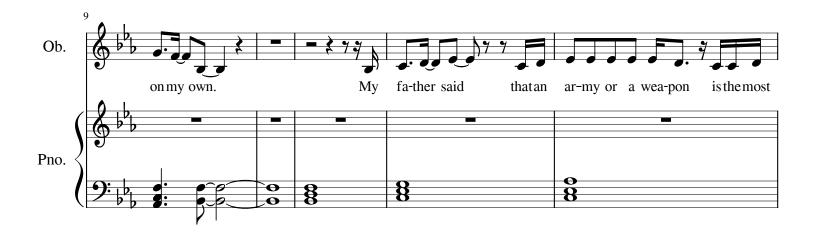


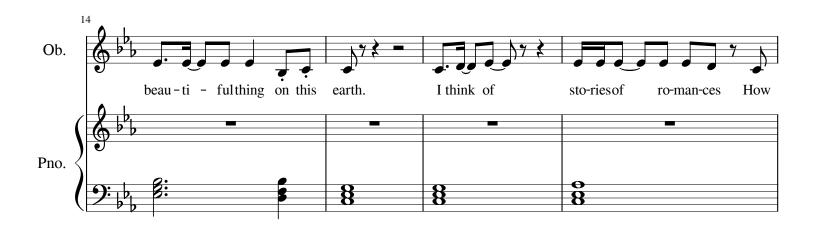


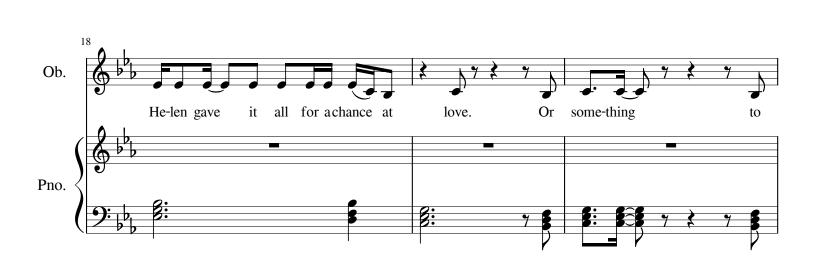
Unmoored Melody Line

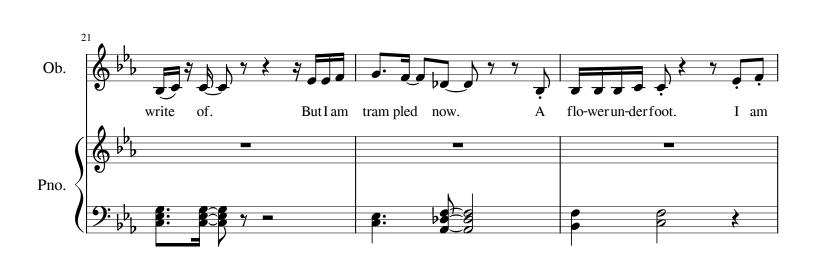


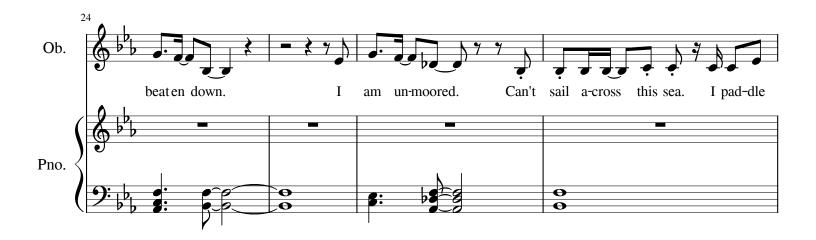




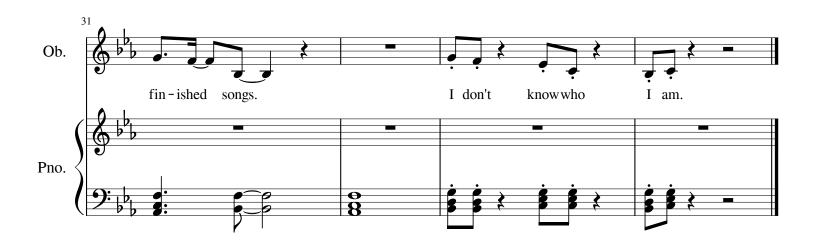












Unmoored Arrangement



2 Unmoored



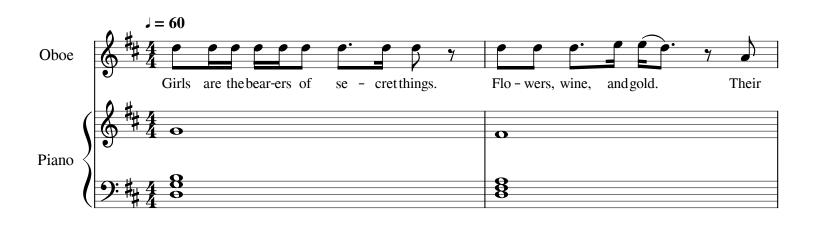
Unmoored 3

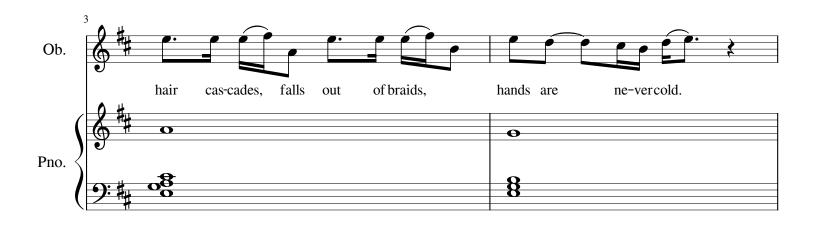


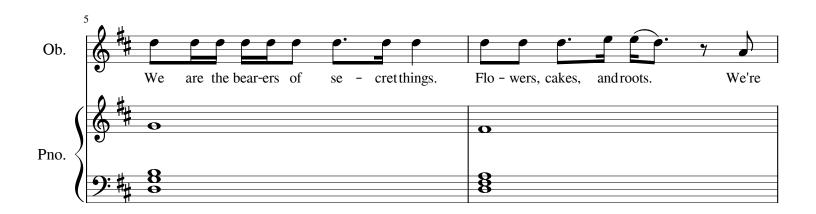
Instrumental Demo of "Unmoored"

https://soundcloud.com/user-455880694/unmoored-instrumental-demo

The Bearers of Secret Thing Melody Line

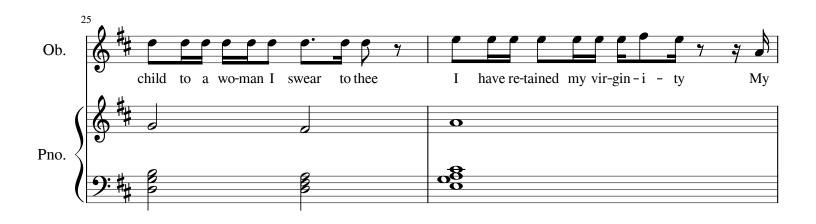




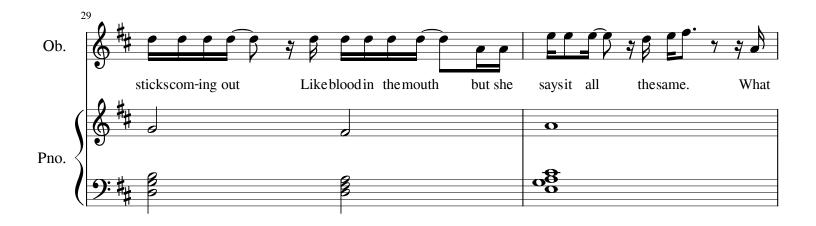


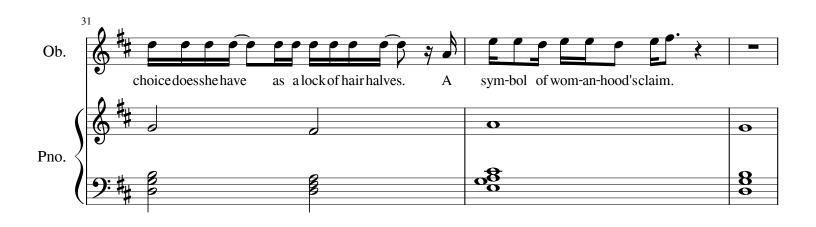










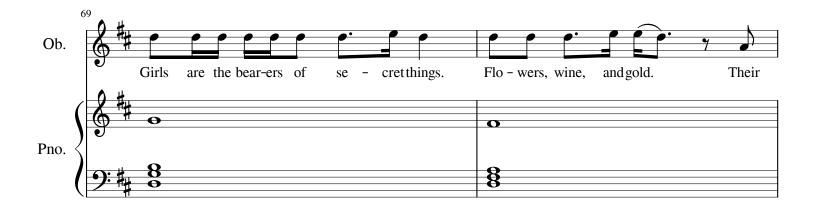


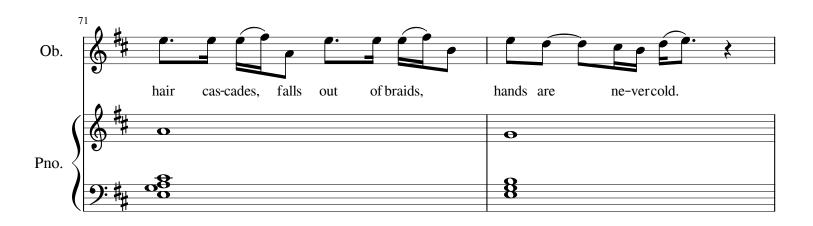


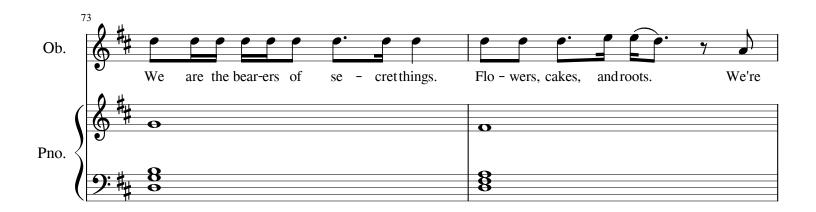


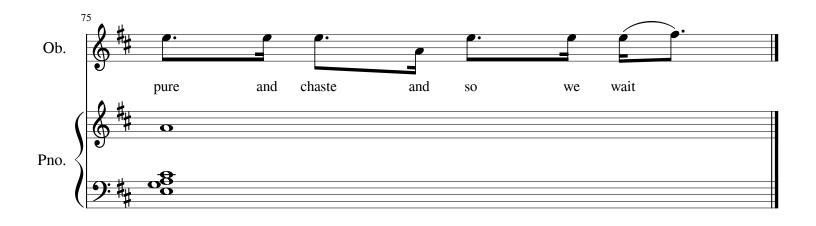












The Bearers of Secret Things Arrangement

Rachel Weaver, Emma Patten
Shaun Jacobs

Alto
Piano





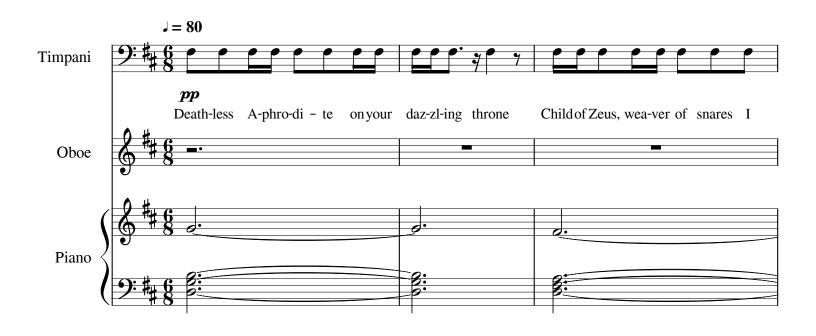


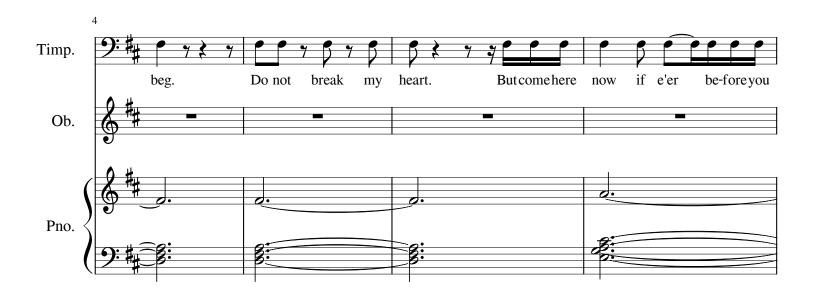






Ode to Aphrodite Melody Line











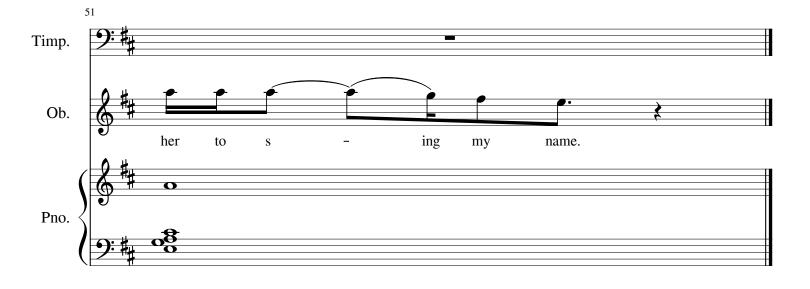




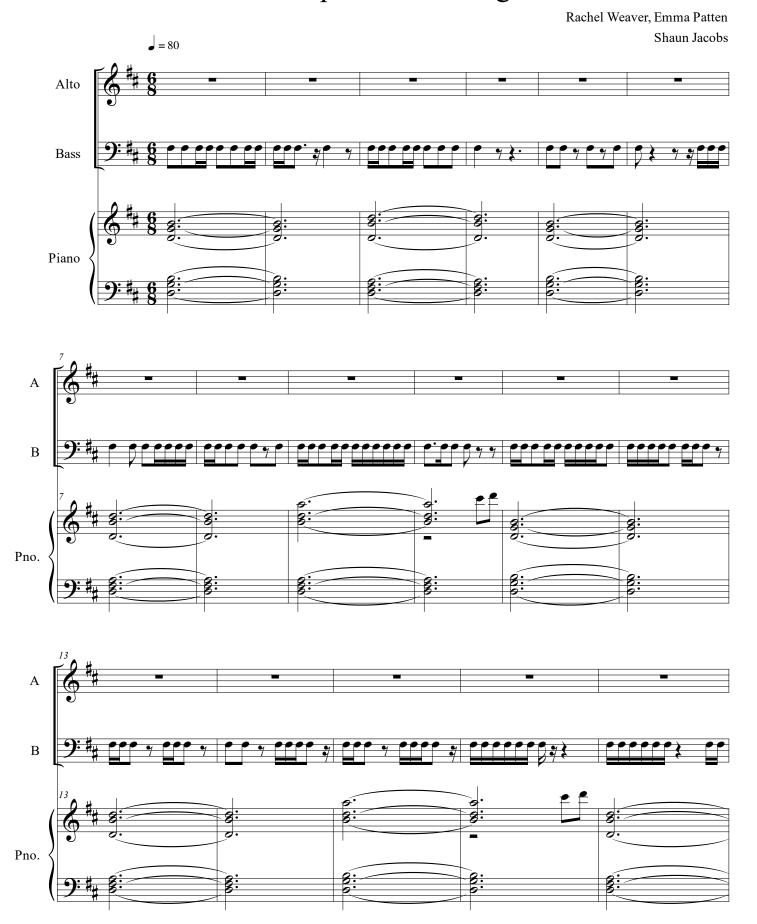








Ode to Aphrodite Arrangement







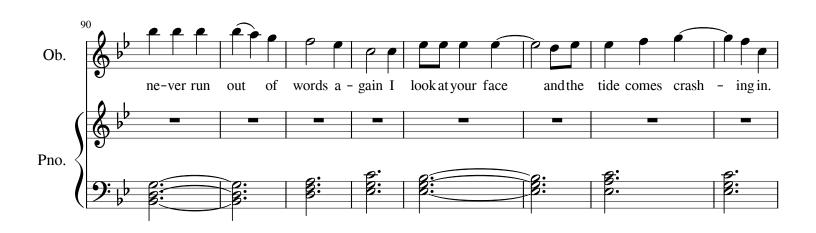
Out to Sea Melody Line

Composer

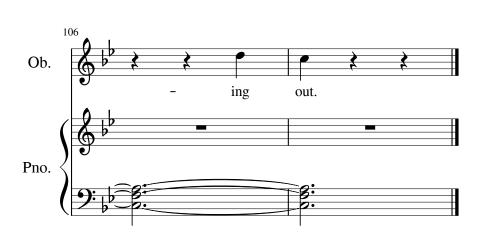












Out to Sea Arrangement

Rachel Weaver, Emma Patten Shaun Jacobs



2 Out to sea



Out to sea 3

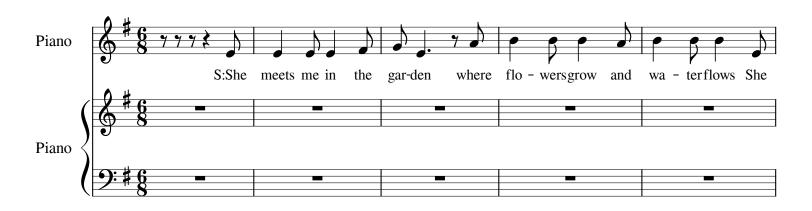


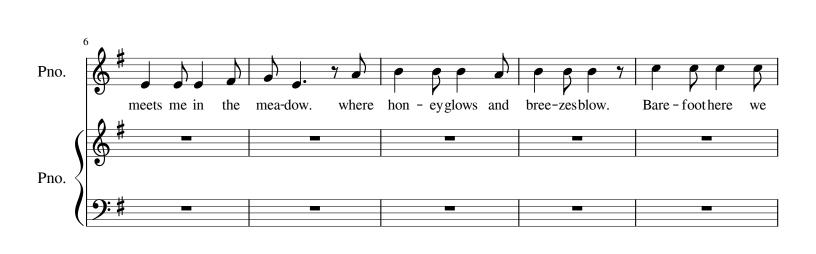
4 Out to sea



For You, Atthis/For You, Kleis

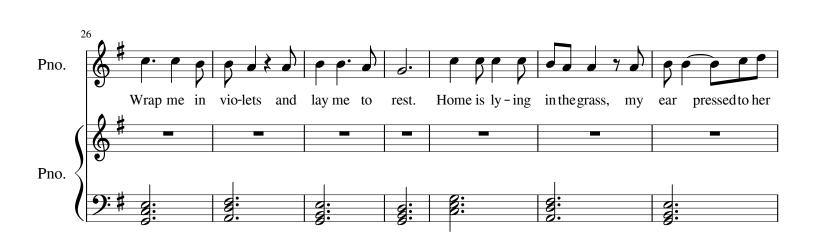
Composer











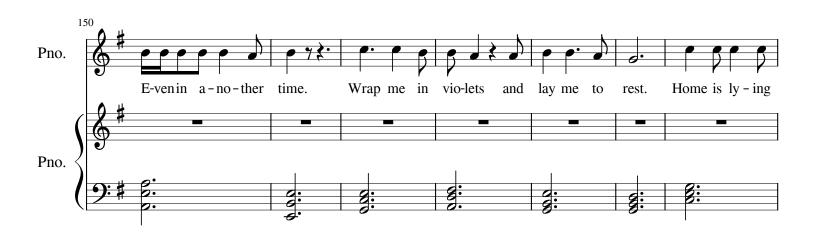




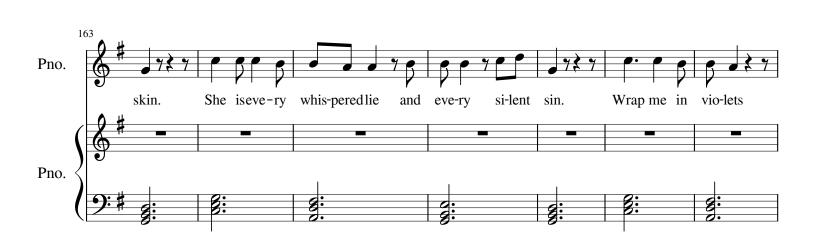






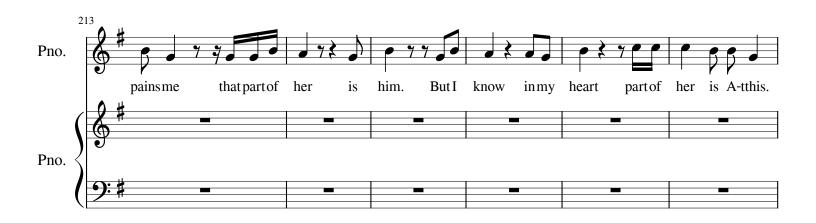


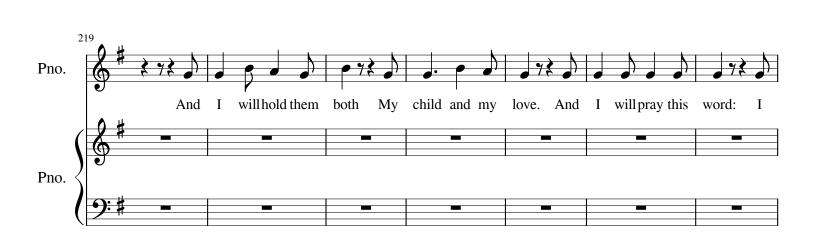


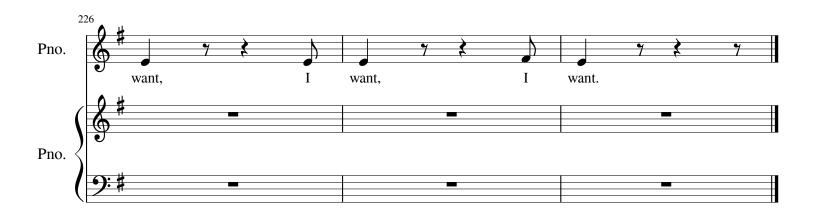












Lover's Interlude/Exile

Shaun Jacobs





Kleis' Lullaby

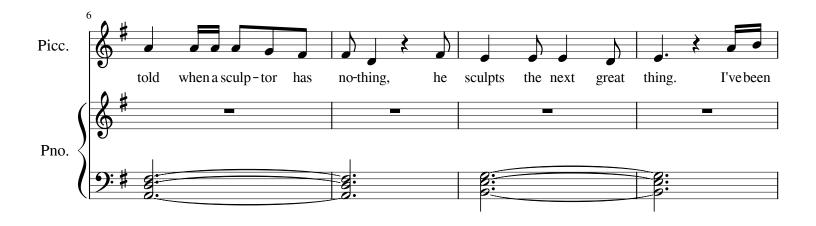
Composer



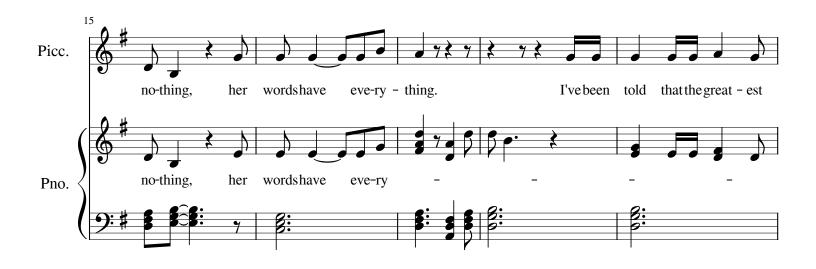
Art and Pain

Composer







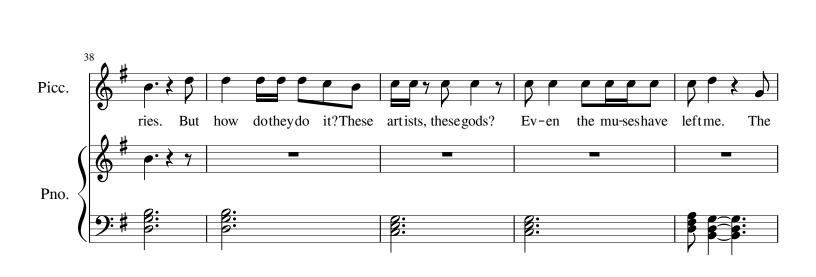


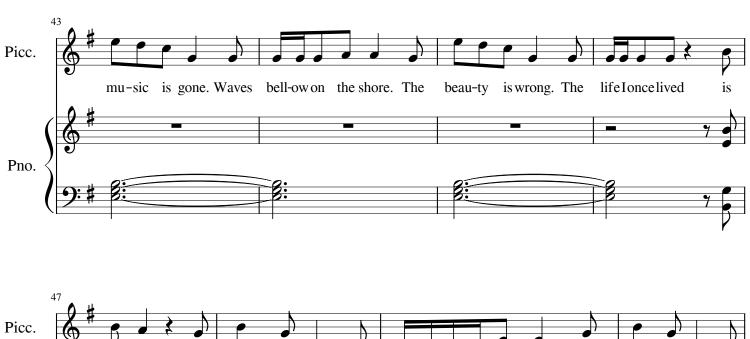




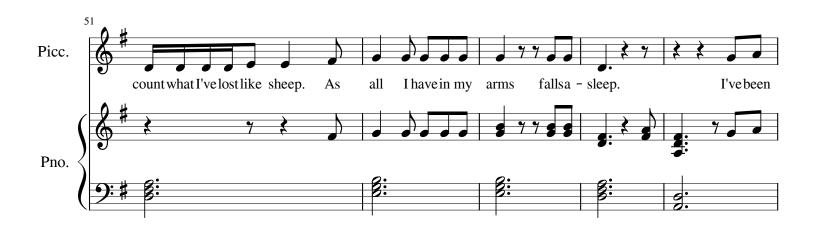










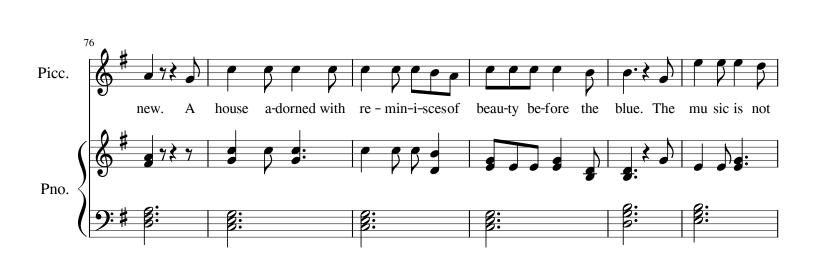


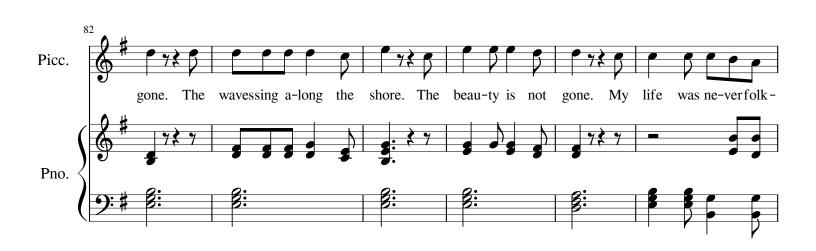




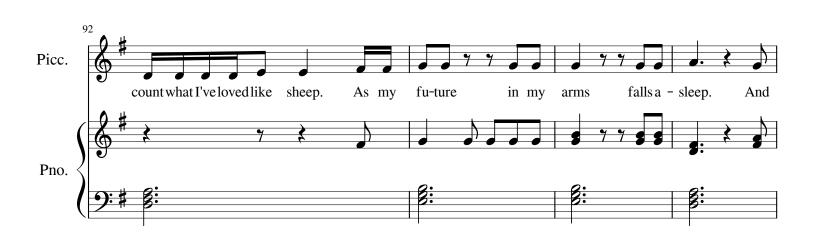


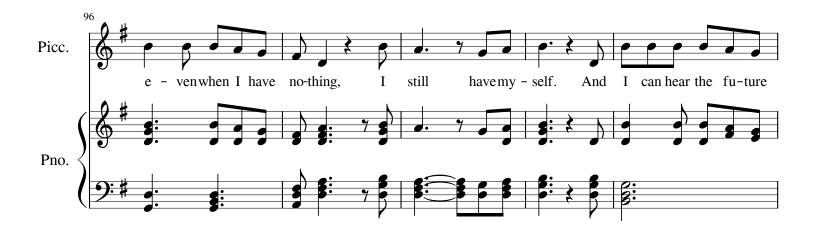


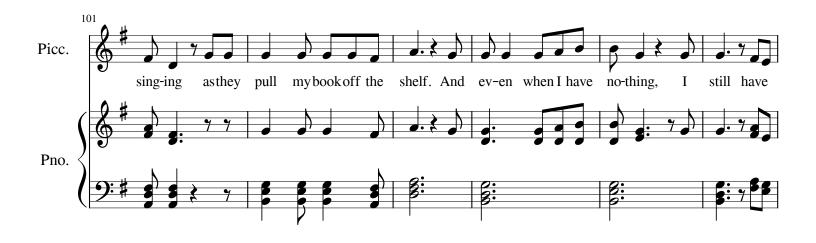


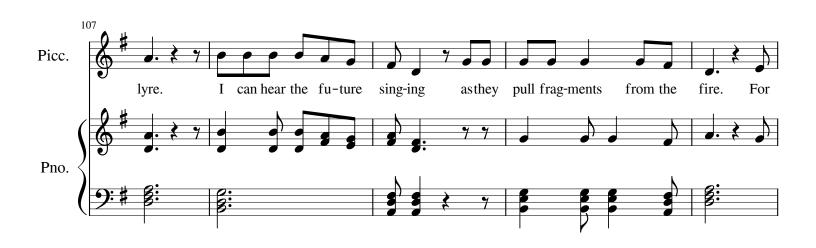


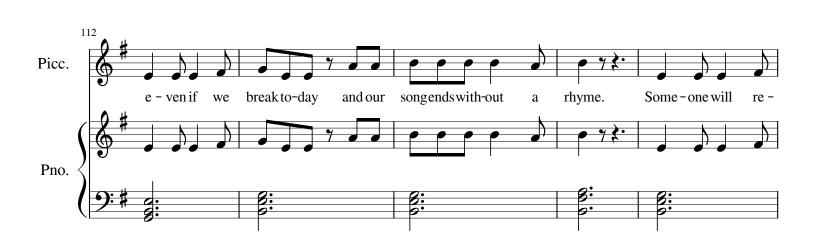


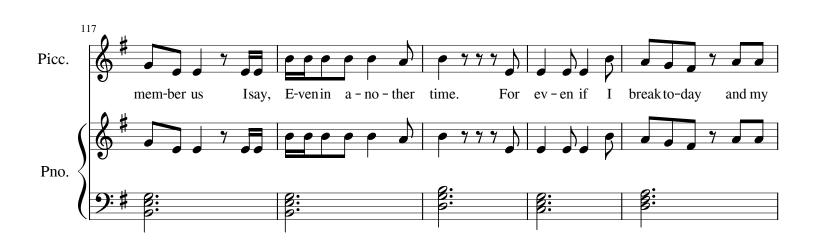


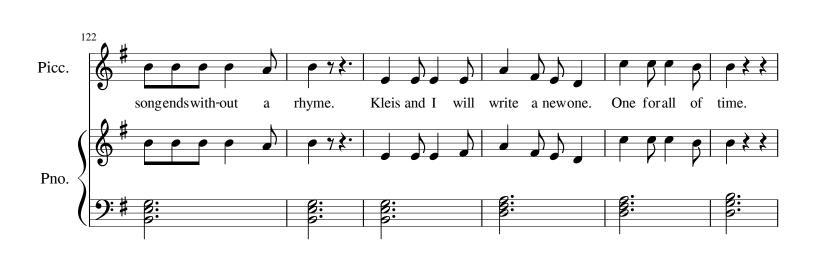


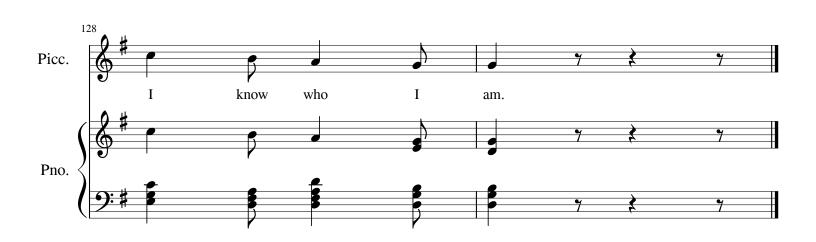












Instrumental Demo of "Art and Pain

https://soundcloud.com/user-455880694/art-and-pain-instrumental-demo