At Love's Hearth: An Original One-Act Musical Exploring the Intersection of Music and Spiritual Care

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Accessibility
At Love’s Hearth
an original one-act chamber musical
weaving together music and spiritual care

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This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Divinity, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
Thanks to my faculty advisor Dan McKanan and teaching fellow Akhil Thomas.
At Love’s Hearth

Lyrics by Stephanie Hollenberg
Music by Jonathan Shin and Stephanie Hollenberg

Created for the fulfillment of Stephanie Hollenberg’s
Master of Divinity Thesis at Harvard Divinity School, 2024

For Carol, and all who love her—
and for all whom we remember with love.
May their memories be a blessing.
CHARACTERS

Rachel  mezzo/soprano, mid-30’s; solo
Rosie  6 years old; solo
Poppy (Charles)  baritone, mid-50’s; company
Gramma (May)  mezzo-soprano, mid-50’s; company
Auntie Ella  soprano, early 30’s; company
Uncle Joseph  tenor, early 30’s; company
Kind Stranger  soprano, 40’s; solo
Doctor  male-presenting; company
Extended Company  10-15 singers for Finale

SYNOPSIS

Tragedy strikes on Rosie’s sixth birthday when her mother, Rachel, falls ill. As the family gathers around the hospital bed, reeling as they try to metabolize the situation, a visitor slips in and offers a simple but profound gift.

Late October. Late 1960’s. The midwest, U.S.

SONGS

Scene One
Overture  String Quartet
“Daydream”  Auntie Ella, Company

Scene Two
“Come Home”  Rachel
Instrumental  String Quartet
“Love Sits Close By”  Rosie, Rachel
“Gather ‘Round the Hearth”  Kind Stranger, Company
Finale  Company, Extended Company
Scene One: Rosie’s Birthday Party

Overture

“Daydream”

Curtains are closed. Rachel and Rosie walk down a side aisle toward the stage, arriving home from school, while string quartet plays the Overture. Rosie has a backpack on her back; Rachel is carrying Rosie’s lunchbox. The spirit is light. They approach the house stoop, in front of the curtains, with lights giving the impression of a doorway to a house.

RACHEL: Are you ready for your surprise?

String ensemble roars again as curtains fling open. We find ourselves in their kitchen, warmly lit, and decorated for Rosie’s sixth birthday. Gramma and Poppy, Auntie and Uncle are waiting. There’s a wall with kitchen counters, a doorway stage left of the counters, and a kitchen table with chairs down stage.

ALL: Surprise!
Joyful greetings commence. Music continues as A (downstage), B (upstage), and C (stage left) happen simultaneously:

A: GRAMMA: Hi sweetie.

RACHEL: Hi Ma. Do you think Rosie was surprised?

GRAMMA: That girl will be tickled by anything! Are you feeling ok? You look a bit flush.

RACHEL: Oh, it’s nothing. Probably just nipped by the wind. Any word from Trystan while I was out?

GRAMMA: No…

RACHEL: I know it’s silly to hope that he’ll find a payphone in the middle of…wherever in Vietnam he is, but…I don’t want Rosie to forget his voice, you know?

GRAMMA: Oh honey. I know this isn’t easy. But what we can do for Rosie, and each other, is celebrate this little girl. You know your sister’s been planning for weeks!

RACHEL: You’re right. Thanks, Ma. Pause. What happened to spaghetti dinner?

GRAMMA: Ella insisted on having birthday dessert before birthday dinner. “Cupcakes are practically appetizers,” said she!

RACHEL: Of course.

GRAMMA: Poppy, what are you up to?!

B: Auntie and Uncle retreat to the kitchen counter where a cake plate with cupcakes sit. Auntie finishes up cupcake preparations while she and Uncle flirt. (All of this should be in balance with the other activity on the stage so A remains in focus.)

C: Rosie and Poppy are playing a game with goodies stolen from the cake prep. It’s messy and cheeky.
ROSIE: Why is there only one candle? I’m six.

POPPY: Symbolism, my girl–you are the one true light of our lives!

UNCLE: Yeah, Poppy “symbolically” sat on the other candles and broke them all.

AUNTIE: Make a wish, Jelly Bean!

ROSIE: I wish…

*Rosie blows out the candle. Gramma places cupcakes on small plates and passes them out as conversation proceeds.*

POPPY: So Rosie, have you gotten to Marxism in school?

ROSIE: Mr. Brown said we’re not old enough. He didn’t like the book you gave me for show-and-tell.

POPPY: The manifesto? Well I’ll be—what a shame. Teachers, of all people, know class exploitation. I’ll write Mr. Brown a letter. It’s important my granddaughter has a proper education.

UNCLE: Dad, they’re six.

POPPY: Six-year-olds understand class exploitation, too—more than we think.

AUNTIE: Daddy, if you’re not careful, you’ll get arrested, and then where would we be?

RACHEL: How about a song? Would you like that, Rosie?

ROSIE: Oh, Auntie El, please!

AUNTIE: I thought you’d never ask! I’ve been working on a new one this week.

GRAMMA: Someone turn off that radio, will you?

*String quartet stops vamping.*

AUNTIE: Just a moment—I need to tune myself. Cake makes me sharp.

UNCLE: You bet it does…
AUNTIE: “Daydream”
There’s a place that we go
In between the shadows
The veil is thin — enter in —
The unfractured kaleidoscope

Glow-bugs light the wooded path
Raven leads in robes of black
Laughter bubbles like champagne
Howls and squeaks and joyful quacks

Answer Bluebell’s scented invitation
And under leafy bowers you will find…

Strawberries and whiskey, oh, under a Rabbit Moon
Dragonflies dancing with plumed Raccoons
Trees in tuxedos, oh, starlight in their hair
Enacting a patient love affair

Moss grows soft in Dew’s embrace
Otters sup on bouillabaisse
Merry Stones float like balloons
As Larks sing dazzling cabarets

Answer Bluebell’s scented invitation
And under leafy bowers you will find…

ALL: Strawberries and whiskey, oh, under a Rabbit Moon
Dragonflies dancing with plumed Raccoons
Trees in tuxedos, oh, starlight in their hair
Enacting a patient love affair

Da da da…

Rachel takes Rosie’s hand and waltzes with her:

AUNTIE: Hairy limbs and feathered wings
Dare gravity on vinéd swings
River gossips with the Sand
As Snakes try on each others skins

Everyone rises to dance.
Answer Bluebell’s scented invitation
And under leafy bowers you will find…

ALL: Strawberries and whiskey, oh, under a Rabbit Moon
      Dragonflies dancing with plumed Raccoons
      Trees in tuxedos, oh, starlight in their hair
      Enacting a patient love affair

      Da da da…

All sing the “da da’s” whole-heartedly. Singing ceases, but instruments and merriment continue.
Upstage, Rachel feels faint; Gramma sees and goes over to her, concerned.

GRAMMA: Rachel!

RACHEL: It’s, um, probably the sugar—the spinning… I’m—I think I’ll lie down.

Rachel exits upstage through the kitchen door frame. Gramma watches, then rejoins the activity
as the lights dim on the celebrants, whose activity goes to slow-motion. Music intensifies. A
bright, cool spotlight shines on the room behind the wall where Rachel has gone. Audience can’t
see what’s happening, but they can hear it: “Daydream” is drowned out by the tense music, and
builds to chaos.

Abrupt silence and blackout.
Scene Two: Hospital Room

“Come Home”
Kind Stranger Instrumental
“Love Sits Close By”
"Gather ‘Round the Hearth”
Finale

Cool lights come up on the stage. Panels of white fabric of varying sizes hang around the stage, giving the impression of walls. There is a large window upstage right behind the chair; outside, a hawthorn tree is changing colors. Branches of said tree are out of sight for now, but will descend over the room during “Come Home.” Center stage, there is a hospital bed in which Rachel lies, unconscious, hooked up to a machine. Gramma is bedside. Auntie sits in the corridor with Rosie. Uncle and Poppy speak to the Doctor down stage right. The only sounds in the room are the monitor beeping, and muffled conversation from the three men.

DOCTOR: It seems the treatment isn’t working as we hoped it would. She’s not getting worse, but she’s not getting better either. It’s hard to know if or when she might wake from her coma.

UNCLE: Surely there’s something else you can try. What about sending her to a hospital with more specialized care? More resources, more options….

Auntie peers in the doorframe to listen.

DOCTOR: Unfortunately, there are limited options for someone in Rachel’s condition. And after the events of this last week, I fear transferring her could do more harm than good. Pause. I understand this is immensely difficult for your family. We can continue the treatment a bit longer if you think that’s the best decision for your—

POPPY: She wouldn’t want this….

AUNTIE: Dad.
Rosie hears, and comes to the door frame with Auntie. In the same beat Gramma stands and moves to the window, upstage left.

POPPY: Ella—

AUNTIE: Dad, we can't give up hope. Rosie and Trystan, they need her—

POPPY: Hope for what, El? Do you really think Rachel will survive this? And if she does, the girl will grow up with a paralyzed mother and haunted father. What are we hoping for?

GRAMMA: Charles, the girl.

POPPY: She has a right to know.

GRAMMA: She knows. More than you and I could imagine.

POPPY: What are we to do, May? What is a father to do?

Music begins. Company turns away from Rachel’s bed except Rosie, who stands near Auntie but remains facing the bed. Lights dim and everyone freezes in tableau. An otherworldly light shines on Rachel. She begins to sing from her stillness in the bed. Through the aria she sits up and moves about the space.

RACHEL: “Come Home”
Darling Rosie, I hear you sigh
Oh sweet mother, weep not by my side
Joseph, dear, your pacing wears thin
Sister, father, call me back again

Come home, come home

They talk in the room as if I wasn’t here:
The doctor, my father, and brother.
The air is cool and laced with fear
Light and shadow summon.

Sister brings coffee, the monitor beeps,
Rituals marking time,
testing warns improbability
Dread slips down my spine

Come home, come home…
I felt queer and scared that morning alone,
Coffee had long grown cold,
You rang, your voice so far from home,
“Rachel, hold on,” you told me —
your voice crackled on the phone

Cool bathroom tile — wooden blocks —
Flowering walls — deafening din —
Ella’s gone swimming and I am lost —
Trystan! Where have you been?

Come home, come home…

Reaching for a warm hand to hold
Breathe hope; don’t let me go

Who calls now? Whose voice do I hear?
God help me: thy will be done.
A tiny light draws near
Into its arms…I run.

Instrumental

Rachel is back in bed, comatose. Music transitions as a light blooms around the stage and the tree’s branches descend to hover above the room. Kind Stranger emerges through the white panels. She looks around, taking in Rachel’s world: the family, Rosie, the tree, and Rachel. She takes a moment with the tree, then approaches Rachel’s bed. Rosie watches, making slight movements so the audience knows she is witnessing this world. Music continues as Kind Stranger speaks.

KIND STRANGER: Rachel? I came to say hello and be with you for a while. How are you? Pause. Sits down, looks up. It’s beautiful in here. Pause. I hear you love to walk under the trees. It’s cool today. Leaves lie heavy and shining on the ground from yesterday’s rain. Most trees have dropped their leaves into piles at their feet, as if tucking themselves in for winter. But some, like the birch outside your window, persist. Their yellow leaves tremble on the silver branch in the breeze.

I wonder if you feel like that, Rachel? A leaf clinging to her branch. Pause. Some leaves stubbornly cling on, all through the winter. Have you noticed that, too? Others let go, giving themselves to the season. Giving themselves over to the earth, to a new life. Pause.
Rosie, child—come sit beside me. *Rosie moves from light’s edge to come to sit beside Kind Stranger.* I imagine you’re feeling an awful lot. *Pause.* Is there anything you’d like to say to your mother?

**ROSIE:** “Love Sits Close By”

Come home…

What a strange game
of hide and seek.
Am I waiting for you?
Or you for me?

The breath in your body
Is quiet and small,
You’re still in there somewhere.
Do you hear me at all?

Come home, mama, come home.              **RACHEL:**
Come home, mama, come home.                  Oh, darling Rosie, you feel so far away…

Remember the day
Daddy was sad?
You sat for hours
Holding his hand. You said,

Sometimes when
Love sits close by
A door cracks open
Light calls to light.

Come home, mama, come home.
Come home, mama, come home.

I will sit here and hold your hand
While you wander invisible lands

Auntie El says I’m good
at imagining, true,
But I can’t imagine
a home without you.

I can’t imagine…

Come home, mama, come home.
Kind Stranger, Rosie and Rachel are bathed in warm light, similar to Scene One. Stranger sings “Gather ‘Round the Hearth” to the family members. Through the song, gentle lights come up on Poppy, Gramma, Auntie, and Uncle, and one-by-one they turn toward Rachel.

STRANGER: “Gather ‘round the hearth”
Gather ‘round the hearth of love
Shelter under stars above
When the trees close in and your hope
    is wearing thin
Gather ‘round the hearth of love

Look into a world unknown
Dream a dream that’s not your own
Under fern and vine, imagine what
    you will find, when you
Look into a world unknown

Listen to what lies below
Murmuring under winter snow
When the silence leaves you alone in
deafening grief
Listen to what lies below

When your grief feels impossible to
    bear
A thresher on the threshold, a thief in
open air
Let your heart break open
For love bears grief, and grief is love

Wherever this path may go
To kitchen chairs or silver shores
Find the guiding star abiding in your
    heart, and
Gather ‘round the hearth of love

GRAMMA: Listen? I’m trying.
    But where there was laughter, God bid
silence, deafening silence. Oh God,
I’m trying.

POPPY: It’s impossible!
A thresher – a thief –
My heart’s breaking open

P: Remember the autumn, when acorns fell
    like rain –
G: Yes, she was five –
P: She…she said…
G: “We’re in chipmunk heaven.”
P and G: We're in heaven, we are in heaven.
AUNTIE/UNCLE: Rachel we’re here by your side. Wherever your spirit may fly, know we love you –

Gather ‘round the hearth of love…

TUTTI: – Rachel, we love you

As the music transitions into the Finale, the Extended Company enters, filling the stage and surrounds the family, embodying the community of care beyond the hospital walls.

EXTENDED COMPANY: “Finale”

Sometimes when
Love sits close by
A door cracks open
Light calls to light.

Curtain.¹

¹ Please contact Stephanie Hollenberg if you would like to see the musical score for At Love’s Hearth.
During my first unit of Clinical Pastoral Education the summer of 2023, one of my peers asked a hospital chaplain, *What do we do if the patient we visit is unresponsive? How do we know if they would appreciate prayer or not?* Without hesitation, the chaplain responded, “We always assume the patient can hear us.” Her sureness landed in me like a brick. My heart raced and tears sprung to my eyes. She went on to describe how one might offer spiritual care to a patient in such a situation, but I couldn’t hear it. I enlisted every practice I could muster to control the floodgate of tears as we finished our didactic. Receiving permission to take the rest of the day off, I went home and wept.

The chaplain’s response had unlocked inherited family grief. In late summer of 1980, my aunt died two weeks after giving birth to her first and only child. She was comatose for a week before suffering a Grand Mal seizure, after which she fell back into a coma and died. This happened nearly a decade before I was born, so I didn’t know her. And yet I did. Even in her absence, Aunt Carol has been present with me throughout my life—most often when gathered around the kitchen table with my parents, siblings and grandparents, but I’ve also had moments alone in which I have felt her with me. Even so, I had never mourned for her, until now.

As the grief washed over me that June day, I recalled a memory from a year before in which my mom had shared with me a detail of Carol’s hospitalization. My mom recalls her mother and others worrying openly in Carol’s hospital room about her poor prognosis. When

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2 Glück, "Averno" (excerpt).
Carol awoke briefly from her coma, the first question on her lips was, “Am I going to die?” As
my mom and I sat on the couch across from one another, she shared with tears in her eyes that it
haunts her to think Carol had been able to hear everything said in that room while comatose,
leading Carol to give up hope of living.

Ancient texts suggest that humans have known for centuries that hearing is the last sense
to leave a person whose physical body is failing or transitioning. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*,
for example, was written in the eighth century “to be read to the spirit of the deceased in the
intermediate state…between the moment the soul left the body and the time it was either reborn
in another form or liberated from the cycle of rebirth and death (samsara).”³ It has taken modern
science remarkably longer to catch up; just in the last few decades have researches taken
measures to test and prove that the hearing sense can remain intact for unresponsive patients.⁴ I
am no scientist, but I am curious about what the recentness of these studies suggests: even if
there was a general sense amongst medical practitioners through the twentieth century of the
possible truth of this claim, might the absence of scientific proof have prohibited the
implementation of consistent protocol surrounding patient care? During CPE clinical hours, I
myself have overheard some insensitive comments made around patients who are sleeping or
unresponsive, and my mind spins wondering how prevalent it was in 1980—and is, to this day—
for medical professionals to speak tactlessly in the room of an unresponsive patient with families
and other care team members.

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³ Mark, "Tibetan Book of the Dead."
⁴ Examples: CBS News, "New study reveals healing power of voices"; Lawrence, Ramirez, and Bauer,
"Communicating With Unconscious Patients: An Overview"; Marla, "Family Voices and Stories Speed Coma
Recovery."
With my mother’s memory pressed upon my own, it’s no wonder the hospital chaplain’s response provoked a hailstorm of questions: What was said in Carol’s hospital room, and could she hear it, as mom suggested? Could Carol sense the family’s worry and fear? What was her inner journey while in coma? Was she, too, afraid? Was there a staff or volunteer chaplain available to visit and sit with her calmly and compassionately?

PROJECT SEEDS

Mourning my aunt became one of two seeds for my thesis project, *At Love’s Hearth*. As I continued to feel my way through this emotional, ancestral landscape, I turned to songwriting, and thereby stumbled upon a resource for spiritual self-care. During a class with songwriter Stew Stewart through Harvard’s FAS department, fall semester of 2022, I wrote a song from Carol’s perspective when she was comatose ("Come Home"). In class we explored mythologizing personal stories, which in effect creates an emotional buffer between oneself and others implicated in the story, and allows the artist to universalize the personal, shaping a story in which audience members can locate themselves and make meaning of their own stories. As author Brenda Ueland writes: “The more you wish to describe a universal, the more minutely and truthfully you must describe a particular.” For the course’s final project, I explored this idea, weaving the songs “Come Home” and “Daydream” into a short musical that mythologized my aunt’s hospitalization (see *Libretto*, pages 7 and 10-11).

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5 Stew Stewart is a singer-songwriter and playwright best known for his musical *Passing Strange* which Spike Lee turned into a film in July of 2008 while it was playing on Broadway.
6 Ueland, *If You Want To Write*, 104.
The second seed of my thesis project was inspired by my personal experience as a classically-trained singer. As I began to study chaplaincy in Harvard Divinity School classrooms and through Clinical Pastoral Education, it dawned on me that I had burned out in the professional music world in part because it had not supported me in facilitating spiritual integration and developing spiritual resilience in the face of a highly competitive, perfectionist, conformist, and often elitist musical culture. I began to dream about what it might look like to offer spiritual care to professional musicians.

And so At Love’s Hearth came to be in the convergence of these two seeds: completing my original one-act chamber musical, and inviting a group of musicians to perform it, engaging in a semi-experimental rehearsal process guided by values and principles of spiritual care.

The heart of this thesis has always been the second seed, the spiritual care of musicians, but along the way I have discovered how the two seeds inform one another in a mutually-supportive, circular way. Beginning to envision a rehearsal and performance experience that would integrate spiritual care of musicians fed my own creativity, returning me to the musical project I had begun the year before. Songwriting and creative storytelling organically became a channel for mourning, and I discovered anew music to be an act of spiritual care for myself. In turn, rekindling the spark of meaningful music-making made me curious about how professional musicians maintain the joy of music-making when it becomes their work. Animated by those for whom the creative spark suffered on the road to establishing a music career, as mine did, how

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7 I have also started reflecting on how classical music is entwined with histories of colonialism and imperialism across the globe. In addition to the issues I mention above, classical music culture is subject to racism, ableism, classism, ageism, and fatphobia. They have not been part of my own experience as a white, average-bodied woman from a middle-class family, but I know it is an impactful reality for many musicians. Significant work has yet to be done in classical music spaces to address these structural harms.

8 I’m grateful to professor Chris Berlin, whose course Change, Adversity and Spiritual Resilience had a particular impact on these realizations.
might music educators and leaders shape a rehearsal environment that nurtures musicians’
authentic self-expression, thereby building their resiliency to face change and adversity?9

MUSIC AS SPIRITUAL CARE

Music has always been inherently spiritual for me, allowing me to touch the sacred both
within and beyond myself. I had hoped to deepen this practice by pursuing professional music-
making, but sadly this path resulted in disconnecting me from that source of strength and
resilience, yielding a period of disorientation and grief. Writing one song and then another
allowed me to return to music-making on my own terms, to discover a new dimension to my
voice and creativity, and to connect not with the enterprise surrounding music, but with the
experience of music-making itself. *At Love’s Hearth* has helped me discover what kind of music-
making is meaningful to me, and to create an opportunity for myself and others to embody it. In
sum, this project has been an act of spiritual care, helping me integrate my values and music, and
transform a life-limiting engagement with music into a life-giving one.10

Writing songs and crafting *At Love’s Hearth* also helped me mourn my aunt. As so many
who have experienced loss will attest, music is a powerful means for embodied bereavement.
The work of trauma therapist Resmaa Menakem has drawn attention to how trauma can be
biochemically transmitted from generation to generation through our DNA expression.11 Each

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9 I’m aware that part of this journey may involve musicians looking squarely at the “ideal career” that music conservatories feed young singers, and for each musician to discern what kind of music-making is actually meaningful. It could be that gifted musicians would not choose to pursue that career trajectory, which invites important follow-up questions: for those who choose to step off the traditional performance path, how does a musician discern what kind of music-making is meaningful, and how and where do they find opportunities to make music joyfully? This reflection does not address these questions, but I hope educators will bring them to the fore.

10 Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 9, 11.

ensuing generation therefore has a part to play in transforming the trauma, working towards greater liberation for oneself and those who follow. Wrestling with this family story has helped me identify my inherited grief, and my hope is that this offering will help loosen the grip it has on me and my family, working towards liberating subsequent generations from this suffering.

Embarking on the musical exploration of Carol’s story also made me more curious about my family members who experienced this tragedy first- or second-hand. It dawned on me that if spiritual care was the aim of my project, every step of the process needed to be guided by spiritual care principles, such as curiosity, compassion, presence, positive regard, and ethical conduct that includes the oft-cited “do no harm” principle. Spiritual care is fundamentally relational, and understanding this led me back to my family. I initiated dialogue with my mother, and requested her feedback on parts of the project. I invited conversations around the Thanksgiving table with my parents and siblings about the impact of Carol’s death on our family. And, after summoning the courage, I wrote letters to Carol’s son, my cousin, and Carol’s widow to share with them about the project. Of the many fears that arose throughout this process, making these two connections felt particularly scary, for I had never spoken to them about Carol.

Would they be defensive or disquieted that I had chosen to tell her story so publicly? I wondered. My fears, it turned out, were unfounded. Each of them offered their unwavering support. Carol’s widow eagerly spoke about adding my piece to a collection of memorabilia to honor Carol’s legacy; my cousin reflected that he never would have thought to create something like this to honor his mother, and tenderly shared the way he has found to honor her through his life.

Stewart had suggested in the songwriting class that when writing about such personal stories, sometimes one needs to create space between the project and those implicated in the
story. He recounted a few instances in which he did not invite family members to shows because he felt it might do more harm to their relationship than good. I respect that such boundaries are sometimes needed. As Stewart said rightly, “All our best stories are the ones we’re scared to tell.” Some stories need to be birthed and shared regardless of the fear of its reception. And I think that the very process of creating art—not simply the final product—can be an opportunity for reconciliation or mutual meaning-making. Because spiritual care is fundamentally relational work, in the context of At Love’s Hearth I found that as the creator and "spiritually oriented director" (see Reflection, page 27) a primary task was to relate with those entangled in the story.

In my own experience, choosing to include my family in the process proved to be vital and vitalizing. I have grown to better understand the complexities and nuances of Carol's hospitalization and death, I have expanded my understanding of how grief manifests, moves, and gets stuck, and most importantly, this piece has become a hearth, if you will. It has given our family an opportunity to emerge from our lonely corners to huddle around the warmth of Carol’s memory—even if but for a moment—to share memories and ask questions, to step toward connection and healing as we mourn together.

SPIRITUAL CARE OF MUSICIANS

Re-discovering music as a spiritual care practice for myself circled me back to the primary thread of this project, making me curious about the experience of musicians like myself who have professionalized music-making. How does one’s experience of music-making shift as it becomes one’s profession? What happens when the dream of “making a living doing what you love” enmeshes one in a culture of values that may be life-limiting? What compromises do
musicians make as they find their way into and negotiate contracts within an under-resourced and highly competitive industry? How do musicians build resiliency, sustaining connection to the joy of music-making that inspired them to make it their life work in the first place?

A few days before rehearsals began, a memory floated into my consciousness from my high school musical production of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. I was a senior at the time, grappling with questions of faith and identity, and this inner journey had cast a cloud over even my most joyful activities, such as singing. At the end of our dress rehearsal run, I approached my theater director, Talashia Keim Yoder, and with a troubled spirit admitted I was having a hard time getting into the head and heart of my character, Aunt Polly. Talashia proceeded to sit with me in the Green Room after our rehearsal, walking me through the show scene by scene. Hours passed. By the time we left, it was past dinner time; the building had emptied out, the hallways were dark. Talashia had a husband and young son waiting for her at home, and yet she sat with me unhurriedly. Retrospectively, I know that the source of my distress didn’t concern Aunt Polly, and I imagine Talashia knew that, too. Her response was an act of spiritual care: she sat with me patiently, offered compassionate presence, followed my conversation lead, asked good questions, and helped me feel seen, supported, and loved. I felt and continue to feel immense gratitude to her. Nearly twenty years later, as I prepared to direct my own show, it dawned on me that Talashia had given me a map of spiritually oriented directing long before I knew I needed one. This way isn’t new, but it is rare.

Because of my own journey and longings, I have come to believe that spiritual care can be integral to building resiliency and creating sustainably meaningful work. I’m aware, however, that in a culture that has trended toward privatized expressions of faith and spirituality, musicians
may be wary to engage in processes that openly offer spiritual care. It’s likely that my
advertisement (see Invitation to Musicians, page 44) drew musicians to this project who were
already amenable to spiritual care. Even so, it felt important in our first rehearsal to acknowledge
the wonderfully diverse expression of spiritualities that might be present in the room, and to
clarify a few definitions. Psychotherapist Kenneth Pargament defines spirituality as: "a search
for the sacred"; and the sacred as:

“…things that are holy, set apart from ordinary aspects of living…encompass[ing] not
only God, divine beings, or a transcendent reality but also other aspects of life that take
on divine character and significance by virtue of their association with a higher power.”

Guided by the Touchstones for Creating Trustworthy Space, from Parker Palmer and the Center
for Courage and Renewal, I emphasized to the musicians that everything is by invitation, and
encouraged them to engage in whatever way felt authentic and meaningful to them.

On opening night, before we opened the doors to the audience, I asked the musicians if
they believe music is power (see Musician’s Pep Talk, page 55). Heads nodded, and one person
said aloud, “Literally!” Knowing her to be a self-described atheist, I had been unsure how she
was experiencing this process, so her response surprised me and also confirmed a suspicion of
mine. I would venture to guess that Pargament’s definitions above are consonant with many, if
not most, musicians’ understanding and experience of music as transcendent, "tak[ing] on divine
character and significance." I feel hopeful that framing the idea of spiritual care clearly and
carefully could cultivate a wider receptivity to spiritual care in professional music spaces.

12 Pargament, Spiritually Oriented Psychotherapy, 32.
13 Doehring, “Using spiritual care to alleviate religious, spiritual, and moral struggles arising from acute health
crises,” 1.
14 Courage for Center and Renewal, "Touchstones for Creating Trustworthy Space."
REFLECTION

What follows are reflections on my own experiments with practicing spiritual care during the production of *At Love’s Hearth*. But first, a note about nuts and bolts to paint the scope of the project.

NUTS AND BOLTS

In November of 2024 I began collaborating with Jonathan Shin, a Singaporean composer whom I met in 2015 through our graduate program at the Longy School of Music of Bard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I had written the libretto and several melodies for *At Love’s Hearth*, and asked him to orchestrate the show for voices and string quartet. We agreed on deadlines for the pieces and compensation, and engaged in calls roughly twice a month. (He was in Singapore, so always a day ahead of me!) Of the seven pieces, five are vocal and two instrumental. I composed three of sung pieces, which Jonathan arranged for string quartet; Jonathan composed the remaining two sung pieces and two instrumental selections.

I spent the end of January and most of February rallying musicians: four string players (plus one substitute), seven singers for the Company roles, ten lay singers who participated in the Extended Company (five of them HDS students), and a rehearsal pianist. All in all, we involved twenty-five musicians, Jonathan and myself included. With the exception of one person, all of the Company singers and String Quartet were professional musicians. Many I had worked with previously, others I had not.\(^{15}\)

Limiting my reach to the professional pool brought gifts and challenges. While it meant that we could put this together quickly, it was immensely difficult to recruit string players

\(^{15}\) Thanks to the Boston Singers Resource for providing wonderful resources for connecting musicians. [https://www.bostonsingersresource.org/](https://www.bostonsingersresource.org/)
because I did not have a budget to pay musicians. Consequently, I ended up offering payment out-of-pocket to the rehearsal pianist and four string players. Our singers had graciously committed to volunteering their time, though audience donations during the performance allowed me to offer a small honorarium to the Company singers.

We had four rehearsals together (the string quartet with us for only two of them) over the span of three weeks, meaning our rehearsal time for this new piece was quite short. Two other dynamics added further complexity to the process. One, the score was finished mere days before rehearsal, so it was fresh for all of us. Two, I envisioned this to be a chamber music experience with no conductor, generating a challenge that the musicians rose to with grace and skill. We used the Swedenborg Chapel and HDS’s William’s Chapel for rehearsal spaces.

Our performance on Friday, March 22 took place in the Williams Chapel. Around 100 audience members gathered to witness our lightly-staged concert performance of *At Love’s Hearth*. Because it was not fully staged, I integrated some narration into the performance in an attempt to bring the audience more fully into the theatrical experience. I also ended up conducting the Finale and one other key moment due to acoustical challenges. A friend, Jeff Wang, captured an audio and video recording (see *Recording*, page 58).16

**Shaping the Experience of Spiritual Care**

In his book *A Subversive History of Music*, Ted Gioia writes about the magical and shamanistic roots of music which illuminates a large subset of songs that he calls “performatives.” When sung, such songs “actually change human affairs rather than simply

16 Learn more about Wang’s work at [https://www.modelperil.com/](https://www.modelperil.com/).
express emotions and moods.”\textsuperscript{17} Throughout history, for example, lullabies have been utilized to soothe upset babies, marches to unify the step of a thousand soldiers, and love songs to seduce lovers. Though the aesthetic and entertainment value of music has become an overwhelming north star in the contemporary creation and dissemination of music—a trend set by medieval troubadour culture—the performative function of music is still evident: people use it to induce sleep, salespeople employ it to sell specific products, and more.\textsuperscript{18} The idea of “performatives” feels resonant with my intentions for \textit{At Love’s Hearth}, for my hope for this piece was not to entertain an audience nor create an aesthetic masterpiece. The personal performative function was to facilitate mourning, and the communal performative function to practice offering spiritual care to performing artists by creating an environment that welcomes the soul.

\textit{Getting Clear}

One important realization from my time at HDS is that musicians essentially serve a priestly function, serving as conduits of a higher power and ushering audiences in and through experiences of the sacred. From this emerged the conviction that singers therefore have a moral responsibility to consider their own relationships to spirituality and ultimate matters because of the position of power they occupy when they step into the stage lights. This insight has led me to reflect on the typology of the elements of the ministerial role, commonly referred to as the priestly/pastoral/prophetic. I felt this priestly responsibility as the creator of \textit{At Love’s Hearth} in that I felt Something Greater was coming through me and needed to be shared, and because I was elementally making a ritual out of words, song, movement and story. But because I inhabited a

\textsuperscript{17} Gioia, \textit{A Subversive History of Music}, 173.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 165.
REFLECTION

directorial role rather than a performing role, I found myself serving more of pastoral function throughout the rehearsal period. As such I attempted to cultivate a space in which the singers felt empowered to inhabit a priestly role, performing the ritual that I had created and ushering audiences into and through a sacred experience. (I never overtly framed it like this to the singers, though in the pre-show Musician’s Pep-Talk, I did prompt them to take up their wizard hats and wands!) To be clear, I don’t believe this priestly/pastoral dichotomy can be reduced to public- and private-facing manifestations of the work, nor are they clearly delineated areas. There were moments in which I did find myself inhabiting a priestly role, but most of my responsibilities presented as pastoral.

The question of “roles” presented itself in other ways, as well. Earlier conversations with my family helped me recognize that in my family system I am first and foremost daughter, sister, aunt, cousin, niece, and wife. These roles are not hats that I can take off when relating to family; they are the primary way I relate to each person, and they to me. Thus I knew I could not expect to play the role of chaplain for them—nor would it be appropriate—but I could bring a spiritually-oriented approach to these conversations, grounded in traditional chaplain training and practice.

This awareness of roles informed my first step before inviting musicians to participate in the project: to create a Vision & Purpose Statement for myself (see Vision & Purpose Statement, page 43). In my ideal world, every musical production would have a staff chaplain available to the musicians whose only responsibility is to be a spiritual caregiver. But well aware that I would be wearing multiple hats for At Love’s Hearth (composer, project manager, administrator, stage director, spiritual care-giver, accountant, snack-bringer, and more), I wanted to be clear in my
understanding of my role in this unique situation. I called this “spiritually oriented director,” modeled after Pargament’s book *Spiritually Oriented Psychotherapy*, and by this I meant that when interfacing with the musicians and audience members, I would inhabit the role of a director who utilizes spiritual caregiving skills. My hope was that bringing a spiritually-oriented approach to my directorial role would invite an “ongoing process of theological reflexivity and integration,” helping the musicians “face the complexity and ambiguity of suffering with compassion and resiliency.”¹⁹ My Vision & Purpose Statement thus helped me clarify my values and intentions, as well as create an agreement with myself for how I would embody spiritual care principles during this process.

I will add here that all too frequently small arts organizations and opera companies rely on a few people to carry out an immense amount of work, so while my situation was unique, it was not unusual in this regard. I think this invites an important and fruitful conversation around the responsibility of private voice teachers, vocal coaches, and stage directors. Are they accountable first to the music, or to the musicians? I have my own opinion, but regardless of others’ stances I believe it would strengthen the entire organizational culture if educators and leaders were encouraged in their training to educate themselves around the importance of spirituality in regards to the wholistic care of a musician, and even develop basic spiritual caregiving skills themselves. One could also argue that this would create a more ethical and sustainable culture of music-making. A student may not work with a teacher who shares their spiritual orientation, but that doesn't mean the teacher shouldn't be able to help the student.²⁰ In the same way that Pargament acknowledges the omission of spiritual care of clients in many

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¹⁹ Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 15.
psychotherapy practices though spirituality is a core part of the human experience, so must music educators and arts organization leaders begin to recognize that spirituality is an integral part of so many musicians’ experiences. Equipping educators and leaders to honor this dimension of music-making will inevitably create richer, more meaningful performance experiences for musicians and audiences alike. A fuller discussion of ethics and accountability is beyond the scope of this reflection, but I hope that others will undertake this important discussion.

**Relationships**

One lesson that I drew upon from chaplaincy is the commitment to people-centered care. From the beginning I gave careful attention to relationships. In addition to facilitating conversations with family, I spent significant time engaging in kind, compassionate, and generous communications. I created an inviting and clear advertisement for musician participation (see *Musician Invitation*, page 44). I listened to each “audition” recording I received by email, and responded to the singer with gratitude for their interest in the project and affirmation of a gift I witnessed in their recording. This in itself yielded warm exchanges in which several musicians shared snippets of their musical journeys. For example, in one exchange with a singer I knew, I refrained from asking her the rote question, “What are you up to these days?” (which I have often observed leads to a grandiose answer that attempts to prove how busy and successful a singer is). Instead I asked, “What is bringing you joy these days?” She responded, “I loved your question!” and proceeded to share with me recently-discovered clarity around what musical experiences actually bring her joy. It was a beautiful reminder that a good question can facilitate connection, to self and others. Additionally, during the rehearsal process I
crafted emails to the cast that emphasized gratitude and affirmation alongside practical details and rehearsal notes, and always included an inspiring resource (see Rehearsal Plans & Resources, page 46). After the show’s conclusion, I wrote individuals emails to each musician, which created an opening for them to respond with their heartfelt reflections on the experience. Truthfully, these communications took a lot of time! But because my Vision & Purpose Statement had helped me identify the importance of relationships—and remembering my own experiences of receiving impersonal automated emails from auditions—I committed to making time for these communications.

Perfection

Another guiding principle that emerged countered everything I had been taught to value and strive toward: perfection is not the goal. Early on I identified that the process was more important than the product. As I discerned how to create and hold a container with alternative values to mainstream professional music culture, questions arose around how to seek a level of excellence that is appropriate for the professional musicians involved. A conversation with my thesis advisor, professor Dan McKanan, prompted me to think about the role of practice and repetition. So often in professional music-making spaces, repeated actions are utilized to attain technical perfection. The oft-repeated adage “practice makes perfect” confirms this. But so often, this kind of excellence is sought at the expense of everything else: a performer’s unique artistry; their connection to the music, audience, and Ultimate Reality; meaningfulness; soulfulness; presence; and more.
But repeated actions have been utilized for other purposes throughout history. The rhythms of drums and chants have been summoned to attain altered states of consciousness since the dawn of humans. Gioia writes that “neuroscientists nowadays call this phenomenon *entrainment*, the technical term for the tendency of brainwaves to match their frequency to the recurring pattern of an external stimulus.” He points out that medical professionals use sound waves to treat a multitude of ailments such as kidney stones and tumors, saying, “there isn’t as big a leap as they might assume between the traditional healer’s drum and various current-day tools of the doctor’s trade, many of which also rely on rhythms and sonic properties. In fact, the more we learn, the more it seems that songs are not just human constructs, as are so many works of art and imagination, but a genuine channeling of an external power.”

What an extraordinary suggestion! What if professional musicians in the western classical music culture shifted their understanding of the purpose of practice and repetition, striving not for technical perfection, but for a deeper connection with the sacred, with the hopes of becoming a conduit for such power? What might be possible, for individuals and the collective?

Functioning as a spiritually oriented director for this project, I was not in the position to experiment with this reorientation myself, but I did attempt to create a rehearsal environment that might open a window of possibility for the performers to experience this. In our first rehearsal together, I explicitly told the musicians that perfection was not our goal. *How many performances have you seen that are technically perfect, but incredibly boring?* I asked them. *How many performances have you seen that are imperfect, but profoundly moving?* I invited

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22 Ibid., 33.
them to unburden themselves with this expectation, trusting that what they create will be a special and beautiful offering, and to seek instead moments of joyful music-making.

I also find myself reflecting on the audience’s relationship to and expectations around repetition. After the performance, many audience members exclaimed that they wanted to hear it again, and expressed hope that this piece will have a life beyond this thesis. I doubt they meant they wanted to hear it again because they wished to hear a more technically-perfect performance! They wished to hear it again because something about the experience moved them, and they wanted to experience it again, perhaps more deeply. Gioia articulates an oft-unnamed truth, that repetition allows us to experience something more fully, producing an opportunity to tap into the power of the thing itself, and the divine source from which it comes. John Bell writes that in both religious and secular contexts, “what we sing informs and indeed shapes what we believe. Singing is not a neutral exercise. It should carry a government health warning that it can affect minds.”

Indeed, like water lapping over a river stone, we are shaped by repetition of experiences—if we create the conditions to allow it.

Resources

We only had four rehearsals together, so realistically speaking there was little time for repetition. On the one hand, it regretfully limited our capacity to play with the idea of entrainment; on the other hand, this may have helped deter the musicians from the temptation of perfectionism in a useful way. Putting together a solid show was important, but with the time we had I prioritized infusing the container with soulfulness and meaning (see Rehearsal Plans &

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23 Bell, The Singing Thing, 56.
In our first rehearsal, I took the time to set up the container well with a generous welcome, check-in, and poem. It meant that we had limited time for our first run of the score, but it set the tone for the rehearsals to come. The resources also allowed us to explore and hold the show’s themes of grief and communities of care, and allowed people to approach the content in ways that felt authentic and meaningful to them.

I brought a question to each of our check-ins in an effort to guide the musicians toward their sources of strength and meaning, a key element for chaplains making spiritual assessments of care seekers. One of these check-ins took the form of a short guided meditation. The questions were: What is a place where you feel peaceful? Who is a person that makes you feel loved? What is something that makes you feel strong? As we gathered for our last rehearsal, a singer approached me with a light in her eye and thanked me for those questions. She said she had led a board meeting for an arts organization the day before and invited the meeting attendees to respond to the first question (adapting it for her group by using the word "calm" instead of "peaceful"). She recounted how amazing it was to see how that question softened the energy in what is often and dry, business-minded environment. She also said she looks forward to using those questions with her two toddlers. Her integration of the resources delighted me, instilling hope in me that spiritually oriented directing not only works, but also ripples out to effect broader cultural change.

Another bright moment occurred at the end of the same rehearsal. It was late, and we had run over time, and so instead of a check-out I took the opportunity to affirm them and then quickly share a quote by poet Ross Gay:
“What happens if joy is not separate from pain? What if joy and pain are fundamentally tangled up with one another? Or even more to the point, what if joy is not only entangled with pain, or suffering, or sorrow, but is also what emerges from how we care for each other through those things? What if joy, instead of refuge or relief from heartbreak, is what effloresces from us as we help each other carry our heartbreaks?”

After a pregnant pause, one of the singers (the aforementioned atheist) said, “Can you send that to us?” My heart leaped as I felt the words settle quietly in their hearts. In doing so, the quote’s meaningfulness to me grew, leading me to integrate it into my program note (see Program, page 50). Though we had precious little time together, this moment was a clue that this quote, and other resources offered, were enabling group cohesion and mutual meaning-making.

Other resources I involved included Parker Palmer's Touchstones (mentioned above), and, very importantly, snacks. Snacks are a natural joy-bringer to musician spaces! I had forgotten to offer the snacks I brought for our first rehearsal, but afterward the quartet and I lingered and chatted over Fig Newtons. For subsequent rehearsals, the snacks provided a noticeable lift for those who partook. Breaking Kind bars and clementines together is indeed a powerful ministry!

I had intended to enlist one other resource, a reflective collage craft based on SoulCollage®. I thought it would be a nice offering particularly for the Extended Company who would spend significant time waiting in the wings during our dress rehearsal. In the end, there was neither time nor space to organize this, but I maintain that it could be a meaningful and embodied meaning-making resource for future projects.

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25 https://soulcollage.com/
Gifts & Challenges

I have a magnet on my fridge quoting Eleanor Roosevelt that my mother gave me years ago: "Do one thing every day that scares you." Over the years I've wondered what that would feel like. Beginning this thesis project, I found out. Fear after fear arose throughout the many layers of this project: speaking with family, experiencing imposter syndrome around writing a musical, sending email upon email inviting musicians to participate (voluntarily, at that), designing a spiritually-integrated rehearsal process, committing to a personal financial investment with my limited means, and more. I felt I was making everything up as I went. With no experience as a playwright or director, who was I to do this? Why would anyone want to volunteer their time to help me with my little thesis project? Fear was one of my greatest challenges, yet I knew in my gut that I needed to see At Love's Hearth to fruition.

In the midst of these fears, I employed another learning from my chaplaincy training: the necessity of self care. I owe huge gratitudes to Plum Village for fortifying my meditation practice, to the wildness of Jamaica Pond, to Holly Wilkinson and Wholeheart, Inc. for holding me skillfully during a winter retreat, to Karine Polwart and the Spell Songs album, and to my apartment bathtub. When fear overwhelmed me, I meditated, walked, retreated, listened to music, and took many-a-hot bath.

Something beautiful happened, however, as I walked through the storm of fears. At a certain point, it was no longer about me. At Love's Hearth took on a life of its own. I began to feel that it was an offering of love for my family, and for Carol. Being the director instead of a performer also changed the energy for me; feeling that my musicians deserved to have a full audience to receive and celebrate their hard work and beautiful music-making, I fearlessly
advertised the heck out of it. I also felt it was an offering to the community, that this story no longer belonged to me, but to everyone who has suffered loss or near-loss. Feeling this story held in and by community helped me ride the wave of fears with greater skill and agility, ultimately transforming fear to joy. Ross Gay captures this transformation beautifully: “Is sorrow the true wild? And if it is — and if we join them — your wild to mine — what’s that? What if we joined our sorrows, I’m saying. I’m saying: What if that is joy?”

Another challenge I faced was that of time. I scheduled so few rehearsals because I felt the tensions of wanting to honor the professional musicians who had generously volunteered their time and talents, and of wanting to respect what they might perceive to be a satisfying rehearsal process (namely, efficiency). But spiritual care takes time. Developing relationships takes time. With our limited time and the many hats I wore, I found I was not able to establish satisfactory rapport with each individual. Recognizing this, I made a point to say hello to each person before rehearsal began so, at the very least, we had connected and shared a smile.

Wearing multiple hats also proved to be a challenge. It's a gift for hospital chaplains to be able to sidle up to care seekers while the medical team is busy with tests and analyses and ask, How's your spirit today? Chaplains often sit with patients in the waiting, in the in-between places. But as the captain of the ship, I was not able to interact with the musicians in this way during the rehearsal process. (Regretting this, I did make a point to follow up with a few individuals post-show.) One day as I was lamenting about this to my husband, he reminded me of the power of presence. He pointed out that I have been working on myself for years, growing my capacities for care and compassion, peacefulness and reflective listening, and that I bring that

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skillfulness into other roles and spaces that I inhabit. It returns me to my earlier point about encouraging private voice teachers, vocal coaches and stage directors to develop spiritual caregiving skills in order to create a music-making environment that welcomes the soul, even in the absence of a formal chaplain.

A final challenge that I will voice here regards money. I have found Lewis Hyde's book, *The Gift*, to be incredibly insightful as I renegotiate my own relationship to music. It has caused me to ponder how receiving compensation for a music gig changes my experience of the music-making itself. Hyde describes the difference between market exchange and gift exchange, wherein market exchange treats something as a commodity with measurable value, and gift exchange establishes a relationship through the sacrifice of something. The former is a cycle of giving that is material; the latter relational and spiritual.27 Hyde writes, "a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, while the sale of a commodity leaves no necessary connection."28 In fact, the nature of market exchange mandates alienation between parties: "If a thing is to have market value, it must be detachable or alienable so that it can be put on the scale and compared."29 Consequently, market exchange encourages extraction, and as professional musicians enter the market economy, they themselves become subject to extraction. This distinction illuminates my own journey into professional music-making, and the difficulty I found in attempting to earn a living doing something that was inherently spiritual for me within the bounds of market exchange.

28 Ibid., 70.
Holding relationship at the heart of *At Love's Hearth* thus presented a challenge as I engaged with the professional music community. Asking musicians to volunteer their time drastically limited the pool of willing participants. Structurally, the arts in U.S. culture are sorely under-resourced, and all too often musicians are required to volunteer their time and gifts until they achieve higher ranks in the field. This highly extractive culture forces a lot of musicians out of the field because they do not have the financial means to sustain those early stages of a music career. For this reason, paying musicians for their time can feel like an act of spiritual care, to honor the importance and worth of their gifts. But doing so launches musicians' gifts and offerings into the market economy. It places a value on them, turning their gifts—take a moment to consider how we use that word—into a commodity. In doing so, the "feeling-bond" that music so beautifully nurtures between two people or within a community is promptly severed.

My dream was for this project to dwell within gift exchange. But, as I said above, offering the musicians honorariums—to at least cover costs incurred during their involvement—felt like an act of spiritual care, leading me to invite the audience to contribute donations to support the musicians.\(^{30}\) Having raised my white flag to market economy, my question then became: If money is to be involved, how can I shape an experience that doesn't feel extractive? How can I create a space that still nurtures connection?

It occurs to me that musicians in western culture already bridge these two economies; although they largely operate within market economy they remain open to the "feeling-bond[s]" that music facilitates. But the container in which the music is held needs to nurture that innate

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\(^{30}\) I wonder if this, in effect, was a cycle of gift economy. They were planning to gift their time, and out of gratitude I offered them an honorarium, which generated surprise and gratitude from the singers. This invites further reflection on the involvement of money in gift exchange.
propensity for connection. I attempted to do this between inviting check-ins with the musicians and encouraging the audience to savor this live music experience by saying hello to someone new. I do fear that encouraging audience donations cheapened my effort to nurture the fruits of gift exchange amongst musicians and audience members. How do I honor the realities of present-day professional music-making, reconciling the responsibility I feel to the musicians, while holding true to an idealistic vision? I look forward to exploring this more in future as I discern how I wish to engage the market economy with my own musical gifts.

FEEDBACK

Despite these challenges, the feedback I received from the musicians revealed that the fruits of this labor are abundant and precious. In addition to the bits that have been scattered throughout this reflection already, below are a few more.

Our lone amateur singer in the Company wrote me to say what a privilege it was to sing with professionals. He recounted a sweet connection he made with another singer who has a son close to his granddaughter's age, and said that the music continues to bring tears to his eyes. A longtime choral singer, he has sung very little since moving cross-country to be near his grandchildren. He wrote: "This experience has also rekindled a desire to sing more than just at church. I am again looking for a choir to join...."

Another singer wrote me early on in the process, after she received the first draft of the script, thanking me for the story. She shared several meaningful experiences she has had singing bedside for dying persons, including her beloved grandmother. After the performance, she wrote with gratitude for being included, saying, "Thank you for providing me with such a healing and safe musical experience. I will carry this with me for quite a while."

One person shared that because of personal challenges, he had not performed for over a year, "but in the wake of this production and other events I have felt empowered to get back in the swing of things!"
During our first rehearsal, between my welcoming spiel and the table run of the score, a musician, with a slightly mystified gleam in his eye, told me, "I have never experienced a rehearsal like that—creating such a safety net. It was cool. I appreciate it."

At the end of the first rehearsal, I shared a moment with a musician after nearly everyone else had left. She thanked me for creating such a lovely space, pausing before sharing that she had had a "grief-filled morning" attending a funeral. I don't believe she would have shared that with me had I not created the space for it to be known. As the director, it allowed me to have a pulse on what's going on in the lives of the musicians; as a spiritually oriented director, it allowed me to acknowledge her heavy heart and hold her in it for a moment.

An audience member wrote a glowing email, saying the show had caused her to reflect on her own CPE experience. She expressed a wish to be able to "go back to the various unresponsive patients I visited, guided by the example you and your characters set."

A gifted classically-trained singer who happily agreed to sing in the Extended Company wrote, "I know I don’t have to explain how complicated it is to be a singer who has chosen to leave behind the 'career' we are fed in school, but projects like this are what reminds me of how incredible music making in community is. Your dedication, passion, and leadership through the process made all the difference in cultivating something that was sincere and unforgettable. Not to mention the composition was just SO GOOD! I was chatting with your friend…before the performance about creating more opportunities like this for musicians of all levels to connect- without expectations- and my wheels haven’t stopped turning 😃"

I share the above stories as a reminder to myself and others that music matters, as do the containers we create to hold the music-making, and more importantly, the musicians. I did not overhaul the entire professional rehearsal experience, but the energy generated by the project and the responses received demonstrate that the care I took to shape the experience led to meaningful and inspired music-making. Person-centered spiritual oriented direction works.
CONCLUSION: PASSING THE GIFT

“If the teaching begins to ‘take,’ the recipient feels gratitude. I would like to speak of gratitude as a labor undertaken by the soul to effect the transformation after a gift has been received. Between the time a gift comes to us and the time we pass it along, we suffer gratitude. Moreover, with gifts that are agents of change, it is only when the gift has worked in us, only when we have come up to its level, as it were, that we can give it away again. Passing the gift along is the act of gratitude that finishes the labor. The transformation is not accomplished until we have the power to give the gift on our own terms. Therefore, the end of labor of gratitude is similarity with the gift or with its donor. Once this similarity has been achieved we may feel a lingering and generalized gratitude, but we won’t feel it with the urgency of true indebtedness.”

Lewis Hyde writes that whatever we have been given mustn't be kept: "The gift must always move." I return to the impact that Talasha's spiritually oriented direction had on me as a struggling teenager, and how it has generated gratitude and inspiration over nearly twenty years. I contrast this with a confusing moment that occurred with a voice teacher two years ago that caused me to stop singing, which Hyde has helped me understand: “We will be motivated to proceed only so long as the debt is felt. If we stop feeling indebted, we quit, and rightly so.” In hindsight I see that it was so easy for me to quit singing because I lacked gratitude in my relationship with my voice teacher. I had been operating within the bounds and expectations of market exchange with her, hoping that she would help me achieve success. I was scouring the world for the thing that would reconnect me with a sense of the sacred, and of meaningfulness, and thinking I would find it in a successful career, I invested in that voice teacher because I thought she was my ticket. But while she was a wonderful human and deftly guided me through new waves of vocal growth, the gift I sought had already been given me at the tender age of seventeen.

31 Hyde, The Gift, 60.
33 Ibid., 66.
At Love's Hearth has indeed been an act of gratitude that has brought me full circle, passing on the gift of compassionate care and meaningful music-making that Talashia gifted me. I marvel at the energy that this journey has generated as I witness how passing along the gift has touched and inspired others. The audience celebrated this piece with me, wishing to hear it again; the musicians extended their congratulations and many said they would be happy to be involved in it again if it has a future. I'm truly humbled. And—like Talashia, who knew I was troubled not by Aunt Polly, but by my other suffering—I wonder if it is not the musical piece itself for which the audience and musicians hunger, but a soulful offering, an experience that enlivens them and connects to Something Greater beyond themselves.

Music is power, and one of the great potentialities of music theater is its ability to build a new world guided by new visions. Spiritually oriented direction holds connection and relationships at its core, and in doing so invites a more wholistic, less extractive process. This births a world that is more relational—connected more deeply to self, other human and more-than-human beings, and one's sense of the sacred. Out of this fertile soil grows greater love, kindness and compassion. My hope is that At Love's Hearth is the beginning of something bigger that will nourish musicians and empower them to be the wizards they truly are (see Musician's Pep Talk, page 55).
Vision & Purpose Statement
for Spiritual Care of Musicians
February 2024

What do I hope to do in this rehearsal process? What are my visions and hopes?

To craft a rehearsal experience that
- prioritizes the people over the product, acknowledges the power of music and story-telling, and encourage musicians as vessels of that power;
- operates in the spirit of gift economy, facilitating connection to self, one another, the audience, and the sacred (whatever language one uses to describe ultimate reality, or the Something Greater beyond oneself);
- creates a non-competitive, non-performative, non-extractive environment;
- honors the musical genius of each person, inviting collaboration (with a clear understanding of the director making the final decisions);
- plants seeds for greater compassion and kindness toward all beings who suffer;
- produces a high quality performance but not at the cost of human dignity and joy.

My commitment:

As the director, I will organize and lead rehearsals with the aim of encouraging a high quality performance, but not at the cost of human dignity. I will employ spiritual care skills, which may include compassionate presence, mirroring and reflective listening, and validation of feelings; facilitate reflection and meaning-making regarding the show’s content, and integration of rehearsal/performance process and personal lives, as desired; connect musicians to sources of strength, as needed; encourage self-care; and provide spiritual care resources, where needed.

I will seek to walk alongside, rather than lead. I will honor the mystery of the musicians’ whole selves, seen and unseen, and water the seeds of goodness that I see. I will regard each musician with compassion and understanding in the wake of challenges and/or suffering. I will strive to build relationships with each individual, and facilitate group cohesion, to counter the extractive, competitive, performative culture of music-making.
Calling musicians to help workshop & perform a new one-act chamber musical!

*Lyrics by Stephanie Hollenberg, Music by*  
*Jonathan Shin & Stephanie Hollenberg*

about the process —

**About:** This piece is being developed to fulfill Stephanie Hollenberg’s thesis requirement at Harvard Divinity School, weaving together music-making and spiritual care both in the show’s content and the rehearsal process. This is a show for which the process is as important as the result; in addition to the ins and outs of workshopping a new piece, the rehearsal process will be somewhat experimental, informed by principles and values of spiritual care. (Please know that this includes people of all spiritual and non-spiritual orientations!)

I believe that music is power, and that mind, body *and* spirit must be integral to the process in order for musicians to embody their fullest potential as story-tellers and change-makers, joy-bringers and seed planters, magicians and healers, priests and prophets, illuminators and beauty-cultivators. In my experience the spiritual dimension of music-making often goes unacknowledged and untended in professional music spaces. The intention for this rehearsal process is not to impose spirituality or religiosity artificially, but to create a meaningful musical process in which each soul, in its fullest authenticity and mystery, finds welcome and support.

In addition to aiming for high quality music-making, we’ll seek to include in our rehearsal process qualities of connection (to self, others, and the sacred), collaboration, joy and fun, and reflective meaning-making. The performance will be a concert version of the musical, with light staging. If this strikes your fancy, I look forward to meeting you! And if you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out: stephaniehollenberg@hds.harvard.edu.

**Soft Auditions for Singers:** Please send *three things* to the email above: (1) a video of you singing (preferably something in the style of musical theater, folk, or light opera), (2) a CV, and (3) a few sentences about why you would like to be involved in this project.

**Singer Rehearsal Period:** *Company* rehearsals will be between March 1 through March 22, mostly Mondays and Wednesdays. Time TBD based on musicians’ availability. *Extended Company* will have two commitments: the dress rehearsal and performance.

**Soft Audition for Instrumentalists:** Please send *four things* to the email above: (1) a video of you playing (solo is fine; chamber is great), (2) a CV, (3) a few sentences about why you would like to be involved in this project, and (4) your availability the week of March 11. Thank you!
about the piece —

**Performance Date:** Friday evening, March 22, 2024

**Location:** Rehearsals and performance will be held at a venue near Harvard Square.

**Synopsis:** Tragedy strikes on Rosie’s sixth birthday when her mother, Rachel, falls ill. As the family gathers around the hospital bed, reeling as they try to metabolize the situation, a visitor slips in and offers a simple but profound gift. Inspired by a true story.

**Title:** TBD…let’s discover it together!

**Instrumentalists:** String Quartet (Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Cello). Please note that this is designed to be a chamber musical, performed without a conductor, so a strong quartet leader will be required.

**Cast:**  
Rachel, early 30’s, soprano; solo  
Rosie, age 6; solo  
Auntie El, early 30’s, soprano; solo  
Uncle Joseph, tenor (up to G4)  
Gramma, late 50’s, mezzo-soprano  
Poppy, late 50’s, baritone (up to F4)  
Kind Stranger, mezzo-soprano/soprano; solo  
Doctor (male presenting), speaking role  
Extended Company (10-15 voices)

**Compensation:** I regret that I am unable to offer compensation for this project at this time. Grad school doesn’t pay very well! In all seriousness, I’m fully aware of the complicated dance of making a living as an artist, and the cost of living in Boston. I’ve been there (and still am) myself. To be transparent, I am on a journey of reclaiming my joy for music-making regardless of what it pays; it’s part of my reintegration of music as a spiritual practice. I say this not to try to twist anyone’s arm or con folks into working with me for free, but to say that if you think you might find joy participating in this project, if you think it might nourish your creativity and soul, I hope you will join us. I’m happy to speak more about this with you if it would be helpful! <3
Rehearsal Plan & Resources

Lead Up Emails to Musicians
"We cannot live in a world that is interpreted for us by others. An interpreted world is not a hope. Part of the terror is to take back our own listening. To use our own voice. To see our own light." — Hildegard von Bingen

Poem: “Last Night as I Was Sleeping,” Antonio Machado

“When we are brave enough to sit with our pain, it deepens our ability to sit with the pain of others. It shows us how to love them.” — Valerie Kaur

Podcast: https://plumvillage.org/podcast/concentration-mindfulness-and-insight-where-to-start

Song: “Lost Words Blessing,” Karine Polwart & friends (album Spell Songs)

Friday, March 8
Agenda: Table Run

Welcome and gratitudes

Check In: Where is a place that makes you feel peaceful?

Introduction to Parker Palmer’s Touchstones, and altar space

“A Different Holding Pattern,” by Rosemerry Whatola Trommer

If I am to hold the world in my heart
then let me hold it the way leaves hold sunshine,
trapping the energy not for the sake of holding it,
but to transform it into nourishment.
Though the process isn’t simple, it’s common.
All around the globe, in every season,
leaves hold and synthesize
whatever the day gives them.
On a day when the energy of the world
seems too much to hold,
let me bid my heart turn

34 Thanks to Holly Wilkenson and WholeHeart Inc. for many of these wonderful resources. https://wholeheartinc.org/
like a leave to the sun
and make sugar.
The way Rilke turned grief into sonnets.
The way Sibelius turned war into song.

Friday, March 15
Agenda: Scene Two

Welcome and Guided Meditation
As you transition your mind and body from the day you’ve had, notice what you might be bringing into this space—emotions, to-do lists, people for whom you are responsible. How do we transition well from one space to another? Take a moment to acknowledge what you’ve brought into this space. Now tune into your breath. As you breathe in, let your breath be deep. As you breathe out, let your breath be long. In, deep — out, long. Deep, long. Notice your feet on the floor. Your hands on your lap. The softness of your brow. Begin to feel the energy of the others in this room. Come back to your breath: breathing in, I have arrived; breathing out, I am home. In, arrived — out, home. (Inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh.)

Introduction to Scene 2, and grief:
Something I’ve been learning about grief as I sit with individuals as a hospital chaplain is how isolating grief can be. So many individuals don’t have a support system; and even when you do, sometimes it’s difficult to reach out for help, or see past the crisis at hand… and sometimes it can be so painful for a person to accept the love that’s already there, that they run from those they love, cutting themselves off from community.

“When we are brave enough to sit with our pain, it deepens our ability to sit with the pain of others. It shows us how to love them.” — Valerie Kaur

This scene invites the family—and the audience—to maintain connection in the face of loss or near-loss. To turn toward the suffering, not away from it; and to remember that they are woven into a community of care beyond the hospital walls. It invites us to look at how we respond to suffering, and to draw on the resources that sustain us.

"Grief is love. How can we hold this grief without holding each other?" — Terry Tempest Williams

Check-In: Who is someone that makes you feel loved?
Saturday, March 16
Agenda: Scene One

“What happens if joy is not separate from pain? What if joy and pain are fundamentally tangled up with one another? Or even more to the point, what if joy is not only entangled with pain, or suffering, or sorrow, but is also what emerges from how we care for each other through those things? What if joy, instead of refuge or relief from heartbreak, is what effloresces from us as we help each other carry our heartbreaks?” — Ross Gay

Wednesday, March 20
Agenda: Sitzprobe / Dress Rehearsal

Lighting a candle for one of our singers who had a medical emergency that afternoon and had to pull out of the project.

Friday, March 22
Agenda: Performance

(See Musician’s Pep Talk, page 55.)

Wrap-Up Thank You Email to Musicians
Song: “Thank You Very Much,” Rising Appalachia

Other Inspirational Resources:
Essay: “Being Number One,” Thich Nhat Hanh

Poem: “Soften,” Rosemerry Whatola Trommer
https://ahundredfallingveils.com/2019/12/18/soften-she-said/

“Pain is a doorway, an every changing ally inviting us home.” — Rashani Rea
Tragedy strikes on Rosie’s sixth birthday when her mother, Rachel, falls ill. As the family gathers around the hospital bed, reeling as they try to metabolize the situation, a visitor slips in and offers a simple but profound gift.

7:00PM WILLIAMS CHAPEL, HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL FOLLOWED BY Q&A + RECEPTION

This will be a concert performance of the musical, not a full staging.
This project is in fulfillment of Stephanie’s MDiv Thesis at Harvard Divinity School.
At Love’s Hearth

A One-Act Chamber Musical

Music and Lyrics by Stephanie Hollenberg, in collaboration with composer Jonathan Shin
This thesis project is in fulfillment of Stephanie’s Master of Divinity degree

Rachel  Hannah Meloy
Rosie    Justine Boonstra
Poppy   Stanley Buller
Gramma Margaret Felice
Auntie Ella Sara DeLong
Uncle Joseph Grant Yosenick
Kind Stranger Kathryn McKellar
Doctor Nicole Marie
Extended Company Justine Boonstra · Joy Castro-Wehr · Beatrice Duvert · Emily Hedrick · Leslie Lawrence · Nicole Marie · Kimberly Ouelette · Maddie Ruth · Danielle Shevchenko · Emma Thomas

Violin 1 Clara Chisholm
Violin 2 Alexander Smith
Viola   Rebecca Mac
Cello   Jason Coleman
Rehearsal Pianist Yukiko Oba

Synopsis: Tragedy strikes on Rosie’s sixth birthday when her mother, Rachel, falls ill. As the family gathers around the hospital bed, reeling as they try to metabolize the situation, a visitor slips in and offers a simple but profound gift. Late October. Late 1960’s. The midwest, US.

Scene One
Overture        String Quartet
“Daydream”      Auntie Ella, Company

Scene Two
“Come Home”     Rachel
Kind Stranger Instrumental String Quartet
“Love Sits Close By” Rosie, Rachel
“Gather ‘Round the Hearth” Kind Stranger, Company
Finale          Company, Extended Company
A Note from Stephanie

“What happens if joy is not separate from pain? What if joy and pain are fundamentally tangled up with one another? Or even more to the point, what if joy is not only entangled with pain, or suffering, or sorrow, but is also what emerges from how we care for each other through those things? What if joy, instead of refuge or relief from heartbreak, is what effloresces from us as we help each other carry our heartbreaks?” — Ross Gay, Book of Delights

Last summer I began to grieve the death of my aunt for the first time. She died unexpectedly in 1980 at the tender age of 28, and so I never actually knew her…and yet I did. I have felt her presence throughout my life, even in her absence, particularly when gathered around the kitchen table with my family and grandparents. Even so, it has taken me over thirty years to begin to understand the profound impact that her death had on our family, to feel the grief that I inherited, and to learn how to let it move through me.

At Love’s Hearth was born from those first waves of grief. As I stepped into the darkness, music was my torch. I crafted the first draft of this musical in a songwriting class with Stew Stewart through the FAS at Harvard, where we played with mythologizing personal stories in order to allow others to find themselves in one’s own story. So yes, this is my family’s story, but it is also yours. It belongs to everyone who has experienced loss or near-loss, everyone who knows what it means to wait in a hospital hallway, everyone who has witnessed grief change a beloved, and been changed in turn.

This story could be told 1,000 different ways. Every person who knew my aunt experienced her life and death differently and from varying positionalities. My remembering is strongly impacted by my mother’s memories and reflections, colored by my own imagination and meaning-making. I share this because I feel a weight of responsibility knowing you will only know my aunt from this one mythologized fragment. But in reality, she is known and remembered in myriad other ways by those who loved her. And isn’t that the way with grief? Everyone must forge their own path of understanding and remembering, yielding a rich and complex tapestry of stories that honors the deceased.

One detail that I have dared to explore in this piece is the mystery of people’s experiences in coma. *Can the patient hear? How do care professionals and beloveds speak around unresponsive patients, and how might this impact the patient’s wellbeing?* Texts such as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* suggest an ancient understanding that hearing is the last sense to leave a dying person, and yet only recently has western research begun to confirm this. As I train to become a chaplain myself, I wonder what kind of spiritual care has or hasn’t been available to unresponsive patients over the decades, and I feel increasingly committed to provide compassionate care to all patients through their last breath.

Grief touches us all at some point in our lives. It can feel utterly disorienting and isolating. And yet one of the great mysteries is that joy emerges as we hold grief together. Joy not as a refuge, Ross Gay writes, but as something that “effloresces from us as we help each other carry our heartbreaks.” Indeed, collaborating with Jonathan Shin and bringing the piece to life alongside these extraordinary music-makers has yielded unexpected joy and healing for me. At Love’s Hearth holds together this paradox. For those of you navigating your own landscapes of grief, I hope this piece meets in you in a way your spirit longs to be met. May we all find the resources and courage we need to gather ‘round the hearth of love, kindling joy in the darkness.
**Artist Biographies**

**Justine Boonstra** is a Boston-based singer and teacher who recently completed her Master’s of Music in Vocal Performance at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, MA. Some of her favorite roles to date are The Sandman in *Hansel and Gretel* with NEC Opera and Despina in *Così fan tutte* with Chicago Summer Opera. While mainly focusing on classical music in recent years, Justine prides herself on being a versatile singer, performing in many genres including musical theater, pop, and R&B.

**Stanley Buller** is a computer software consultant who moved to Boston from Kansas City in 2022. Stan has been a life-long singer, participating in church choirs, men’s quartets and men’s choruses. Before moving to Boston, Stan was ten-year member of The East Hill Singers, a group of professional and church musicians from Kansas City who sing together with inmates from the Lansing Correctional Facility. When not working or singing, Stan enjoys walking in the Arnold Arboretum, playing with his three grandchildren, gardening, and doing DIY projects.

Soprano, **Sara DeLong** (she/her) is a frequent performer of both musical theatre and opera with a particular penchant for contemporary works and modern interpretations of the classics. Favorite past roles include Mother Abbess in *Sound of Music* (Rochester Opera House, NH), Cinderella in *Into the Woods* (Light Opera Theatre of Sacramento, CA), Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* (American Singers’ Opera Project, NC), and Phoebe in *Yeomen of the Guard* (The Sudbury Savoyards, MA). When not on stage, Sara can be found producing, directing, or else concert managing for the award winning ensemble, Blue Heron. [www.Sara-DeLong.com](http://www.Sara-DeLong.com)

**Margaret Felice** is a Boston-based soprano and a doctoral student in Theology and Education at Boston College. Recent performances include *La Clemenza di Tito* with Opera del West (Servilia cover), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* with Firebird Pops Orchestra (Congregation) and *The Secret Garden* with The Company Theatre (Rose Lennox). She is thrilled to be part of this meaningful new work. Reach out, read her work, or hear her sing at [www.margaretfelice.com](http://www.margaretfelice.com).

**Stephanie Hollenberg** (she/her) is a versatile performing artist and church leader. In addition to serving multiple congregations north of the River, she has found great joy performing roles such as Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro* (Boston Opera Collaborative) and an Esprit in Massenet’s magical *Cendrillon* (MAI Trentino Festival in Italy). She is a lover of art song and four-part harmony, and relishes performing with her star singer-songwriter husband, Luke Concannon. Stephanie holds a Master of Music from The Longy School of Music, and is a Master of Divinity candidate at Harvard Divinity School where she is preparing to become a chaplain. Stephanie resides on unceded Massachusett and Abenaki land. [www.stephaniehollenberg.com](http://www.stephaniehollenberg.com)

Soprano, **Hannah Meloy**, received her Master of Music degree from the Longy School of Music. In 2018 she won 3rd prize in the Philharmonic Society of Arlington’s Young Artist Concerto Competition for her performance of Samuel Barber’s *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* and was selected as a young artist for the Manchester Music Festival. She was chosen for the 2016 Cleveland Art Song Festival. She is currently an active recitalist in her community and can be found singing weekly as the soprano soloist at Boston’s historic Old North Church. Her more recent operatic roles include Zerlina; Despina; Susanna; Pamina; Barbarina; and Sophie. [www.hannahmeloy.com](http://www.hannahmeloy.com)

A multifaceted operatic soprano, **Kathryn McKellar** has been praised by The Boston Globe for her “elegant singing” and “polish.” She has performed with many of Boston’s leading companies, including Boston Lyric Opera, Lyric Stage Company of Boston, The Boston Pops, and Boston Modern Orchestra Project, and her performances span the lyric soprano repertoire from baroque to contemporary. Kathryn holds a Master of Music from Boston Conservatory, sits on the board of the Boston Opera Alliance and is
the founder and managing director of Opera on Tap Boston. Kathryn resides in Somerville with her husband and two children. [www.kathrynmckellar.com](http://www.kathrynmckellar.com)

Jonathan Shin is an award-winning Singaporean composer-pianist who performs extensively as a soloist and chamber musician, and improvises across multiple genres. Shin’s music has been described as “supremely confident and comfortable in its own skin.” (The Straits Times)—his first commission, The Other Merlion and Friends, was critically reviewed as “probably the most compelling and worthwhile new work from any Singaporean composer in recent years.” In 2020, his concert overture City Arising was premiered by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra. Shin’s works have been premiered and performed in Europe, Asia, and North America. He is a founding member of the Lorong Boys, a multi-genre group. [www.jonathanshinmusic.com](http://www.jonathanshinmusic.com)

Tenor Grant Yosenick has a wide variety of musical experience and interests. His opera credits include Pontio Pilato in Wagner's Das Liebesverbot, Pedro in the world premiere of Omar Najmi’s En la ardiente oscuridad, and the title roles of Mozart's Lucio Silla and Zemlinksy’s Der Zwerg. His concert solo credits include Britten’s Rejoice in the Lamb, Orff's Carmina Burana, and Respighi’s Lauda per la Nativita del Signore. Yosenick has recently been a featured performer in numerous projects with such groups as Odyssey Opera, the Boston Camerata, the Schola of Saint Paul Parish Harvard Square, Nightingale Vocal Ensemble, and Catalyst New Music.

Clara Rose is a violinist and vocalist from Vancouver, BC, the unceded territory of the Coast Salish People. With a background in Celtic, Balkan, Swedish, blues, bluegrass and jazz folk traditions, Rose effortlessly melds these disparate styles into her own passionate and groovy fiddle voice. A master improviser across many genres and disciplines, Rose’s joyous expression and skillful artistry has a transformative effect on all of her collaborations. Rose is currently pursuing her degree in violin performance at Berklee College of Music. She performs with The Acoustic Nomads and leads the Clara Rose Trio.

Boston-based freelance cellist and composer Jason A. Coleman has degrees from Tufts University and New England Conservatory. Throughout Boston and other parts of New England, he takes part in numerous orchestral, chamber, and theatrical productions. His own works, commissions, and arrangements have been performed throughout the United States. Nope, no website yet.Yep, he knows he should do something about it.

Rebecca Mac is a violinist and violist, regularly performing in various ensembles including Mamaliga, a quartet performing original folk inspired compositions, Zol Zayn, a klezmer dance-band, and Zunroyz, a trio unearthing string repertoire from the Jewish music archives. Mac has performed nationally and internationally at renowned music festivals including KlezKanada, Yiddish Summer Weimar and Yiddish New York. Mac is a 2022-24 grant recipient of the Massachusetts Cultural Council’s Traditional Arts Apprenticeship program, through which she explores the connections between Greek, Turkish and Jewish music with Beth Bahia Cohen. Mac has a degree in violin performance from Berklee College of Music.

Donations are welcome. All donations received will go to the musicians, who are contributing their gifts and time out of the kinds of their hearts. You may contribute cash (see jar at door) or via Venmo (see barcode).

Harvard Chaplain Kerry Maloney will be available after the performance for anyone who would appreciate spiritual care support.
Thank you —

— to my collaborators. To Jonathan Shin, my friend and co-conspirator who gave this piece wings, helping create something more special than I ever could have imagined. To the brilliant singers and instrumentalists who gifted their trust, time and talents, bringing this offering to life... in just four rehearsals!

— to my teachers. To Stew Stewart whose writing prompts planted the first seeds of this piece. To Chris Berlin, who inspired me to think about cultivating spiritual resilience in singers. To my CPE educators Cheryl McDevitt (Beverly Hospital), Michelle DeCoste, Joel Eaton, and Bob Anderson (Havenwood Heritage Heights), for modeling compassionate caregiving and helping me find my sea legs in the world of spiritual care. To Holly Wilkinson and the WholeHeart community, for teaching me how to create and hold beautiful space, and for nourishing me through your retreats and friendship. To Talashia Keim Yoder, my high school theater director, mentor, and friend, who first showed me what spiritual care of performing artists could look like long before I knew I needed it.

— to my Boston community. To my friends at the Mennonite Congregation of Boston, Hillside Community Church, Sanctuary UCC, and the Swedenborg Chapel for helping me discover and shape my ministerial voice (with abundant grace and love) over the last decade.

— to my HDS community. To my thesis supervisor Dan McKanan, teaching fellow Akhil Thomas, and thesis cohort for being wonderful thought partners, helping me sculpt the project, and offering abundant grace in my creative chaos. To my HDS friends and peers for inspiring me and being companions on the road.

— to my family. To my husband, Luke—my teacher, soundboard and stable ground—who inspired my first original songs. To my mother, for supporting this public manifestation of so personal a heartache, and for walking this road with me open-heartedly as she shared stories and insights. To my father and siblings, and Rob and Dave who have supported this project in honor of Carol. To Grandma and Grandpa Barr (may their memories be a blessing) who carried on, crafting beauty and love out of heartache. And above all, to Aunt Carol (may her memory being a blessing), for being present with us all, even in her absence. I love you.
Musician Pre-Show Pep Talk
March 22, 2024

We’ve done something incredible: just three weeks with the score, four rehearsals, over twenty musicians, performing chamber style without a conductor, navigating sudden illness and a last minute cover…and yet here we are. It may feel rougher than you’re used to, or than you’d like it to be. And that’s ok. It’s an offering. And I hope we can enjoy the music-making tonight, the aliveness of performing a raw piece, the humor of making mistakes and improvising.

Music is power. Does that resonate with any of you? There’s a book that I have been loving called *A Subversive History of Music* by Ted Gioia. It’s the music history book I wish I would have had in school. In the chapter “Not All Wizards Carry Wands,” Gioia speaks about the magical and shamanistic roots of music, and that until the time of the troubadours, music was pretty exclusively what he calls “performative”: something that, when uttered or sung, has the power to change the world. Lullabies, to calm screaming babies. The binding words of “I do” at weddings. Marches, to unify soldiers in war. Laments, to grieve. When the troubadours came along, they popularized and legitimized secular song. Music for the sake of aesthetic or entertainment. And this changed the course of music history. Gioia says that performative songs still exist, but that we don’t use the word “magic” anymore to signify this embedded power. This is the final paragraph of that chapter:

“We rarely use the word ‘magic’ in such settings. The troubadours legitimized, secular songs as art, and not as incantation; and the whole official pedagogy of music, even a thousand years later, hasn’t deviated a whit from that ingrained approach. Both as performers and audience, we are taught to view music as an aesthetic experience, not a source of enchantment. I find people get anxious when I talk about music as a magical force, so I have learned to use different words: I called music a *change agent* in human life, or a *catalyst*. But it’s still magic, even under a fancier name. Not all wizards carry wands and wear pointed hats. Some show up at work with a saxophone or a guitar in hand, and we still crave their life changing interventions, even if that aspect of their craft remains mostly unacknowledged.”

I imagine that some of our audience tonight will expect to be entertained. And that’s ok. Others will have hearts open and ready for enchantment, ready to be moved and changed by your offering tonight. I invite you to look out tonight for “signs of the invisible good.” So: I invite you to take out your wizard hats (*I mime this, and the singers follow me, much to my delight*) — and put them on (*we all put on our wizard hats, and singers begin to smile*). Now draw your wands out of your sleeves (*we take our wands out, and some pretend to wave theirs around*) — and let’s make some magic tonight!

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Good evening! A very warm welcome... Glad you’re here...
My heart is full to see you all gathered here

Thank you for spending your evening with us — for supporting me and these wonderful musicians, as we premiere of *At Love’s Hearth* this evening. It’s been a wonderful whirlwind, and we’ve put this together in just four rehearsals!

Something I’ve been thinking about a lot (I say this in the program) is the relationship between joy and sorrow, hope and despair, faith and doubt. We know joy because we have known sorrow. We know sorrow because we have known joy. Those two are not opposites; they are two things that inform one another. Like light and darkness.

This paradox is really present in this piece as you’ll see this evening, how joy and sorrow live alongside one another, and beget one another.

This piece didn’t have a title until just a few days ago (and who knows if it will change), but *At Love’s Hearth* rose up in me as I sat with this paradox. *At Love’s Hearth*, we experience joy. *At Love’s Hearth*, we hold our sorrows. There’s a line in the show: “Love bears grief, and grief is love.” As we gather around the hearth of love, it is a place where love can hold us in the extraordinary variety of human experiences we have through our lives.

An elephant in this room is that everyone has been or will be touched by grief at some point in our lives. It’s a very human experience. I invite you to be with whatever arises in you this evening: whether it’s laughter, anger, tears, silence. Grief takes many forms, and it needs to move through us. So let it move.

In the back you will find an altar space — a hearth of love, if you will — and if there is someone or something that you are holding tenderly or joyfully in your heart this evening, I invite you to write it on a piece of paper, which you’ll find in a basket over there, and place it on the altar. There are also flameless candles that you’re welcome to light in honor of your remembrance.

I have lit one already to honor one of our singers who had a medical emergency this week and is not able to join us this evening. I invite you to lift her up with me this evening, and wish her peace and wellness on her healing journey. I’m very grateful that Justine Boonstra has stepped in very last minute to sing the role of Rosie. I’m sure you’ll enjoy her performance very much.

Another person I want to bring into the room is Jonathan Shin, our composer extraordinaire. The tunes that I wrote were a stylistic mix of folk, musical theatre, and operatic, and I knew that I could count on Jonathan to make a coherent whole out of it. He is in Singapore, so he’s unable to be with us for this premier, but Jonathan I thank you for being such an incredible collaborator.
I advertised there would be a Q&A after the show, and I have decided that I don’t want to do one! If you have Q’s, come to me or a musician and we’ll give you an A. But I’d rather just celebrate this moment with you in an informal conversation afterwards. So please stick around for a light reception, and let’s celebrate the creation of this piece together.

A final word: Live music is an incredible thing. I invite you to say hello to someone this evening you don’t know, and enjoy sharing this experience together.

With that, I invite our wonderful singers up to the stage!
Recording: https://youtu.be/468D48q_h2M?si=0uQXW4PFuul_zyeC
Bibliography


