

Carnival – A Rock Opera

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**Abstract**

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*Carnival – A Rock Opera* is a musical study that infuses acting fundamentals within a live concert performance. Dramatic acting relies on a thoroughly developed script with clear characters, a rising and falling action, and text for the performers to bring to life. Is it possible to develop a quality through line of dramatic action while simultaneously writing poetic lyrics for a sung-through production that is free of text? Recent adaptations of concept albums by popular music artists have been edited and rewritten to better emphasize the dramatic arc of the story. In this thesis, the performer connects Linklater voice training, the Alexander Technique, and Suzuki training with their biopsychosocial history of musical knowledge to try and create a connection with audience members in an intimate space. The listed techniques were used to develop healthy performance traits while being used as tools that enlightened the performer to efficient vocal production skills, and physical presence. The challenges that were overcome in the early research period included re-writing charts for documentation and future recording purposes, active listening to live recordings of demo tracks to decipher musical interludes and patterns, and overdubbing instruments and vocal lines for a live concert feel. These adjustments to physical and audible presentation were imperative to the audience's reception of a dramatic story within the live concert production. The concept of writing a rock opera that is easily decipherable by a listener is possible, but not probable without visual/textual aid to the viewer or listener.

I'd be lying if I said *The Carnival* hasn't been on my mind since 2017. This 22-minute rock opera about lost love, and the memories we choose to retain originated as a simple guitar riff and a chorus, that November. At the time I never had the means to organize a full band record. When the first line is sung, "Come with me into the shadows of mystery," the audience is welcomed into a show, an experience - the spectacle that is the carnival. The story is simple. A boy meets a girl, falls in love with her, travels across the country to start a new life during troubling times, and subsequently loses her love only to realize the memories of their happiest days are worth their weight in gold as he moves forward. Cliché? Yes. Overdone? Probably. Truthful? Absolutely.

When I first started to record the music for this opera the main obstacle I ran into was the lack of written sheet music, chord progressions, or rhythm tracks that were available to me. All of these songs were only lyrics before the demos were made and I didn't have records of what choices had been made for the multi-track recordings. The Alexander Technique was the most helpful tool when recording the backing tracks for this piece. I come from a guitar/singing background and trusted my ability to record a track in 1 take with nothing else supporting the sound. When it came to laying down lead guitar, electric bass, backing vocals, and drums I found myself tightening frequently due to the stress of needing to match rhythms, chord progressions (from memory), and filling out the sound on the tracks.

I first recorded the song *Since You Left*, during the summer of 2020. The original piece was made up of midi files from a cheap keyboard. I re-recorded this song, in full, 10 times between June 2020, and December 2022, with 4 occurring between September and December, after I had learned to play drums, and bass guitar. What I wanted was a funky sounding piece of desperation that invites one to move or cry in the corner when the lyrics hit. As I would go back

and listen to the latest version of the song, I would ask myself to coordinate so that I could focus on the levels of each instrument, where I needed to layer in dub-tracks, and find the holes of sound that needed to be filled with the additional organ, or solo.

Bridget and I spent the last few years working to ground my speaking voice within my body rather than focusing it solely in the head resonators, which was a singing choice I made at a young age. As I wrote the melody lines to these songs, I ignored the fact that I kept these notes in my upper register which was a “comfortable” place for me to sing, but a stressful one. I found that my voice got tired quickly with only one pass of the show in its entirety and spent the months of January and February working on freely producing sound from the chest resonators via controlled breath. I spent time working through the zoo-woh-shaw exercise from *Freeing the Natural Voice* by Kristin Linklater. From there I would approach each melody line in a lower octave to find the placement resonance, how I needed to shape each of the vowels, how my articulators reacted to more breath passing through the chamber, and releasing jaw tension.

Many of my vocal rehearsals took place in the car driving to and from school or work and singing along with the tracks. My primary focus was to drive safely while singing melody lines that were higher than average for my voice. I noticed that when my focus was off how the notes felt or sounded, the breath and resonance opened and produced a healthier less restricted sound. As I moved to rehearsing in the space there were a few nights where I felt disconnected from my lower body (since I’m sitting while driving) but reviewed Suzuki pliés while moving up my vocal register and that helped me engage those lower muscles efficiently again.

Thinking about Suzuki practice, one large obstacle I needed to overcome was the intimate space. My setlist was loud and oozes high energy. If the audience did not agree with the given circumstances of being at a concert, I knew I’d be flailing to try and regain control of the space

and connection to my scene partner. I came up with the idea to incorporate a crowd sound effect that would be layered underneath the music tracks to give the present audience the feeling that they were inside a stadium rather than the penthouse. Not only was this to create a bridge between the beginning and end of each track, but it also helped me to visualize a larger crowd of people who I was singing to which helped me to maintain the extension of energy beyond my whole self and towards my fiction.

When speaking to my mentor, Rene Milan, he encouraged me to think about Suzuki statues when performing this piece. There is a through line of energy that the audience would grasp on to, but the exciting part of this show is how you can surprise them and both expand/explode unexpectedly and then contract and invite them inward with you. Elements of statues, withing from AT, and the expansion/contraction/psychological gesture of Michael Chekov was the most helpful when building the onstage persona.

If I were to remount this production in the future I would want to address the issue of low energy from the crowd. It was something I expected because there's a different energy within a theatre compared to a large stadium show. How would I encourage the audience to ease out of their discomfort and enjoy the music more? I would also like to change the lighting design to reflect the different characters in the story. My original idea was to have two color palates that resembled each character and would light the stage to inform the audience on who was singing. As the show progresses the palates begin to blur until you don't know where one begins and one ends. Then there is a clear split in the stage as both light palates are present and the singer can switch between the two to indicate a higher conflict as they're singing.

Finally, I'd want to have a live band behind me to support the front man character that I am bringing to life. A handful of gestures I made were to the imaginary band that was backing

me for this show. If you must know, they're called *The American Standard*, but that was too long for a marquee. I felt that turning my back to the audience did cut our connection and I had to work to re-establish trust as the performer. With a band backing me, my cues would make more sense to the audience, and it wouldn't appear like I was hiding.

Overall, *The Carnival* was a passion piece of music that had many iterations before making it to the stage in the Penthouse theatre. I grew up listening to concept albums like *American Idiot*, *Tommy*, *The Wall*, *Born to Run*, and *The Black Parade* and have been inspired by how a listener can interpret theatrical images without the visual aids. It's different when you see an album performed live and in person, but there's less cues from the design of the show that would influence your understanding. My goal was to have the audience leave feeling dissatisfied and wanting a better grasp on the subject matter. If they listened solely to the album then they have the freedom to replay it and find the nuances within each piece. I also felt that my skills as a musician were stifled over the last few years and this production brought joy and meaning to the work I had done.

...in association with the University of Washington Professional Actor Training Program

## Carnival

A Rock Opera

by Gabriel Trimbur

*Blackout.*

*Recording begins*

*Music should run all the way through the show*

*Without breaks.*

### 1. Intro

ANNOUNCER (recorded)

Ladies and gentlemen... Lemon.

### 2. Overture (Come with Me Now)

LEMON (sung)

LIGHTS

SOUND

LAUGHTER

COME WITH ME INTO THE SHADOWS OF MYSTERY  
YOU'LL FIND THAT KNOWLEDGE IS WAITING IN WHAT YOU'LL SEE  
STRAY OFF THE BEATEN PATH AND  
DISCOVER WHAT IT IS IN YOU THAT SETS YOU FREE

COME WITH ME NOW  
THERE'S NO USE COMPLAINING JUST HOP ON THE TRAIN AND YOU'RE THERE  
COME WITH ME NOW  
ADVENTURE IS CALLING THERE'S NO USE IN STALLING YOUR FATE  
COME WITH ME NOW  
TIME IS YOURS TO SPARE  
COME WITH ME NOW  
ACCEPTING YOUR PASSION AND GIVING RELEASE TO MISTAKES.

INSIDE YOU'LL WITNESS THE MAGIC OF MISERY  
ONE NIGHT OF INDULGENCE AND PLEASURE FOR ALL TO SEE  
IT'S ALL FOR YOU AND WE ARE  
YOUR HUMBLE SERVANTS OF MISCHIEF AND HERESY

COME WITH ME NOW  
DAZZLING LIGHTS GIVE THE WARM SUMMER NIGHTS A NEW VIBE  
COME WITH ME NOW  
CELEBRATE LIFE BY RELIEVING YOUR STRESS AND YOUR WOES

COME WITH ME NOW  
LET YOUR SOUL FLY HIGH  
COME WITH ME NOW  
THE CARNIVALS WAITING IT'S ANTICIPATING  
WE'RE HERE LIBERATING THE MINDS THAT ARE WASTING  
YOU'LL NEVER LEAVE GUILTY SO TAKE THE FIRST STEP AND  
YOU'RE THERE  
YOU'RE THERE  
YOU'RE THERE  
YOU'RE THERE!

### 3. For a Lover

HEY, WHAT IS YOUR NAME?  
I'M TRYING TO DISCOVER SOMETHING TO SAY  
ARE YOU NEW IN TOWN?  
CAUSE I'VE NEVER SEEN YOUR FACE.  
YOU STOLE MY HEART BEFORE YOU WALKED THROUGH THE DOOR.

IS THIS WHAT THEY TELL ME IS LOVE?  
WHEN WE'RE WORLDS APART.  
BUT FOR JUST A MOMENT  
WE'RE ONE.

LOVE ME TONIGHT  
LOVE ME TOMORROW  
IT'S ALRIGHT  
ALRIGHT...

### 4. Carnival

IT'S ALRIGHT, NOT TO SAY IF YOU ARE GOING  
TAKE YOUR TIME, THERE'S NO USE IF YOU'RE NOT HOPING FOR A  
CHANCE TO FLY, A CHANCE TONIGHT  
RUN AWAY, UNDERNEATH THE BIGTOP FEARS ARE  
THROWN AWAY, AND THE MASQUERADE THAT FOLLOWS GIVES YOU  
PEACE OF MIND, YOU'RE FREE TO FIND YOURSELF.

SHE SAID  
'TAKE ME DOWN TO THE CARNIVAL TONIGHT'  
SHE SAID  
'TAKE ME DOWN TO THE SPINNING WHEELS AND THROUGH THE FLASHING LIGHTS'  
I DON'T CARE IF I LOSE MY MIND  
I JUST WANT TO LIVE HERE IN THE LIGHT.

TAKE A BREATH, WHILE THE FIRE LIGHTS THE SHADOWS  
SILHOUETTES, BECKON YOU TO COME AND FOLLOW

THROUGH THE HAZE AND CROWD, AMAZED AND PROUD TO BELONG.

SHE SAID

'TAKE ME DOWN TO THE CARNIVAL TONIGHT'

SHE SAID

'TAKE ME DOWN TO THE SPINNING WHEELS AND THROUGH THE FLASHING LIGHTS'

I DON'T CARE IF I LOSE MY MIND

I JUST WANT TO LIVE HERE IN THE LIGHT.

I WANT TO TRAVEL THE WORLD OUT THERE

I WANT TO SEE THE WORLD OUT THERE

I WANT TO TRAVEL THE WORLD OUT THERE

I WANT TO SEE THE WORLD

SHE SAID

'TAKE ME DOWN TO THE CARNIVAL TONIGHT'

SHE SAID

'TAKE ME DOWN TO THE SPINNING WHEELS AND THROUGH THE FLASHING LIGHTS'

I DON'T CARE IF I LOSE MY MIND

I JUST WANT TO LIVE HERE IN THE LIGHT.

I DON'T CARE IF I LOSE MY MIND

I JUST WANT TO LIVE HERE IN THE LIGHT!

#### 5. Isn't It Just Lovely (Excerpt)

SEASONS CHANGE AND HOURS PASS

RAINFALL WASHED THIS DIRTY PATH

WE LEFT

WE MADE

WHEN YOU LEFT, I DIDN'T CRY

WHILE WE SAID IT'S NOT GOODBYE

NOW THOSE FEELINGS AREN'T THE SAME

SINCE YOU'VE GONE

ISN'T IT JUST LOVELY

ISN'T IT JUST LOVELY?

#### 6. Juice (excerpt)

I HAD A LITTLE DREAM LAST NIGHT

EVERYTHING WOULD FEEL JUST RIGHT

BUT WHEN I CAME TO, I REALIZED YOU CALLED ME BABY

SITTING IN AN EMPTY ROOM

ATOP A THRONE OF PLUMES

CIGARETTE SMOKE, CLEARING YOUR THROAT  
TELLING ME I'VE GOT ONE MORE MOVE

(spoken) Don't speak... don't even try  
AND WHEN I LOOK AT YOU

SIT AND DRINK YOUR JUICE

JUST SIT STILL  
DON'T MAKE A, SINGLE MOVE  
AND THEY WON'T STARE  
SING A PRAYER  
SAY NOTHING  
AND THEN THEY KNOW THAT YOU DON'T CARE

REACH OUT AND TOUCH MY BODY  
I CRY WHEN SHE'S NOT BUYING  
BUT WHEN THAT PUNCH HITS ME I'M  
ROLLING ON THE FLOOR CALLING OUT FOR MORE  
THEN I'M WAKING UP AGAIN  
THE THOUGHT OF YOU THE TOXIN  
BUT FOR A MOMENT THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY WERE BEFORE.

## 7. Since You Left

I FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN HYPNOTIZED  
BY SPINNING HIPS AND EMERALD EYES  
THEY WAY YOU MOVE ACROSS THE FLOOR  
IT'S GOT ME COMING BACK FOR MORE  
SO, TAKE ME TO THE DRESSING ROOMS  
WEAR YOUR GLITTER AND YOUR PLUMES  
LEATHER AND SOME MAYBELLINE  
IT'S ALWAYS HARD TO TRY AND LEAVE

SINCE YOU LEFT, I'VE BEEN DOWN  
THINKING 'BOUT, THE LOST AND FOUND  
THEN I SEE, NOTHING FOR ME

I WATCH YOU FLOAT ON ANGEL WINGS  
ALL YOU WANT TO DO IS SING  
AND WATCH AS ALL YOUR PRISONS BREAK  
LEADING TO THAT GREAT ESCAPE

SINCE YOU LEFT, I'VE BEEN DOWN  
THINKING 'BOUT, THE LOST AND FOUND  
THEN I SEE NOTHING FOR ME.

LISTEN CLOSE TO WHAT I SAY  
YOU'LL BE BACK AROUND SOMEDAY  
BUT YOU'LL GET NOTHING FROM ME

WHY'D YOU HAVE TO GO AND LEAVE ME SO BLUE?  
OH, SO BLUE  
IT'S JUST THAT I BELIEVED THAT THIS FIERY LOVE COULD BE WITH YOU!

SINCE YOU LEFT, I'VE BEEN DOWN  
THINKING 'BOUT THE LOST AND FOUND  
THEN I SEE NOTHING FOR ME  
LISTEN CLOSE TO WHAT I SAY  
YOU'LL BE BACK AROUND SOME DAY  
BUT YOU'LL GET NOTHING FROM ME.

## 8. Free to Carry On

THERE'S NO TIME TO SAY GOODBYE TO INNOCENCE TONIGHT  
WE'RE OFF AND I'M NOT LOOKING BACK AT ALL THOSE PASSING LIVES  
MAYBE I WAS WRONG TO WIPE AWAY THOSE OLDER LIES  
STILL, I'M FREE TO CARRY ON.

SHE TOLD ME WAIT UNTIL WE'RE OLDER 'TILL WE'RE FOUND  
THERE'S NOTHING LEFT IF WE KEEP RUNNING LOVE INTO THE GROUND  
BUT IF SHE'S THE ONE THAT GETS TO RUN THEN I WON'T STICK AROUND  
I'LL BE FREE TO CARRY ON.

I'M FREE TO FIND MY WAY  
UNLESS IT'S HERE TO STAY WITH YOU  
A WOMAN SO DEVINE  
AND IF IT'S NOT TO BE  
TOMORROWS LIGHT WILL SEE I'M GONE  
A STRANGER PASSING BY.

SHE'S IN THE NOTES I READ  
SHE'S EVERY MELODY I WRITE  
TO SHARE WHAT'S LEFT WITHIN MY MIND  
TRAPPED BY REALITY  
I SPEND TIME RESLTESSLY  
DEVOTING WHAT I HAD TO HAZEL EYES

I'M FREE TO FIND MY WAY  
THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT AND DAY, I RUN  
TO CLEAR MY SPLITTING MIND  
EACH BROKEN MEMORY  
LIKE A KNIFE CUTS THROUGH ME  
I'M GONE, RUNNING FOR MY LIFE!

9. For A Woman (acoustic guitar and vocal)

SHE KNOWS WHAT SHE WANTS AND HOW TO GET IT  
SHE HAS NO TIME TO REGRET IT  
THE CITY WAITS TO HEAR HER CALL  
SHE HAS NO MONEY TO GET HER ON TRACK  
ALL SHE HAS ARE THE CLOTHES ON HER BACK  
SHE'S A RUNAWAY PASSING THROUGH THE NIGHT WHILE IT ALL FADES TO BLACK

IN A TINY BAR ON THE WEST SIDE  
SHE CALLS HER MOM AND SAYS I'VE DECIDED TO LEAVE  
DON'T GRIEVE I'LL BE GONE FOR A WHILE  
I FOUND A SHIP THAT'LL TAKE ME AWAY  
IT'S OKAY, I'M ON MY WAY  
TO A PLACE THAT'LL GIVE ME THE CHANCE TO STAND UP AND SAY  
"NO THANKS, I'M FINE"

IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, SHE'S THERE AND SHE'S GONE  
HER YELLOW RAINCOAT SHINES LIKE THE SUN  
I WAS LOST IN HER WALK AND A SMILE  
IT'LL BE A WHILE UNTIL I FEEL ALRIGHT TO MOVE ON

I NOTICED HER FACE IN PASSING  
DID WE MEET BEFORE IN THE BACKSEAT  
TAXI SURFING DOWN THE BOULEVARD?  
I DON'T RECALL, BUT I'M WILLING TO BE  
IT WAS DURING THE TIME WHEN I TRIED TO GET  
FROM COAST TO COAST TO WATCH THE SUN RISE AND SET.

I WAS NODDING MY HEAD WHILE HUMMING A TUNE  
I LOOKED AROUND THAT'S WHEN I SAW YOU  
WITH YOUR HEAD IN THE CLOUDS AND I THOUGHT TO SAY  
"WE'LL BE ALRIGHT"

IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE SHE'S THERE AND SHE'S GONE  
HER YELLOW RAINCOAT SHINES LIKE THE SUN  
I WAS LOST IN HER WALK AND A SMILE  
IT'LL BE A WHILE UNTIL I FEEL ALRIGHT TO MOVE ON  
IT'S HARD TO THINK THAT A MINUTE AGO  
IF I'D NEVER SEEN YOUR FACE I'D NEVER KNOW  
WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A STRANGER IN LOVE WITH A GIRL LIKE YOU  
IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, SHE'S THERE AND SHE'S GONE  
HER YELLOW RAINCOAT SHINES LIKE THE SUN  
I WAS LOST IN HER WALK AND A SMILE  
IT'LL BE A WHILE UNTIL I FEEL ALRIGHT

SHE TAKES THE HIGH ROAD AND NEVER STOPS  
SHE'S GOT A PLAN THAT'LL TAKE HER RIGHT TO THE TOP  
IN A LEAP AND A BOUND SHE'LL BE DANCING WITH STARS  
AND I'VE NEVER BEEN AT LOSS FOR WORDS  
SHE'S BEEN RUNNING THROUGH MY MIND UNTIL IT HURTS  
AND I'VE NEVER FELT LOVE FOR A WOMAN LIKE THAT

SHE KNOWS WHAT SHE WANTS AND HOW TO GET IT  
SHE HAS NO TIME TO REGRET IT  
SHE'S A RUNAWAY TAKING MY HEART TO WATCH THE SUN RISE AND SET

IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, SHE'S THERE AND SHE'S GONE  
HER YELLOW RAINCOAT SHINES LIKE THE SUN  
I WAS LOST IN HER WALK AND HER SMILE  
IT'LL BE A WHILE UNTIL I FEEL ALRIGHT TO MOVE ON  
IT'S HARD TO THINK THAT A MINUTE AGO  
IF I'D NEVER SEEN YOUR FACE I'D NEVER KNOW  
WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A STRANGER IN LOVE WITH A GIRL LIKE YOU  
IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, SHE'S THERE AND SHE'S GONE  
HER YELLOW RAINCOAT SHINES LIKE THE SUN...

I'VE NEVER BEEN AT LOSS FOR WORDS  
SHE'S BEEN RUNNING THROUGH MY MIND UNTIL IT HURTS  
I'VE NEVER FELT LOVE, LOVE FOR A WOMAN LIKE THAT.

WE'LL BE ALRIGHT.

**Blackout.**

End of show.