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RESONATING WITH FOLKSONG: A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH TO THE TENOR VOICE

USING THE FOLKSONG ARRANGEMENTS OF STEVEN MARK KOHN

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RESONATING WITH FOLKSONG: A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH TO THE TENOR VOICE
USING THE FOLKSONG ARRANGEMENTS OF STEVEN MARK KOHN

A DOCUMENT APPROVED FOR THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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Dedication

This dedication goes to my mother, Dr. Jeanne Corcoran, who hates when I call her that. I had the privilege to grow up on a college campus, and I know how hard my mum has worked to provide for me. Through all the hard times, she was still able to instill a love and thirst for knowledge. Being a single mom is nothing short of super heroic. She showed me through her actions that hard work does pay off and above all else, that being kind, even in the face of adversity, is more important than any accomplishment. If it weren't for her, I wouldn't be here today working on becoming Dr. Corcoran #2.

Love you, Mum

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Abstract

The goal of this document is to provide a unique pedagogical argument for using the fifteen folksong arrangements of Steven Mark Kohn known as the *American Folk Set*, in the high key specifically, as a guided tool for teaching the tenor voice. This document will showcase basic understanding of the human voice and how that foundation has led to a specific methodology to train tenor voices through the works of Steven Mark Kohn. By using the processes of contemporary vocal pedagogy and musical analysis, Steven Mark Kohn's folk song arrangements may be used as successful tools for teaching tenor voices at the beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. When reorganized into these three categories, the folk song arrangements show a distinct roadmap for teaching a tenor voice and present singers a catalogue of contemporary American composed repertoire that may be utilized at any point along the singer's journey. These songs can be approached in various ways to accommodate singers with a classical, musical theatre or have a background with no particular stylistic or prior voice training required. As it pertains this document, the pedagogical analysis will focus more on classical voice. While these pieces are wonderfully composed for all voice types, the aim of this document is to focus on use of Kohn's folksongs in the high key to train the *tenor* voice specifically.

Need For Study

In an ever-changing landscape of classical voice training, missteps in training tenor voices may arise. Issues that may occur in any music program curriculum, in particular with the tenor voice, may include a lack of voice instructor knowledge about tenor repertoire, registration of the tenor voice, and an understanding of the common vocal faults that present in tenor voices frequently. While great voice teachers can approach teaching any voice type or fach with pedagogical knowledge and aplomb,¹ it can be hard to sift through the humongous catalogue of music for the tenor voice. Composers such as Francesco Paolo Tosti or Benjamin Britten, are acknowledged for writing incredible music for the tenor voice and are often assigned to growing tenor voices.² In addition, there is a well-documented catalogue and recorded history of operatic arias in the tenor canon that vary in difficulty and vocal weight. However, there is a missing component in many growing singers' catalogues of repertoire, not just tenors, which is 21st-century American art song.³

The folk song arrangements of composer Steven Mark Kohn, in the low, medium, and high keys have created a digestible and approachable catalogue of 21st-century art song for all voice types but lend themselves well especially for the male voice.⁴ The high key specifically provides a discernable roadmap for vocal teachers to explore and examine the necessary pedagogical milestones for training the tenor voice at all levels. These arrangements of songs

¹ Richard Miller. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996. p.107-116

²“Songs for Lyric Tenor: An Analysis of Five Francesco Paolo Tosti Songs,” [theartsjournal.org](https://www.theartsjournal.org/index.php/site/article/view/1954/968), accessed March 12, 2026, <https://www.theartsjournal.org/index.php/site/article/view/1954/968>.

³ Mariano Correa Hammer, Islei, "American Art Songs in the 21st Century: A Catalogue of Selected Works" (2023). Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Problem Reports.

⁴ Meyer, Trey C. *A contemporary adaptation of America's musical heritage: The American folk set by Steven Mark Kohn*. DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 2021.

offer voice teachers a method to guide the tenor voice in its development for varying levels of proficiency and musicianship.

This document argues for the expansion of the canon of 21st-century composers of art song to include Kohn's works, which often remain overlooked for a growing singer's repertoire.⁵ Most voice programs across the US require at least one art song in English for an audition to undergraduate programs; and many graduate school programs ask specifically for a contemporary American art song as a part of their audition process. Juilliard, one of the most respected conservatories in the world, requires an aria or song written after 1970 for their Master of Music program in voice.⁶ With these requirements, voice teachers now have a responsibility to their students to have a catalogue of music ready to give their students. While other contemporary American composers like Tom Cipullo, Jake Heggie or John Corigliano have written a variety of influential songs, Kohn's pieces are noteworthy for their accessibility, masterful musicianship, and pedagogical efficiency, providing the tenor voice with a catalogue of fifteen different 21st-century American art songs to choose from throughout the various milestones in the student's vocal development.

As well, they are designed to be "mini-dramas" that allow for exploration of acting choices and building a character.⁷ As the landscape of classical singing is shifting in the 21st century, more cosmopolitan approaches to training in various styles needed and flexibility with producing cross-genre musicians is imperative to teach today's working musician. Kohn's catalogue lends itself to both musical theater and classical art song genres and can be used for a variety of students and auditions alike.

⁵ Mariano Correa Hammer, Islei, "American Art Songs in the 21st Century: A Catalogue of Selected Works" (2023). Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Problem Reports.

⁶ College - Voice - Master of Music Application & audition requirements | The Juilliard School. Accessed October 20, 2025. <https://www.juilliard.edu/arm/music/college/voice/master-music>.

⁷ Appendix

American composers bring a unique perspective to art song written in English. Folksong, specifically, is woven into the story of Americana; and Kohn's authentic works create a tapestry of stories written from various parts of this diverse and ever-changing nation. As a voice teacher in the United States, it offers an impressive way to encourage student interest in contemporary classical music, by inspiring them to take ownership of the music that is composed with American identity at the forefront. Moreover, for foreign born or non-native English speakers, these pieces offer a unique vocal lens for singing in English and contemporary American compositional style. These songs may just as effectively be used to help singers unfamiliar with American English to learn prosody and pronunciation. All of these aspects create a unique 21st century approach to training the tenor voice.

Methodology

Originally released in three separate volumes, Kohn has composed fifteen folk song arrangements that are some of the most delicately crafted and earnestly composed songs in this genre. As this document will reveal, using musical, textual, and especially pedagogical analysis, Kohn takes what is normally considered a "simple" genre and elevates the music by experimenting with key changes, cluster chords, and virtuosic piano parts. While some of these folk song melodies are simple, the piano arrangements vary from calm and serene, to "Rachmaninov-esque" in terms of difficulty, creating a complex musical language compared to a traditional folk song arrangement.

The approach that Kohn has taken in the composition of these pieces offers a natural progression of difficulty that becomes apparent when we see all fifteen folk song arrangements together. Originally, Kohn's songs were released in three volumes. The first and most well-

known volume begins with arguably his most famous song, “Ten Thousand Miles Away,” followed by the fourteen other arrangements, outlined in their original sets, in the table below:

Volume 1	Volume 2	Volume 3
“Ten Thousand Miles Away”	“The Bachelor’s Lay”	“The Gallows Tree”
“On The Other Shore”	“Down, Down, Down”	“I’m a Stranger Here”
“The Farmer’s Curst Wife”	“The Old Women’s Courtship”	“The Drunken Old Fool”
“Wanderin’”	“The Ocean Burial”	“Poor Wayfaring Stranger”
“Red Iron Ore”	“California”	“Hell in Texas”

Traditionally, these songs are performed as a pseudo-cycle of the five songs in each volume; and as they were arranged originally, make well-rounded sets for a recital, mixing different ranges, pathoses and vocal difficulties in each five-song set. However, in 2018, Kohn’s folk song arrangements were all re-released in a complete compendium by E.C. Schirmer Publishing. Looking at all fifteen pieces together when they are not arranged in their original sets, the songs blend together more efficiently in terms of the vocal skill required to perform them, rather than any through theme, musical ideas, or any additional concept we might normally see in a traditional art song cycle. Through this, I argue that the songs may be split into three categories: songs for the young/beginning tenor, songs for the intermediate level tenor, and songs for the advanced tenor. The criteria used to re-organize this includes range, tessitura, difficulty of the arrangement, length of song, and amount of singing in or around the tenor passaggio as shown in the chart below. Throughout this document, this methodology will be utilized to show how to best train a tenor voice:

Beginner Level Pieces	Intermediate Level Pieces	Advanced Level Pieces
“Wanderin’”	“The Gallows Tree”	“On the Other Shore”
“I’m a Stranger Here”	“Red Iron Ore”	“Poor Wayfaring Stranger”
“The Ocean Burial”	“Ten Thousand Miles Away”	“California”
“Down, Down, Down”	“Hell in Texas”	
“The Farmer’s Curs’t Wife”		
“The Old Woman’s Courtship”		
“The Drunken Old Fool”		
“The Bachelor’s Lay”		

Usually, in the high key of an art song originally written in a low or medium key, the piece will modulate up by about a third. Because of this, pieces will function in the voice quite differently for tenors when rearranged into higher keys. To understand how a key change effects a piece so drastically, it is important to consider the more ubiquitous song cycle, Ralph Vaughan Williams’ *Songs of Travel*. Often, pieces from this cycle are assigned to young male singers because of their folklike quality in the melody. The original medium-low key and the transposed high key each tell a very different story. If we understand the basics of tenor pedagogy, a fully formed tenor’s range normally falls between the notes of B3 and C5, with some sitting higher and some sitting lower, with the passagio starting around E4 and turning around a G4 and becoming more head dominant around A4.⁸ But overwhelmingly, because of the way much of

⁸ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.7

tenor music is written, tenors must sing in and around their passaggi more than any other voice type.⁹ When we modulate this cycle into a more appropriate tenor key, we see a complete difference in registration, tessitura, and overall quality of the piece. When examining the first song in the *Songs of Travel*, “The Vagabond,” within the first verse of the original (lower key) of C minor, the overall tessitura sits in the lower to middle ranges of most baritones.¹⁰ It only goes above a B-flat³ a few times, once in measure ten and in measures fourteen/fifteen, barely touching the baritone’s passaggio.¹¹ It only sits in the passaggio for the climactic, “There’s the life for a man like me...” in measure sixteen and quickly descends out of it.

⁹ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p. ix, 1-5

¹⁰ Miller, Richard. *Securing Baritone, Bass-Baritone, and Bass Voices*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. p.63-75

¹¹ Miller, Richard. *Securing Baritone, Bass-Baritone, and Bass Voices*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. P.63-75

The Vagabond

Words by
R. L. STEVENSON

Music by
R. VAUGHAN. WILLIAMS

**Allegro moderato.
(alla marcia.)**

Voice.

Piano.

p *ma sempre marcato.*

sempre pesante il basso.

risoluto.

Give to me the life I love, Let the love go

by me. Give the jol-ly heaven a - bove, And the byway nigh me

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Bed in the bush with stars to see, Bread I dip in the

ri - - - ver_ There's the life for a man like me, There's the life for ev - er.

f *pp* *colla voce.* *pp*

Musical Example 1. Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Songs of Travel for Low Voice* “The Vagabond,” mm. 1-23.

Source: Vaughan Williams, Ralph. *Songs of Travel*. London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1905.

The high key by comparison—in E minor, a major third up—gives it a completely different feel and presents more vocal struggle. Already, the tessitura sits higher and closer to a tenor’s passaggio throughout the verse, sitting at approximately D4. However, the lower key sits closer to an A3, comfortably in the chest voice for most baritones, where only a true bass voice may feel any kind of strain in that range.¹²

¹² Miller, Richard. *Securing Baritone, Bass-Baritone, and Bass Voices*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. p. 63-75

The Vagabond

Words by
R. L. STEVENSON

Music by
R. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Allegro moderato.
(Alla marcia.)

Voice

Piano

p ma sempre marcato.

sempre pesante il basso.

risoluto.

Give to me the life I love, Let the love go

The musical score is written for voice and piano. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked 'Allegro moderato. (Alla marcia.)'. The piano part consists of a steady bass line of eighth notes, marked 'sempre pesante il basso.', and a melody in the right hand marked 'p ma sempre marcato.' and 'risoluto.'. The voice part has a single line of music with the lyrics 'Give to me the life I love, Let the love go'.

risoluto.

Give to me the life I love, Let the love go

by me, Give the jol-ly heaven a - bove, And the by-way nigh me.

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Bed in the bush with stars to see, Bread I dip in the

ri - - ver - There's the life for a man like me,.....

Musical Example 2. Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Songs of Travel for High Voice* “The Vagabond,” mm. 1-19.

Source: Vaughan Williams, Ralph. *Songs of Travel*. London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1905.

While the lower key feels like a conversation with the audience, the higher key sits closer to the tenor’s passaggio and has a much more stentorian quality. The climax of “There’s the life for a man like me...” in measure sixteen feels more heroic, because it is on a G4. While E-flat4 is in a baritone’s passaggio and G4 is in a tenor’s passaggio, those two notes are not, and more importantly, do not *feel* equal. A G4 is where most tenors’ voices *turn*, or where the vocal folds become less thyro-arytenoid dominant and create a more “head dominant” sound.¹³ The turn for

¹³ M Bozeman, Kenneth. *Practical vocal acoustics: Pedagogic applications for teachers and singers*. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2013 p.59-66

most baritones is F4, a whole step higher.¹⁴ So, for the two pieces to be equivalent, the higher key would need to be lowered by whole step, or the lower key transposed up a whole step higher for them to be at the same level of vocal challenge. While “The Vagabond” is a wonderful piece to give a young baritone because it just touches the passaggio and the melody structure is rather simple, for the tenor in the high key, it serves as a more intermediate piece. The high key for a tenor requires much more comfortability in the passaggio and asks more of the performer to create the intended ethos and musical structure compared to the lower key.

Using the same idea, I argue that Kohn sets tenors up for success by providing a smorgasbord of pieces at various levels for a tenor to grow. In the lower keys, the tessitura of Kohn’s pieces function in their intended purpose: elevated folk song arrangements that any baritone can sing. Some are a little more difficult than others, but most of the pieces do not go above an E4 and only two pieces extend to an F/F-sharp4 (and one that has an optional high G4). However, specifically for tenors singing in the higher key, many songs explore higher tessituras, touch or sit in the passaggio much more consistently, and even explore the extremes of the tenor voice, ascending as high as B4 in Kohn’s arrangement of “Poor Wayfaring Stranger.” Because of this, every folk song arrangement in this collection has pedagogical merit. This document breaks down each piece into three simple categories of song that any teacher with any experience of working with tenors, may ultimately explore.

Unsurprisingly, the largest group of songs fall into the beginning category. Folk song melodies are written to be easily digested and repeatable, so that they are easier to learn. Though, again, these arrangements create a more musically advanced version of these folk tunes, giving the singer and their collaborative pianist a greater sense of accomplishment. These songs have

¹⁴ Miller, Richard. *Securing Baritone, Bass-Baritone, and Bass Voices*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. p. 63-75

also been specifically categorized by the spectrum of difficulty within each category. The beginner-level songs are usually strophic or a modified strophic, rarely touch the *passaggio*, if at all, and are harmonically easier to hear entrances and tonality. This aligns with the capabilities of most tenor voices in the beginning of their singing journey.¹⁵ It is best not to overwhelm a young tenor voice with high notes and difficult tessituras, unless the voice presents an inherent comfortability in or above the *zona di passaggio*. In most cases with tenors, a slow methodical approach to expanding the range is the correct course of action.¹⁶ Essentially, for a tenor to graduate from beginning tenor to intermediate tenor, the student must demonstrate a comfortability with moving in and out of the *primo passaggio*.¹⁷ Kohn's easier pieces show a clear roadmap for determining if the singer is in fact a tenor voice. A piece such as "Wanderin'" that sits higher, but only goes up to a D4 can help determine if the singer's *passaggio* starts closer to D/E4. If so, the beginning singer may eventually progress to "The Bachelor's Lay," which touches a couple G4s, showing more comfortability in that section of the voice.

The next level of difficulty is comprised of the intermediate group. Once again, these pieces are arranged from least to most difficult. These songs explore the *passaggio* more intently, sustaining notes in the *passaggio* at a longer length and have a higher musical complexity compared to the easier pieces in the beginner level. A piece such as "Ten Thousand Miles Away" is also a great competition piece that is both a judge- and crowd-pleaser. These pieces have more climatic F-sharp/G/A-flat4s that act as the perceived top of the tenor voice until a singer is ready to explore the actual top later when the voice matures and is better prepared for that challenge.

¹⁵ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-6, 13

¹⁶ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-8, 13

¹⁷ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-8

The last level of difficulty is the advanced category. These pieces demand that a singer has complete control over their range, musicianship and even present a challenge for professional level singers. They are the culmination of everything worked on in previous pieces: exploring musical ideas, musical line, comfortability in different registers of the voice, and the ability to perform these at the highest level. These pieces explore moving in and out of the tenor's passaggio more regularly and explore the extremes of a tenor's range. Exploring this part of the voice through folk song creates a pedagogical safe space to explore how to approach difficult sections of the voice.

This pedagogical method of categorizing Kohn's work creates a through line that any teacher might hypothetically use to train a tenor voice. Granted, a classical singer needs to be well-rounded in various languages, styles, and an understanding of their own instrument, but all of Kohn's folk song arrangements offer a wonderful alternative to standard vocal repertoire. This exceptional cadre of works by Kohn may be placed in the tenor's repertoire and may be used for various recitals, auditions, and create a collaborative dynamic approach between teacher and student on how to best learn and navigate the various parts and complexities of the tenor voice.

Chapter 1: Understanding the Tenor Voice

Understanding the human voice as it pertains to classical singing is a long journey that mixes oral tradition and anatomical science to create art. While most American schools follow some sort of Italianate bel canto tradition,¹⁸ the way that each voice teacher approaches these traditions can vary wildly. Most teachers agree that the key components of singing are inspiration (taking in the breath), phonation (the act of the vocal folds closing to vibrate), exhalation (the expulsion of that air efficiently through breath support), and resonance (using the natural chambers of the vocal tract to help amplify sound). Depending on the pedagogical tradition from which any teacher has learned and their experiences with vocal health and science, every teacher comes at the issues of vocal faults differently.¹⁹ Personally, I come from a bel canto tradition where my teachers, Diana Jacklin (student of Blanche Thebom) Prof. Murray Kidd (student of Susan Clickner), Prof. Mark Cleveland (student of Richard Cassily), Prof. Penelope Bitzas (student of Susan Clickner), Prof. Clifton Forbis (student of Bill Neill) and Dr. Joel Burcham (student of Jim Doing) have created a lineage and approach to teaching that lines up with many of the initial teachings of great vocal pedagogues such as Manuel Garcia II, Marchesi, Richard Miller, etc. I am a firm believer that a good classical sound comes from proper coordination of the vocal folds, steady breath, and enough physical activation appropriate to energize the sound.²⁰ Every singer and their voice is different. A voice teacher requires a keen sense of awareness to hear what vocal faults need to be corrected.²¹ It is a voice teacher's duty to hear the faults in a singer's voice and ethically guide the student to a better version of their singing voice.²² All singing at its core is fundamentally built upon this foundation. Going forward, it is to

¹⁸ Miller, Richard. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996. p.1-6

¹⁹ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.3-10

²⁰ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.31-35, 48-50

²¹ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.3-10

²² McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.3-10

be understood that any reference to singing, vocal health, and vocal pedagogy are in reference to classical style singing; though on a personal note, I am a firm believer that good singing is good singing, regardless of genre.

Some common issues that arise with teaching the voice includes managing hyper- and hypo- functionality of the vocal folds, which is usually a coordination issue with subglottal breath pressure, bad posture, breath control, and a lack of understanding the different registers of the voice.²³ Balancing and counterbalancing these issues by using various tools in our voice teacher tool belts is the main function of a voice lesson. More traditional methods such as connecting the voice to physical actions, imagery, or even trial and error are always used.²⁴ In recent decades, more modern approaches such as Alexander technique classes, vocal science, and even recording technology to listen back in real time have become invaluable tools for vocal growth.²⁵ All good singing begins with a good breath, and many pedagogues concur that most singing issues come from an incoordination of breath in some way, shape, or form. Regardless of talent, learning to breathe correctly with a low and intentional breath instantly adds more confidence and sustained volume without having to adjust anything else.²⁶ Closely related to breath is good posture, which plays a large part in taking in an efficient breath.²⁷ If the air tank is optimized for singing with an active but not strained posture, singers will have more space to take a deep breath.²⁸ Once a singer is able to take a good breath consistently, finding resonance is the next logical step.

²³ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.15-20, 80-90

²⁴ Miller, Richard. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996. p.3-6

²⁵ Bozeman, Kenneth. *Practical vocal acoustics: Pedagogic applications for teachers and singers*. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2013. p.90-96

²⁶ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.46-60

²⁷ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.46-60

²⁸ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.46-60

Resonance is different for each singer due to several factors such as body size, thickness of the vocal folds, the size of orifices in the face, or issues such as a deviated septum, etc. All may play a significant part into how much the voice projects.²⁹ As all voices mature and age, more sound is attained due to the calcification of the vocal mechanism.³⁰ Understanding the natural size of the instrument and finding the resonance to carry in an acoustic space is what creates a classical sound.³¹ Resonance is the optimization of the vibrations created by the inspiration and expiration cycles and is critical to development of classical singing.³² However, the area of the voice I spend the most time correcting as a teacher is the registration of the voice.

Registration is an issue seen in all voice types, and with a particular section of the voice known as the *passaggio*.³³ The *passaggi*, or passageways in English, are the points of the voice that denote registration shifts.³⁴ In Soprano and Mezzo-soprano voices, there are three distinct registers. The first register is the chest voice, which is denoted by a speaking quality in the voice.³⁵ Often female singers speak naturally in their chest voice, and strengthening this section of their range helps buttress the rest of the voice.³⁶ Through an initial *primo passaggio*, treble voices begin the transition to a more head dominant sound through the second register known as the *mixed voice*.³⁷ This section starts to blend the chest dominant sound to the a lighter head register or *head voice* that allows for the glorious high notes at the top of their ranges.³⁸

For non-treble singers, there is an extended chest register until arriving at a section of the voice known as the *zona di passaggio*.³⁹ Depending on the voice type and vocal weight, that

²⁹ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.120-130

³⁰ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p. 94-98

³¹ Bozeman, Kenneth. *Practical vocal acoustics: Pedagogic applications for teachers and singers*. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2013 p.17-45

³² Bozeman, Kenneth. *Practical vocal acoustics: Pedagogic applications for teachers and singers*. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2013 p.17-45

³³ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-8

³⁴ Richard Miller. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996. p.1-8

³⁵ Richard Miller. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996. p.1-8

³⁶ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.82-90

³⁷ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.82-90

³⁸ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.82-90

³⁹ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-8

zona shifts in a typical male range. For basses, it tends to fall between G/A3-C/D4, bass-baritones A3-D4, Baritones from B4-E4,⁴⁰ and Tenors from E4-A4.⁴¹

Fig. 1: Approximate register events from, Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996.

Approximate Register Events		
Category of Voice	<i>primo passaggio</i>	<i>secondo passaggio</i>
<i>tenorino</i>	F ₄	B ^b ₄
<i>tenore leggero</i>	E ₄ , (E ^b ₄)	A ₄ , (A ^b ₄)
<i>tenore lirico</i>	D ₄	G ₄
<i>tenore spinto</i>	D ₄ , (C [#] ₄)	G ₄ , (F [#] ₄)
<i>tenore robusto (tenore drammatico)</i>	C ₄ , (C [#] ₄)	F ₄ , (F [#] ₄)
<i>baritono lirico</i>	B ₄	E ₄
<i>baritono drammatico</i>	B ^b ₄	E ^b ₄
<i>basso cantante</i>	A ₃	D ₄
<i>basso profondo</i>	A ^b ₃ , (G ₃)	D ^b ₄ , (C ₄)

Those ranges may vary from singer to singer because of size of the voice, but these are consistent points for most male singers. Instead of two small passaggi, this section of the voice is about a fourth or fifth of a male at birth's upper middle range that helps lead into the head voice.⁴² However, it is my assertion that a male singer's head voice is still connected to the chest register, whereas a treble voice has a complete register shift. To attain an actual register shift, male voices have a *false* register, where the vocal folds come together loosely creating what I refer to as a "Mickey Mouse" type sound; a hollow, airy timbre similar to the sounds made by

⁴⁰ Miller, Richard. *Securing Baritone, Bass-Baritone, and Bass Voices*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

⁴¹ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-8

⁴² Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-8

Disney's most famous mouse.⁴³ For classical male singers, there needs to be a thinning of the vocal muscles, specifically the thyro-arytenoid (TA) muscles that still connects the upper register to the chest voice.⁴⁴ This is accomplished by a process known as *covering* the voice.

Covering is the term used when non-treble voices need to create a darker or more lifted pharyngeal space to compensate for the natural constriction that happens in the vocal tract as male singers sing through their *zona di passaggio*.⁴⁵ Naturally, the muscles of the throat constrict as the rise in pitch occurs, so to counteract that, the space must change to keep the tract aligned, and to not muddy the quality or overtones of the voice.⁴⁶ Often, that means a change in some of the pure bright vowels in Italianate singing to more neutral, rounded vowels must take place.⁴⁷ For instance, a bright "ah" vowel modifies to a darker "aw" sound, a bright "ee" vowel shifts to an "ih," etc. This change requires a lot of experimentation, focusing on the quality of sound production that a teacher is hearing, but it should create an optimal classical sound that allows for the voice to release to higher notes that vibrate and resonate enough to carry in a hall without using a microphone.

The main issue that can arise when a singer is asked to sing with a darker sound, is that they will, inevitably, sing heavier thinking that a darker *vowel* means that they need to weigh down the voice.⁴⁸ This is why when teaching, it is recommended to use the terminology associated with vowel modification. I have discovered in my own teaching that when the student is asked to adjust their vowel rather than darken the sound, often they don't weigh down the voice as often. The production of clear sound should not change because of a more rounded

⁴³ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.82-88

⁴⁴ Bozeman, Kenneth. *Practical vocal acoustics: Pedagogic applications for teachers and singers*. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2013. p.57-80

⁴⁵ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993. p.131-137

⁴⁶ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p. 121-129

⁴⁷ Richard Miller. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996. p.131-137

⁴⁸ Richard Miller. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996. p.131-137

vowel.⁴⁹ However, there will be a slight timbral shift through the *passaggio*.⁵⁰ That specific shift is what is referred to as *turning*. The turn of the voice is how all male voices, but especially tenors, navigate into the highest part of their range.⁵¹ Many times, this is one or two notes in the *zona di passaggio* that act as a secondo passaggio and denote that the voice needs to release to access the extreme top of the voice.

For non-treble voices, but especially tenor voices, learning to navigate the passaggio is the mark of mastery of the voice. For treble voices, the two passaggi may feel like “speed bumps” or a nuisance that can make a piece more difficult, but this is not going to cause the voice to stop phonating.⁵² This has mostly to do with the treble passaggio, being only a pitch or two in their range per passaggio, and how music is written for treble voices respectively.⁵³

When starting classical voice training with a young tenor voice, it is important to understand that it takes time develop the tenor sound.⁵⁴ Unless a student clearly shows an inherent ease in their higher range—i.e., they have a higher speaking voice and when they sing it is clearly more comfortable on higher tessitura pieces—it is best to gradually build the voice and slowly extend the range over time.⁵⁵ Truthfully, a young tenor should be trained similarly to a high baritone until the voice starts to open up and shows that it can travel to and sustain notes in the *zona di passaggio* consistently.⁵⁶

The core questions in building a tenor voice are 1) Is the voice resonating naturally at a higher tessitura? 2) Are the registration events happening in places that pedagogues agree denote a tenor voice? and 3) regardless of the timbre and weight of the voice, does the student feel more

⁴⁹ Richard Miller. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996. p.131-137

⁵⁰ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-8

⁵¹ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-5, 13-20

⁵² McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.82-90

⁵³ Richard Miller. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996. p.121-123

⁵⁴ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-6

⁵⁵ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.7-9

⁵⁶ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-6

comfortable singing the repertoire of a tenor? If those criteria are met, a teacher may reasonably assume that they are a tenor voice and begin exercises to increase the range. It is imperative not to push the voice past comfortability too early. If the student can only reach a G4, then work towards strengthening the voice up till that point. When the voice opens up to A-flat/A4, only then can a teacher, slowly but surely, expand the range further. When less experienced teachers teach the tenor voice, they may attempt to allow the student to sustain notes of the passaggio too early, or even try to get the student to reach up towards extended ranges. This may hinder the growth and development of the tenor voice.⁵⁷ In my own teaching experience, I once had to rehabilitate a high school student singer who was clearly a tenor voice, but a previous teacher assigned the student “Che gelida manina” from Puccini’s *La Bohème*, arguably one of the most famous and notoriously difficult pieces in the tenor operatic canon. I wouldn’t recommend this piece to most tenors until they were at least singing at a graduate school level because of its high tessitura and one of the most famous high C5s ever written in opera. It is always best practice to give the student art song and exercises that touch the difficult areas of the voice before trying to sustain them or perform them in front of an audience. Through a slow, methodical approach, any teacher may learn to effectively teach and correctly develop the tenor voice.

⁵⁷ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.7-10

Chapter 2: A Brief History of Folk Song

Folk song is an essential component of American cultural identity and national expression. Although American folk music does not originate from a single source, scholars widely acknowledge that it developed through the blending of European, African, Asian, and Indigenous musical traditions carried by immigrants, enslaved peoples, and Native Americans into the United States.⁵⁸ Folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand defines folklore, and by extension folk song, as “cultural materials that circulate traditionally within a community, typically transmitted orally and existing in multiple versions.”⁵⁹ Within this framework, folk songs are understood as part of verbal folklore. Musical expressions of that folklore are passed from singer to singer through tradition rather than through formal publication or authorship.⁶⁰

Many folk songs are characterized by melodic and poetic simplicity, qualities that make them accessible for communal participation and oral transmission across generations. Strophic organization and rhyming verse structures are common features within the folk tradition, contributing to memorability and ease of performance. These accessible musical structures helped preserve folk music as a participatory art form rather than an exclusively professional genre.⁶¹ For example, examine the following first verse is from one of the most famous American folk tunes “Poor Wayfaring Stranger.”

⁵⁸ Lomax, Alan Lomax. *Folk Song in the United States*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960 p.3-25

⁵⁹ Brunvand, Jan Harold. *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998 p. 3-5

⁶⁰ Brunvand, Jan Harold. *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998 p. 3-5

⁶¹ Kip Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 1–18

*I am a poor wayfaring stranger
I'm travlin' through this world of woe
But there's no sickness, toil or danger
In that fair land to which I go*

*I'm Going there to see my mother
I'm going there no more to roam
I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger
I'm just a goin' over home*

The first stanza rhymes “stranger” with “danger” and “woe” with “go.” Folk songs can have different rhyming schemes, but overall, folk song texts tend to rhyme because it makes it easier for an untrained musician to remember the lyrics.⁶² Truthfully, most of these songs were not printed into sheet music until the very late 19th century and more often not until the 20th century when Alan Lomax began compiling and recording hundreds of songs for the US Library of Congress.⁶³

Folk music traditions have appeared throughout every era of American history, but historians frequently note that folk revivals and heightened interest in folk expression often emerge during periods of economic hardship, labor unrest, and social oppression, especially among working-class communities. Roy argues that American folk music became closely associated with labor movements, protest traditions, and political activism during the twentieth

⁶² Lomax, Alan Lomax. *Folk Song in the United States*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960 p.xv-xxx

⁶³ Lomax, Alan Lomax. *Folk Song in the United States*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960 p.xv-xxx

century, functioning as both cultural expression and social commentary.⁶⁴ Not every folksong deals with oppression specifically. However, the large catalogue of Negro spirituals giving slaves coded messages to escape their chains,⁶⁵ various folksongs describing the harsh conditions of building the railroads, mining ore or the harsh sea, and even more contemporary folksongs like Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are a Changin',"⁶⁶ all speak to the situation of oppression that the people of the time felt.

Throughout American musical history, simple melodies have drawn exquisite composition and have elevated a simple genre into the tapestry of musical intellectualism. Many great American composers such as Aaron Copland, H.T. Burleigh, John Jacob Niles, etc., have all written beautiful arrangements of folk song. Some of my personal favorites were arranged and adapted from the compendiums of folk songs collected by John and Alan Lomax, which were used heavily in the compositions of Kohn's pieces.⁶⁷

As a teacher, folksongs are great pieces to give new and inexperienced students. The simple melodies make a great canvas to explore the beginnings of good vocal technique, and often there are certain selections that teachers lean on. The Schirmer compendiums of folk song or even most church hymnals are good resources if someone wants to better understand folk melodies. One of the most used compendiums of arranged folksongs, especially for young singers, are Jay Althouse's *Folk Songs for Solo Singers Vol. 1 and 2*, in both the high and low keys. Althouse is a well-known composer of choral music and arranger of folk songs as is his wife and frequent collaborator, Sally K. Albrecht.⁶⁸ Some of his arrangements are excellent, such

⁶⁴ William G. Roy, *Reds, Whites, and Blues* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1–25; Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 3–15.

⁶⁵ Bacon, Barbara. *Slave Code Songs* Accessed August 20, 2025. <https://voices.pitt.edu/LessonPlans/SlaveCodeSongs.htm>.

⁶⁶ Dylan, Bob. "The Times They Are A-Changin': The Official Bob Dylan Site." The Times They Are A-Changin' | The Official Bob Dylan Site. Accessed August 20, 2025. <https://www.bobdylan.com/songs/times-they-are-changin/>.

⁶⁷ Appendix

⁶⁸ Althouse, Jay. *Jay Althouse – Jubilate Music*. Jubilate Music. Accessed March 14, 2026. <https://jubilatemusic.com/pages/jay-althouse?srsltid=AfmBOoqluvARBmxHnqcuzAyZfDGg84L335ZpT7aOfPE3qiFWiasW2aoC>.

as his arrangement of the folk song “Shenandoah” or “Homeward Bound.” Both of these songs masterfully paint the text of longing to return home and elevate the original melodies. The arrangement of Shenandoah in particular has a wonderful key change in the final verse that creates a sense of majesty and reverence that honor the great Missouri River.

24 ²⁴ *holding back* *in tempo* ²⁵ ²⁶ *f*

wide Mis-sou - ri. Oh,

holding back *in tempo* *f*

64 ²⁷ ²⁸ ²⁹ ³⁰

27 *With a bit more movement*

Shen-an-doah, I long to hear you. A - way, you roll-ing riv-er. Oh,

With a bit more movement

³¹ ³¹ *holding back* ³² *mp* *in tempo* ³³

Shen-an - doah, I long to hear you. A - way, I'm bound a -

holding back *in tempo*

Musical Example 3. Jay Althouse arr., *Folk Songs for Solo Singers, Vol. 1*, for High Voice “Shenandoah,” mm. 24-33.

Source: Althouse, Jay, arr. *Folk Songs for Solo Singers, Vol. 1: 11 Folk Songs Arranged for Solo Voice and Piano*. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music 1993

However, many of his arrangements can feel banal in comparison and don’t capture the spirit of the original text, even missing the point completely. Re-examining the folk song “Poor Wayfaring Stranger,” Althouse’s arrangement alludes to a bossa nova feel that undermines the gravitas of a homesick person who cannot return to their home. At its best, it evokes the sound of a moving train, paying homage to 20th-century vagabonds, but that is taking a huge leap of inference on my part to justify why Althouse might have composed it in this way.

34

POOR WAYFARING STRANGER

American Folk Ballad
Arranged by JAY ALTHOUSE

Moderately (♩ = ca. 112-116)

I'm just a poor way-far-ing stran-ger
clouds will gath-er 'round me;

a trav-'ling through this world of woe.
I know my way is rough and steep.

Train Whistle

Musical Example 4. Jay Althouse arr., *Folk Songs for Solo Singers, Vol. 2*, for High Voice
“Poor Wayfaring Stranger,” mm. 1-11.

Source: Althouse, Jay, arr. *Folk Songs for Solo Singers, Vol. 2: 14 Folk Songs Arranged for Solo Voice and Piano*. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music 1993

Folk song can be such an incredible tool, especially early in a singer’s journey. Even if a student comes from a background of more contemporary style of singing or can’t read music yet, folk song provides an approachable avenue for students to learn these skills. For a tenor specifically, a great arrangement of folksong can not only help them grow vocally but can be a piece they keep in their repertoire and come back to as they progress. It’s a chance to find new colors in the voice, new acting choices, and grow with a piece of music.

Along my own journey as a growing musician and tenor, I was lucky enough to be introduced to the folk song arrangements of Steven Mark Kohn by my voice professor, Penelope Bitzas, during my Master’s degree. Kohn’s compositional masterfully sets these fifteen folk songs while maintaining the famous melodies they we’re derived from. The individual difficulty of each piece may vary, but the spirit of an approachable folk song is never lost even though the arrangement itself elevates the musical language.

Chapter 3: Steven Mark Kohn

Steven Mark Kohn is an American composer and lyricist of film music, opera, ambient music and art song. Born in 1957 just outside of Cleveland, Ohio, he gained a passion for music growing up listening to the great pop and rock bands of the 1960s and 1970s.⁶⁹ It led him to take piano lessons his senior year of high school and apply as a music major at Kent State University.⁷⁰ At Kent State, Steven enrolled in a composition class with Prof. Walter Watson who encouraged him to start composing.⁷¹ This interaction set him on the path to becoming a composition major, eventually earning his Master's degree in composition from the Cleveland Institute of Music in 1982.⁷² Steven's first successes came from composing commercial jingles and arranging music for local Ohio businesses. These experiences taught him how to arrange and record audio as well.⁷³ These connections and skills he learned in the TV and radio industry led him to composing everything from animated versions of children's books to Disney Channel cartoons. Some of his most well-known compositions outside of classical music are several meditative compact discs for a company called Health Journeys, used to help alleviate anxiety through guided meditation.⁷⁴ In the late 1990s, Steven was hired as a faculty member at his alma mater, The Cleveland Institute of Music, where he was inspired to write art songs that fused folk song traditions with classical and musical theatre esthetics. This would go on to become the first song of his *American Folk Set*.⁷⁵ Since that time, hundreds of singers such as Will Liverman, Benjamin Appl, and Andrew Garland have sung his repertoire across the country and the world.⁷⁶ Andrew Garland is most famous for recording Kohn's entire catalogue with pianist Donna

⁶⁹ "Biography." Steven Mark Kohn. Accessed May 15, 2025. <http://www.stevenmarkkohn.com/about.html>.

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Ibid

Loewy, a critically acclaimed album that to date is the only recorded compendium of Kohn's folksong arrangements.⁷⁷ Outside of composition, Steven is a talented lyricist and writer, who has written and produced short films, television shows and also wrote the libretto for the opera *Riders of the Purple Sage* with his longtime friend Craig Bohmler, a process that was featured in an Emmy Award-winning documentary about the making of the opera.⁷⁸

One of the greatest advantages to working on the music of living composers is that they can give direct insight into their music making process, as opposed to composers that are no longer living like Mozart, Puccini, and Wagner, whose ideas can only be interpreted through existing literature and performance practices. As a part of my research, I conducted an interview with Steven to help me to gain insight into his background and provide me with the information needed as to why he chose certain poetry, what compositional techniques he employed, and what his process was for composing these folk masterpieces.

During the interview, Kohn described how each song cycle was created with a through line, mostly related to tempo and feel, giving a wide range of ethos for each five-song set. The goal was to open each set with a medium tempo opener, a slower more somber piece second, a funny piece third, a sad or sorrowful piece fourth, and then an epic tale to close out the set.⁷⁹ Looking at the sets in their original organization, each volume follows this pattern exactly. Kohn consulted a wealth of folk song resources but relied heavily on the Lomax anthologies of folk song. He wanted to find the most story-like poetry that featured distinct characters for most, if not all, of his song arrangements.⁸⁰ Kohn initially wanted to write a musical. However, he found it more advantageous to write art song rather than trying to put on a full-fledged musical because

⁷⁷ Andrew Garland, Donna Loewy. American folk song settings. MP3. Naxos Digital Services US Inc, 2009

⁷⁸ "Biography." Steven Mark Kohn. Accessed May 15, 2025. <http://www.stevenmarkkohn.com/about.html>.

⁷⁹ Appendix

⁸⁰ Ibid

producing a musical is usually much more expensive and difficult to collaborate on.⁸¹

Composing art song by comparison is much less time consuming and more control is given to the composer. By incorporating the idea of character, he was able to model his songs much like Jason Robert Brown's *Songs for a New World*, which is similarly character-driven.

Kohn had medium voices in mind when composing these pieces and did not want to stretch the baritone voice into the extremes of its ranges.⁸² He stated, "Even folk songs are designed to be easy to sing. I didn't want to write the melodies too high or too low."⁸³ When Kohn started to transpose to a higher key, he found that he had to modify some of the piano parts and melodies slightly, because it was not as simple as pushing a transposition button and everything comes out perfect.⁸⁴ Some of the harmonies had to be reworked, which explains why the high key feels so different to sing.

Many of his contemporaries were focused on atonal works and making music for the sake of pushing the art form, but Kohn has always had the philosophy at his core to put the audience first.⁸⁵ He wanted to create music that any listener may enjoy while still feeling accomplished in his own craft.⁸⁶ It is what drew him to folk song initially, because it was a digestible art form that any listener could understand. While Kohn did not compose these pieces with any kind of pedagogical ideals in mind, Kohn admits that they can offer opportunities to explore so many aspects of classical singing in a safe environment.⁸⁷

Initially, Kohn wrote "Red Iron Ore" and "Ten Thousand Miles Away," which led him to devise the formula of a five-song compendium.⁸⁸ He completed his first set, and through

⁸¹ Appendix

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Ibid

connections with Glendower Jones, owner of Classical Vocal Reprints, started promoting the songs to singers and voice teachers. My teacher during my master's program, Penelope Bitzas, was also good friends with Glendower Jones and directly received Kohn's music from him. Professor Bitzas was also Andrew Garland's teacher at that time. After hearing Andy sing them, she suggested that I sing his first set on my master's recital in 2016. Eventually, more classical singers discovered his first set and performed them at some of the largest concert halls in the world. Because of the popularity of the first set, Kohn quickly returned to composing to complete the next two sets of his folksong arrangements.

Kohn wanted to be able to write from his own lens and life experiences. The composer grew up in the Great Lakes region of the United States, and as an American, did not view himself as overtly patriotic or nationalistic.⁸⁹ Kohn found the songs of great American composers like Copland and John Jacob Niles lacked a focused care for a sense of character.⁹⁰ He wanted to find a way to incorporate a compositional language and treatment of text similar to how Ralph Vaughan Williams treated British folk song.⁹¹ After Kohn had completed his three sets, Michael Ching of EC Schirmer Publishing, who was a close friend of his from Aspen Music Festival years prior, reached out to Kohn and asked if he wanted to merge his songs into a complete compendium under the Schirmer publishing label, which would allow for more global and widespread sales and performances of his music.⁹² Steven agreed and the full compendium of songs was released in the high, medium, and low keys in 2018.⁹³

⁸⁸ Appendix

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Ibid

Chapter 4: The Fifteen Folk Song Arrangements of Steven Mark Kohn's *American Folk Set*

Beginner Level

A tenor who is early in their singing journey may be rather indistinguishable from a young lyric baritone.⁹⁴ Often, there is very little delineation between a high school level student and a freshman music major in terms of their level of musical experience, unless they went to a specialized school for the arts or were actively taking voice lessons with a teacher in high school. Often, male students have been told what their voice type is by a high school choir teacher and have not taken voice lessons. Many times, young tenors may sing up to the beginning of the *zona di passaggio* and top out around F/G4. Truthfully, when a new young student works with a teacher, many times it is more about determining where their voice is currently and seeing how it will grow into itself. If a teaching professional is unsure about whether their student is a tenor or a baritone, a great piece to start with is Kohn's "Wanderin'."

"Wanderin'"

"Wanderin'" is the most approachable piece in Kohn's canon. Regardless of a low, medium or high key, the piece is always in the key of D major. The range of this piece goes from D3-D4, which is not very high, but the tessitura of the piece sits closer to that higher D4 for most of the piece. Because of that, it provides insight to a teacher into whether the person singing leans more towards being a tenor or a higher baritone. If the singer in question is a true low voice like a bass or bass-baritone, this piece will feel very high.⁹⁵ With a bass voice in mind, this might be one of the tougher pieces to sing in Kohn's canon of folk song. Sustaining multiple repeated D4s for a low voice is not only incredibly difficult, but it sits in their upper *passaggio*, and most

⁹⁴ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-6

⁹⁵ Miller, Richard. *Securing Baritone, Bass-Baritone, and Bass Voices*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. p.1-10

low voices turn on or around a D4.⁹⁶ For a baritone, a D4 will feel less difficult than it is for a bass, but for many baritones, somewhere around B4 is where the primo passaggio begins, and it will be evident that they have reached a difficult part of their voice.⁹⁷ D4 should feel comfortable for a tenor to sing, but sometimes, especially if the tenor has no formal classical training prior, they may need to learn to find that ease in the sound and sustain easy phonation. In this case, the pitch of D4 shouldn't sound strained or difficult to sing.⁹⁸ If the student can sustain multiple D4s with relative ease, you have discovered a tenor voice, and this guides the teacher in how to move forward with the students training.

Rhythmically, “Wanderin” is in a smooth 12/8 time signature that stays consistent throughout the entire piece, both in the vocal line and the piano. It has three strophic verses and a fourth modified strophic verse that introduces a student to the concept of basic syncopation and hemiola. The constant ostinato almost feels like a flashback sequence in a television show, which makes sense based on Kohn’s television and film background. It lulls the listener with its

⁹⁶ Miller, Richard. *Securing Baritone, Bass-Baritone, and Bass Voices*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. p.34-39

⁹⁷ Miller, Richard. *Securing Baritone, Bass-Baritone, and Bass Voices*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. p.34-39

⁹⁸ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.23-30, 38-45

cascading arpeggios.

Traditional American Text

Traditional American Tune
Arranged by Steven Mark Kohn

With a steady even roll, mournfully, distantly ♩ = 72-84

With a steady even roll, mournfully, distantly ♩ = 72-84

p molto legato sempre

p

p

p *poco* *p* *distantly*

poco

ped. changes

Dream like
Ostinato that
feels like a
flashback
sequence

I been a-wan-d'rin' ear - ly, — I been a-wan-d'rin' late, from

New York Cit - y — to the Gold - en Gate. An' it

Musical Example 5. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Wanderin’,” mm. 1-9.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

37

pp half-voiced

Ash - es to ash - es, and dust to dust. If

l.h. r.h.

pp

Hemiola in the Melody

40

whis - key don't get you, than the wom - an must. An' it

43

looks like I'm nev - er gon - na cease my wan - der -

Musical Example 6. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Wanderin’,” mm. 37-45.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

It is separated into four modified strophic verses that speak of longing, long travel, and accepting that life is short and will end someday. The original poem derives from many of the tales of turn-of-the-twentieth-century hobos, tramps, and wayfarers jumping from train to train,

traveling the country, and missing home.⁹⁹ The long verse structure teaches the value of breath control, and the ostinato piano part helps to create a beautiful legato singing line to soar over it. As well, because of the elevated composition of the piano part, it will sound like the piece is much harder than it really is. However, the melody line is easy to grasp, giving the student a feeling of accomplishment when putting it all together. The piano presents deep, rich bass notes that cut throughout the continuous ostinato in the right hand, giving weight to the wanderer's journey in the song. For a teacher, this piece is approachable, not extreme in range, covers basic musical concepts, and is a great first piece to give a student from Kohn's catalogue.

Once a voice type has been confirmed, a vocal pathway will start to emerge. The healthiest thing that a voice teacher can do with a young tenor is take their time opening up the voice. The next few pieces are all focused on expanding the range without sustaining anything in the passaggio, focusing on strengthening the low and middle voice, growing as a musician and finding more comfortability around E4 and F4, which is where the passaggios of most start.

Often in training tenors, many teachers neglect the bottom of the voice because, truthfully, a lot of common operatic repertoire for tenors does not go below the staff often.¹⁰⁰ Usually, the only repertoire that requires tenors to sing that low is in art song.¹⁰¹ However, this neglect leads to the voice having weak spots and often leads to an underdeveloped low and middle register and a strained *zona di passaggio*.¹⁰² And while the top may surge with sound, everything leading up to it sounds unsure and strained.¹⁰³ Creating an aligned instrument that sounds the same from the top to the bottom of the voice is paramount.

⁹⁹ "Wanderin': About the Song." Ballad of America, December 17, 2019. <https://balladofamerica.org/wanderin/>.

¹⁰⁰ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.83-88

¹⁰¹ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.83-88

¹⁰² Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.83-88

¹⁰³ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.83-88

“I’m a Stranger Here”

“I’m a Stranger Here” is a logical next step to grow the tenor voice. Arguably, this piece is somewhat easier than “Wanderin’.” It has a lower tessitura and while it goes slightly higher to an E-flat4, it only touches that note a few times and goes right back down to the middle voice. However, “Wanderin’” specifically gives insight to a tenor voice with a clearer sense of where the voice sits and whether the young singer is a baritone or a tenor. By contrast, “I’m A Stranger Here” sits low enough and is shaped more like a baritone’s tessitura. Even in the high key, a young baritone could make it through this piece (maybe with a few technical hurdles around D4 or E-flat4).¹⁰⁴ If a teacher gave this piece first, it might obscure a young singer’s true voice type, especially if that teacher doesn’t work with tenors or male voices often. If you establish that this singer is indeed a tenor first, approaching this song becomes more about vocal weight management.

“I’m A Stranger Here” is a strophic melody in a consistent 8/8 time signature that sits lower in the tenor voice and travels up to and quickly touches an E-flat4 before returning to the middle voice and then traveling all the way down to a low C3 at the end of the verse. The melody, except for the last verse, which is slightly modified, stays consistent in its shape and range. Because of this consistency, it is a great piece to work on musical timing and not getting too heavy in the bottom of the tenor voice. One thing that is common with all voice types is that singers tend to overweight the bottom of the voice.¹⁰⁵ It feels exciting to push the low notes out, but especially for high voices, it weighs down the rest of the voice too much and can tire out the middle voice and *zona di passaggio* rapidly, especially for a young singer.¹⁰⁶ Luckily, this lower

¹⁰⁴ Miller, Richard. *Securing Baritone, Bass-Baritone, and Bass Voices*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. P.34-39

¹⁰⁵ Richard Miller. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996. p.94-110

¹⁰⁶ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.60-68

tessitura is at the end of each verse and allows enough time to reset if they do oversing the bottom a bit. Meticulous work on finding a lighter phonation while still projecting is important in this piece. If a young singer does oversing the bottom of the voice while they are still learning, this piece will not cause any vocal strain or damage.

The melody may be rhythmically more challenging than a piece such as “Wanderin’,” as it always starts on the upbeat of beat two. For a young singer, this may be difficult to feel at first, but it helps teach some basic musical literacy. It also continues the syncopation worked on in “Wanderin’,” but expands upon it in each verse.

Traditional American Text

Traditional American Tune Arranged by Steven Mark Kohn

Plaintively flowing, not too slowly
♩ = 96–112

Plaintively flowing, not too slowly
♩ = 96–112

p molto legato sempre

sim.

with quiet resignation p

Hitch up my

Entrance on the
“And of Two”

5

bug - gy, sad - dle up my old black mare. Hitch up my

The musical score is for a piece titled "I'm A Stranger Here" by Steven Mark Kohn. It is arranged for High Voice and Piano. The score is in 8/8 time, indicated by the time signature and the tempo marking "Plaintively flowing, not too slowly" with a metronome marking of ♩ = 96–112. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the vocal melody and piano accompaniment. The vocal melody starts with a rest, followed by the lyrics "Hitch up my". The piano accompaniment is marked "p molto legato sempre" and "sim.". The second system starts with a measure rest, followed by the lyrics "bug - gy, sad - dle up my old black mare. Hitch up my". There are large bracketed annotations: one above the vocal melody in the first system labeled "with quiet resignation p", and another above the vocal melody in the second system. A red annotation "Entrance on the 'And of Two'" points to the start of the second system. A measure rest with the number "5" above it indicates a measure rest of five measures.

Musical Example 7. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “I’m A Stranger Here” mm. 1-8.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

There is some nice syncopation in the phrase “I’m a stranger everywhere” and “I would go home but honey” in each verse.

17

stran - ger here, I'm a stran - ger ev - 'ry - where. I

pp *poco* *Sycopation*

21

would go home but hon - ey, I'm a stran - ger

rall. poco *Syncopation* *rall. poco*

25

a tempo *mp*

there. I'm wor - ried

a tempo *mp*

Musical Example 8. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “I’m A Stranger Here” mm. 17-28.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

Out of context, the melody may seem a little strange to learn because of the accidentals, but it's also a good tool for singers to learn the melody correctly first without the piano. However, the real star of this piece is the piano part. It is a flowing tapestry of modal borrowing and deceptive key signatures. The key signature is in C minor, but it really is in C Dorian because it constantly uses a raised sixth scale degree. By using modal structures it blurs those lines and adds modulation to ending the phrase in cluster chord textures. As listeners, we aren't given a concrete feeling of a home key, and it creates a sense of unease, conveying the sense of being a stranger. This can be confusing for a young singer, but the consistency of the melody keeps the singer on track and is a good tool for learning to trust themselves, and more importantly, to first learn their music correctly.

45

would go home, but ho-ney, I'm a stran-ger

rall. poco

Raised sixth scale degree

Modulation

49

a tempo

there. a tempo

ppp delicatissimo

Ped.

(hold Ped.)

distantly, non vibrato pp

Looked down that

Musical Example 9. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “I’m A Stranger Here” mm. 45-53.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

The last verse is where things become a little more complicated. It starts again on the upbeat of the second beat, but musically it specifically asks for this verse to be *pianissimo*. Most of the rest of the piece is a somber *piano* to *mezzo piano*. Whereas before Kohn uses three repeated eighth notes in the third measure of each verse, in the last verse he uses a dotted quarter note in the phrase “far as I could see” to vary the melody.

Key sig. changes throughout

5

Typical rhythm

53

Modified Rhythm

poco

poco

Musical Example 10. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “I’m A Stranger Here” mm. 5-8, 53-56.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

Instead of going up to D-flat4, Kohn asks the singer to stay around a tessitura of A3 and introduces some rubato with the *colla voce* designation in the piano part. Rubato in singing may be a very fluid topic, but this piece allows for some stretching of time in this specific spot to give the singer some agency before closing out the piece. Learning about tastefully taking time is a unique skill that will be addressed later in this document.

“The Ocean Burial”

“The Ocean Burial” has a slightly larger range moving to an E4, but again, the tessitura sits closer to D4, asking the singer to find a lightness and comfortability in that part of their range. So much of a tenor’s training is finding how to keep an open throat that all voice types need, while still finding the light mechanism to keep the sound from getting too heavy.¹⁰⁷ Once again, the melody has a similar shape and tessitura for each verse, but now Kohn is asking for more musical nuance in each verse. The first verse is *pianissimo* and crescendos up to *poco piu forte* in the pickup to measure thirty. The second verse doesn’t have a dynamic marking, but it feels more like a *mezzo forte* as it resets. There is then a lengthy piano solo, followed by the third verse in measure eighty-three. It starts in a very somber *pianissimo*, then crescendos to a powerful *fortissimo* in measure one hundred. It’s important to note that this piece is about a sick young man who is going to pass away soon, and his last wish is to not be buried at sea. We can assume that he is most likely a sailor on a boat and wants to make it back home to be buried with his family. This is shown by the *fortissimo* in measure one hundred as a climax that he is almost home, and then is followed by a somber *a cappella* section that tells us as listeners that he did not make it home and was buried at sea.

¹⁰⁷ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.60-68, 87

The piece uses modal mixture as a musical tool, setting the first verse in major (with a quick minor mix), the second in minor, and the third back to major. This gives our young student a slightly harder musical challenge, not only by changing the mood and remembering what key each melody is in (either G major or G minor), but also asks them to think about the different colors and dynamics in the voice. The piano part is more approachable than “I’m a Stranger Here,” but the higher tessitura and variance of the melody make this a slightly harder challenge, rather than just repeating the same melody with a slightly harder piano part underneath. While this song should be approachable for a young tenor, they will almost certainly find it fatiguing, sitting at D4 and E4 for most of the piece, especially if they are not focusing on good breath management and support. This is the first piece that will make them feel like a tenor, even if it really doesn’t explore any notes above E4. It gives a young tenor a safe space to work on building that stamina without killing them if they over-sing the piece.

Tenderly, not too slow ♩ = 76-96

p with Ped. *poco cresc.*

8 *Tempo pp* "Oh, - *Tempo*

mf *p* *rit. poco*

14 bur - y me not in the deep, deep sea." These words came low and - mourn - ful -

21 ly from the pal - lid lips of a youth - who lay in his small cab - in

Musical Example 11. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice "The Ocean Burial" mm. 1-26.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

45

grave. Oh, it mat - ters not, I have oft been told, where the

Ped. each bar

Modal Borrowing to G minor

56

51

bod - y may lie when the heart grows cold. But grant, oh, grant me this

Back to G Major

Musical Example 12. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Ocean Burial” mm. 45-56.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

In addition, this is a great piece to begin understanding the ethos and character of a piece. The piece provides the young tenor a chance to play the character of a dying sailor and challenges them to make musical and dramatic choices, thereby coloring the piece to make it more intimate and memorable. For many young tenors who might have come from a choral background and have never been in an acting situation, it gives them a chance to explore

character choices. At a base level, a young singer will understand that we are singing quieter at the beginning because we are sick or injured, a little louder when it switches to minor in measure forty-six because we are afraid of death, triumphant in our last gasp of life, and somber as the narrator of the young sailor's death. While morbid, it is a chance for a young tenor to experience acting in a safe space.

As a side note, it also serves as a great piece for church job auditions. While not inherently religious, the themes of death, home, and the journey of life lend themselves to any denomination of faith. Often, collegiate voice programs don't offer a class or course dedicated to the business side of making classical music and how young musicians can make money using their voice. One of the easiest ways for a young tenor to start making income using their voice is to apply to be section leaders and cantors at various churches within the area they are studying. It is usually a singer's first professional job in singing and having a good audition piece can help land a paying church job. This is a great piece to show off the ability to sing in English and on sacred-related themes with good musicianship, even at an early level.

As a teacher, these first three Kohn pieces will lead to growth in the voice and provide a clearer sense of where a student may progress. They may even serve as the test run for a tenor transition or a way to break some improper singing habits of a young singer. Any of these first three pieces could be given to a high school-aged or freshman year singer in any collegiate program. As the student progresses in the beginner category, this is where they start to expand the voice into the passaggio more and touch the notes F4, F-sharp4 and G4. The next few Kohn pieces in the collection are better suited for a sophomore- or junior-level tenor. Someone who has had at least a year of vocal training and is showing consistently that they are indeed growing into their tenor voice.

“Down, Down, Down”

Just looking at the melody of “Down, Down, Down,” a young singer might assume this is a very easy piece. Again, it is a modified strophic piece that, until the last verse, repeats the same melody consistently. If the student were singing the melody *a cappella*, this would be like any other simple folksong. However, Kohn is a master of elevating folksong with accompaniment, and this piece for the pianist is quite challenging.

The melody itself is a repeating shape that goes up to four sustained E-flat4s, some modal borrowing in the seventh measure, then going back up to E-flat4 to touch the first F4 of this set. This is a great time to introduce *covering*. Covering is the act of creating more pharyngeal space, usually through a darker or taller vowel, to help facilitate the voice through the *passaggio*.¹⁰⁸ Even though the tenor is just touching F4, it’s important to build the good habits that train a tenor to know where in the voice a singer needs to start covering. Often, tenors don’t train meticulously enough to know when they need to start covering the voice and this piece helps remind them that every time that F4 arises, they need to cover.

The most challenging aspect of “Down, Down, Down” is lining up the melody with the accompaniment. The piece begins with the pianist playing earth rumbling low E-flat2s and E-flat1s in octaves, which makes the 3/8 time signature unclear until the right hand comes in. Even then, the sense of a home key is almost nonexistent as we start with a C-flat7 in first inversion. The chord before gives no help to the entrance of the melody, playing an FMm7 in third inversion, which is the V42/V in E-flat major. However, by measure thirteen we arrive firmly in E-flat major and the modal borrowing makes more sense going forward. This is a good opportunity for singers to learn the preparation needed for music that does not offer easy

¹⁰⁸ Richard Miller. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996. p.140-148

entrances before working with a collaborative pianist.

ARRANGED BY STEVEN MARK KOHN

In a slow “one,” with weight ♩ = 120–144

Annotations in the score:

- Measure 1:** *pp*
- Measure 5:** *(pp)*
- Measure 6:** Eb minor modal borrowing, bVI: Cb65
- Measure 7:** V/bVI
- Measure 8:** Eb major
- Measure 9:** *p*
- Measure 10:** Low rumbling bass notes
- Measure 11:** Jazzy dominant functioning chords
- Measure 12:** V42/V
- Measure 13:** *p*

Lyrics: With your kind at - ten - tion, a song I will

16

Musical Example 13. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Down, Down, Down” mm. 1-15.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

In the piano interludes, Kohn experiments with key changes and usually makes it back to E-flat major, but every verse has a different accompaniment underneath a relatively similar melody. The poetry of the piece reveals underground miners going down into the iron mines where they someday will take their last breath. Kohn understands that to elevate a folksong, it is not to overly adapt recognizable melody, but to play around it. This is seen time and time again in this piece. Each verse, the piano part mirrors and paints the text of the young miner’s inner monologue. The first two verses are foreboding, as his father warns his son not to go to Oak Hill where the mine is. The third verse is triumphant when the narrator gets a job, then more frantic in the penultimate verse as he realizes he must go down, and finally a somber but distant texture in the last verse. It is not until measure seventy-seven that we see some variance in the melody

where it dips into E-flat minor until measure eighty-six. It continues modally borrowing until the end of the piece. The last thing that is sung is a sustained B-flat while the piano continually goes down and ends on a cluster chord with A-flat, F-flat, C-flat, G-flat, and B-flat shrouding not only the key signature but where our narrator actually goes in the deep mines.

107 with Ped.

sign of a lag - gin' or slab or of prop. Some - day I ex - pect this old moun - tain to

114 E-Flat Major

drop, and come down, down, down, and come down.

pp rit. rit. pp ppp

Key Ambiguity

Musical Example 14. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Down, Down, Down” mm. 107-124.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

From this point on, the music and tessitura of each piece will continue to get harder and higher respectively as we travel through Kohn’s folksongs.

“The Farmer’s Curst Wife”

One of my favorite pieces in this collection is, “The Farmer’s Curst Wife.” While it is always great to sing beautiful music, a more comedic piece may help a student with their acting, their level of confidence, and finding a variety of different colors in their voice. This piece is something that may be described as the “point of no return” for being a tenor. Its tessitura sits around an E4, peaking with a big F-sharp4 on “she’ll a-murder us all!”

49

Nine lit-tle dev-ils went a-climb-in the wall, say-in',

Higher sitting tessitura

51

“take her back, Dad-dy, she'll a-mur-der us all!” Sing hi did-dle-i did-dle-i fi,

Musical Example 15. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Farmer’s Curst Wife” mm. 45-53.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

It expects the tenor to have learned how to sit in this area of the voice comfortably. Having progressed through the previous pieces, the tenor voice should now be well established. A singer working on this piece will start to really begin to *feel* like a tenor. As well, this piece

allows the singer to exercise their *primo passaggio* point and learn how to navigate this early section of the *passaggio*, not asking the student to sit in it, but gently massaging those notes over and over again. If they do sing it a little too heavy, it will not damage their voice as it could if they needed to get to a G or an A4.

This piece tells the story of the devil coming to steal a farmer's wife, but the wife is so ornery that she hacks and slashes her way back out of hell. The singer has an opportunity to play various characters such as the farmer, the devil, and a narrator. It includes a classic phrase of nonsense syllables that many great American folk songs like "Old McDonald Had a Farm" or "I Bought Me a Cat" use to make it more memorable. This song uses the phrase "Sing hi-diddle-ay-diddle-ay-fi, diddle-ay-diddle-ay-day" It is very silly, but it is in that silliness that the young tenor may explore character choices perfecting their comedic acting, and learning to have fun while singing.

The minutia of vocal pedagogy may be daunting, and often voice teachers forget that we are training singing actors. Many times in a young singers training we don't promote the freedom to try new things. This piece gives permission to the student to go ahead and try weird things: How scary is their devil, is he a malevolent force or a sexy seducer? How ugly can the singer make the farmer sound? Is the narrator a good guy or a bad guy? These are all character questions that give the young singer a chance to explore and enjoy the many facets of acting while working to expand the voice. It asks the singer to find different colors in their voice for each character and teaches them how to keep a sustained singing line while focusing on character work.

Now, the vocal line of "The Farmer's Cursed Wife" is not that complicated in comparison to some other pieces, but it has a devilishly difficult piano part. The real challenge is balancing a

young singer's inexperience with a more complicated piano part. The accompaniment has more dynamic variation, extended piano techniques, and tempo shifts than any prior Kohn piece. However, this is also a great learning experience for a young singer to understand the importance of working with a collaborative artist. Often the mindset of the singer is that they are the star of the performance, and the piano part is in a background supporting role. However, the story and the piano are the real stars in this piece, and learning to work with a collaborative pianist early in a singer's development teaches the importance of listening to their collaborators, who are often more informed than the singer themselves. This piece is a chance to grow as a singer, as an actor, and as a musician while it transports the singer on to the next level.

As the tenor voice progresses, a real benchmark is learning to sing the note G4. For almost all types of tenors, an event happens around that note known as “the turn.”¹⁰⁹ It is where we audibly hear a shift in timbre, and the voice starts to move towards a more head dominant sound that allows for higher notes to ensue.¹¹⁰ Because of this, G4/A-flat4 tend to be the maximum extent of a young tenor's vocal range for a while. The goal of all the previous pieces is to build up the comfortability of approaching, and train the voice to start covering just before this turning point is reached. So, as we arrive at the end of the beginner level pieces, the goal is to prepare the voice to be ready to start sustaining notes near G4. The best way to approach learning how to sing these notes is through the same slow and steady methodology.

“The Old Woman's Courtship”

As the singer begins to explore the upper passaggio, a great piece to introduce these concepts is “The Old Woman's Courtship.” In this piece, Kohn finally gives a break to the pianist. For the most part, the pianist is outlining the basic chord structure, while picking up the

¹⁰⁹ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.7-13, 95-105

¹¹⁰ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.107-112

pace a little as the song continues. Truthfully, most of this piece is quite simple, and if it only went to an E4, it might be towards the bottom of the challenge spectrum. However, this piece works on two very challenging concepts and allows for exploration of the *passaggio* and the *turn* of the voice in a healthy manner, while continuing the acting work of “The Farmer’s Curst Wife.”

This piece is essentially split into three verses, separated by a key change for each. It starts in A-flat major with a diatonically sung melody for two measures. The singer has to navigate characters like a young male cavalier and the titular old woman, which is actually spoken dialogue, for two measures.

Briskly, with good humor ♩ = 108–132

mf

Old wo-man, old wo-man, will you go a-shear-ing?

Briskly, with good humor ♩ = 108–132

mf detached

4 *use an absurd falsetto or head voice for the Old Woman's lines*

“Speak a lit-tle loud-er, sir, I’m ra-ther hard of hear-ing.” Old, wo-man, old wo-man,

p *Speaking Falsetto Sections* *mf*

Musical Example 16. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Old Woman’s Courtship” mm. 1-6.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

This repeats and then modulates up to B-flat major before repeating and modulating again to C major. This piece is difficult, asking the singer to be an engaged actor while also navigating a timbral shift between when the tenor is singing and speaking the dialogue of the old woman. In Andrew Garland’s recording, the old woman is characterized by using a lighter, higher phonation known as *falsetto*. Falsetto is a register that only male-at-birth singers possess, where the vocal folds come together just on the edges, creating a hollow and airy sound that allows the voice to sing into the treble register.¹¹¹

Pedagogically, there is a connection between falsetto and the extended range of a tenor’s high notes. The light phonation of falsetto mimics the lightening of sound needed to find the true head voice. In true head voice for tenors, there is more engagement of the thyro-arytenoid muscles that creates a fuller and more resonant sound than falsetto. There is more cord closure, and while there is a thinning of the vocal folds, when done correctly it is not a hollow nor airy. This process of falsetto may help facilitate the training of getting to the extended tenor notes of A4, B4 and C5 in a healthier way.

In pieces found later in my pedagogical grouping of Kohn’s collection, higher pitches will be explored; and starting that work now will help as a tenor voice expands. The use of falsetto in this song allows the singer a chance to do this in a “silly way” by mimicking an old woman. But again, silliness equals freedom for the singer to make mistakes and learn how to find

¹¹¹ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.99-105, Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.18-22

that higher phonation in a safe environment.

The image displays a musical score for a high voice and piano. The score is divided into two systems, measures 22-25 and 24-25. The first system (measures 22-25) features a high voice line and a piano accompaniment. The high voice line begins with the lyrics "Old wo - man, old wo - man, shall I kiss you dear - ly? "Oh,"" and is marked with "rit. molto" and "ten." (tenor). The piano accompaniment is marked "ff" (fortissimo) and includes a "rit. molto" section. The second system (measures 24-25) continues the high voice line with the lyrics "lord have mer - cy on my soul, sir. Now I hear you clear - ly." and is marked "In tempo". The piano accompaniment is marked "In tempo" and includes a "sfz" (sforzando) section. The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 4/4 time signature.

Musical Example 17. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Old Woman’s Courtship” mm. 22-25.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

An additional challenging aspect in this piece is the climbing tessitura and grand finish up to the first G4 in the collection. As well, each section changes key. At first, that is just going from an A-flat3 to a C4, which at this point should be easy for a young tenor. Then after the first key change, it moves from B-flat3 to D4, now leaning more towards a tenor tessitura. Finally, it modulates to C major and the melody now sits right at the primo passaggio and is altered from

the original statement by going up to a G4. Now, it is only a dotted eighth note with a tenuto mark, but because of where it sits, most young tenors will experience this as the top of their range. It gives them the opportunity to feel like are building up to a big high note, and is a great chance to make sure that they have covered into that sound. Even if they do not, and it comes out more belted, it is building confidence in that part of the voice. As the student progresses toward harder repertoire, it is imperative to build a good habit of knowing where the voice needs to cover in order to let it turn. A technique used by veteran teacher Clifton Forbis encourages the student to literally go through the music and circle the notes of the passaggio. Being able to identify the notes that need to be covered is imperative to opening the voice further beyond G4.

“The Drunken Old Fool”

“The Drunken Old Fool” takes a big step back from singing G4s, but is a big step up in musicality. The melody has a convex shape that starts at E3 and goes up to F-sharp4. This melody structure repeats in modified form throughout the piece as a drunk old man finds himself being gaslit by his adulterous wife, even though there is clear evidence that she is cheating on him. The conflict is played off as a cheeky romp rather than a heated argument. What makes this piece more difficult is that it constantly goes in and out of the passaggio and repeats a phrase leading up to F-sharp4 eleven times before finishing the song climatically on an E4. Each time the phrase repeats, it modifies slightly adding the challenge of remembering which version of the phrase comes next.

Pedagogically, this piece does three things well. First, this is a great piece to build stamina. As a young tenor becomes more comfortable with tenor repertoire, there has to be a natural progression of stamina building as the range begins to expand. It is not enough to just “hit the notes,” but eventually F4, F-sharp4, and G4 must become a stable part of the voice to open

the voice up further. Without learning to cover and let the voice turn, a tenor cannot progress. This piece helps build that stamina around E4 and F-sharp4 through repetition. Secondly, the interplay with piano helps build stronger musicianship. As the melody keeps repeating, it varies rhythmically and adds more and more syncopation. The piano part is steady but adds a playful element to the story and builds the character of the piece as silly, rather than salacious. As the melody starts to vary, so too does the harmonic structure, which often thickens the tonal landscape, adding to the syncopation in the melody, almost as if we are sonically getting drunk with the old fool in the poem. Lastly, much like the two previous pieces, this song asks for acting and character work while navigating a much tougher tessitura. It helps the student understand that even in recital, we have to engage our audience with storytelling and be willing to take risks while performing. Again, there are the characters of the titular “Drunken Old Fool” and his cheating wife. The difference between this and the “The Old Woman’s Courtship” is that instead of just flipping into falsetto, Kohn’s asks the singer to find different colors in the voice for each character, while still connecting to a full resonant sound.

7

ain't moved a-way, he's a-liv-in' there still. Sing hi did-dle-i did-dle-i fi, —

più p sub.

p *sf* *p*

Slightly Easier Tessitura in "The Farmer's Curst Wife"

10

did-dle-i did-dle-i day. The

mf *sf* *mp*

Musical Example 18. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Farmer’s Curst Wife” mm. 7-12.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

With pace and humor ♩ = 112-126 *mp* be flexible with the vocal rhythm; duple/triple feel ad lib.

Oh, the old man he came home one night as drunk as he could be. He

With pace and humor ♩ = 112-126

5 saw a coat up - on the rack where his coat ought to be. “My good wife, my dear wife, my

Higher Tessitura and Multiple F-Sharp4s in “The Drunken Old Fool”

8 dar - lin’ wife,” said he, “whose coat is that up - on the rack where my coat ought to be?”

Musical Example 19. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Drunken Old Fool” mm. 1-10.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

As the pieces increase in difficulty as we progress through Kohn’s catalogue, there is a need for increased attention to character while building the stamina to sustain multiple pieces in this tessitura.

“The Bachelor’s Lay”

The final piece in the beginner level is “The Bachelor’s Lay.” This piece is the perfect culmination of what has been developed throughout the beginner level and is a preview of what will be worked on in the intermediate level. It offers a beautiful arrangement, musical variety, and range of acting through multiple characters and a lighthearted tale.

The piece starts with Kohn’s signature dream-like arpeggios that make the tonal center unclear, causing a more difficult entrance. While the key states its in A-flat major, Kohn uses intersperses G-flats throughout the opening measures, making it feel more in Mixolydian mode. The melody stays in a nice 6/8 with a sing-song rhythm that helps keep it centered for the young tenor. It sits in the middle voice but climbs up to the dominant of E-flat4 and touches there a few times before settling on the tonic to end the phrase. This melody then repeats and modulates up to B-flat major, staying consistent in shape but now extending up to F4. This creates a slightly more complicated phrase to navigate both vocally and musically. Then in measure fifty-one, the key modulates again to C major, and now the top note is a G4. Though G4 is only a fairly quick quarter note, the piece is touching this note multiple times in quick succession, again building up the stamina in this part of the voice. The piece then changes key to A major with the tessitura staying the same as C major, but then modulates again to G major before making its way back to A-flat Major as if to say that the “Bachelors Lay” is always the same story, ending where it began.

ARRANGED BY STEVEN MARK KOHN

Simply ♩. = 68–80

p As I was a-trav-'ling one

Simply ♩. = 68–80 G-Flat G-Flat G-Flat G-Flat G-Flat

p legato sempre Opening Theme

℞. (hold ℞.) * (℞. changes)

6 G-Flat in the Melody

morn-ing in May, I heard an old bach-'lor be-gin-ning a

10

lay: "Oh, I can't tell why the rea-son may be that

Musical Example 20. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Bachelor’s Lay” mm. 1-14.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

54

rea-son may be that none of those girls will mar-ry

Multiple Key Changes

58 *più f*

me. I've sailed on the main and I've fol-lowed the coast. No

poco secco sempre *più f*

63

con-quest of love can I hon-est-ly boast. And I can't tell what the

67

Musical Example 21. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Bachelor’s Lay” mm. 54-67.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

101

rit. poco Slower, freely

broad sword and bright buck - les, too, if you want a young la - dy to

Return to Original Key

rit. poco Slower, freely

mf p

107

A tempo rit.

mar - ry you.

A tempo rit.

pp Return of Original Theme

Musical Example 22. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Bachelor’s Lay” mm. 101-112.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

The piece is also rich with acting opportunity. It starts off with a narrator telling the story of a constant bachelor and for the majority of the piece, we hear the sad tale of a man who doesn’t have much luck with the ladies. Kohn takes us through multiple emotions including pity, desperation and even boastfulness. Kohn then switches perspective to what the ladies have always told the bachelor in measure eighty-six, which gives an opportunity for a laugh and character shift on “I’d rather not say...” Then the perspective shifts again back to the Bachelor where unfortunately, he doesn’t get a rose, lamenting that if you want a girl, you must take up arms and maybe become more heroic. This is mirrored in the musical setting shifting to a

79 **Slower** *p* freely, quasi recit.

Another Key Change

Slower (8^{va})

pp espr.

colla voce

Ped. * *Ped.* (hold *Ped.*)

84 **Acting Opportunity** *rit.*

And all of them answered, "I'd rather not say."

(8^{va})

rit.

* *Ped.*

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

92 *cresc.* *f* **A tempo, a bit faster**
 none of those girls will mar - ry me. Go shave off your whis - kers and pow - der your

97 *ff* **A tempo, a bit faster**
 hair! Go dress your - self up with the great - est of care. Put on your

101 *rit. poco* **Slower, freely**
 broad sword and bright buck - les, too, if you want a young la - dy to

G Major *mf* *p*

Musical Example 24. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Bachelor’s Lay” mm. 92-105.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

“The Bachelor’s Lay” shows us exactly where we are going to consistently go in the intermediate level. This piece expects a level of comfortability with going in and out of the *zona di passaggio* without sustaining those notes. As well, there is a musical buildup with five key

changes, challenging entrances, added measures and dynamic contrast made common place in harder pieces. This piece also becomes a vocal balancing act, as the character of the piece needs to be light and silly, even though we're creeping higher and higher in tessitura with each piece. It is a litmus test to see if the tenor in question is ready to move up to harder repertoire. If this piece seems easy, they're ready for a bigger challenge.

Intermediate Level

As we progress through the intermediate group, the tenor who will be able to sing these songs well would be a junior or senior level singer in college that has gained some technical confidence but still has a way to go before mastery of their instrument. A good teacher will have been slowly but surely working on technique and repertoire that starts to sustain notes in the upper part the *zona di passaggio*, i.e. F-sharp⁴, G⁴, and A-flat⁴. The ability to do this will open the door for a tenor to start exploring operatic repertoire through arias like "Dalla sua pace" from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Lensky's aria from *Eugene Onegin*, or even "Lonely House" from Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*. (There is a Bb at the end of this aria, but normally it is sung in falsetto as a performance practice.) These pieces don't require a tenor to go up past a sustained Aflat⁴. In order to build the confidence necessary for this kind of repertoire, a great place to start is art song. Often, I find that tenors, especially younger tenors, become distracted by the psychological challenges that operatic repertoire can present. A lot of those challenges come from the added layer of learning to sing these pieces with the intention of a) eventually singing those pieces over an orchestra b) hypothetically winning a job down the road with those pieces, and that sense of pressure can be immense. Art song doesn't come with as much baggage because inherently, art song is much more intimate by nature. In the case of many of Kohn

pieces, they have not been performed publicly as often and can be great for building the stamina and confidence for operatic repertoire.

“The Gallows Tree”

The first piece in the intermediate level is “The Gallows Tree.” Just looking at the melody, one could assume that this piece is not much harder than a beginner piece. It only goes up to an F4, and the melody structure keeps a similar shape throughout. However, a closer look reveals a huge step up in terms of musical difficulty for both the singer and the pianist. Similar to pieces like “The Farmer’s Cursst Wife” and “The Drunken Old Fool,” this piece gives a unique opportunity to balance singing and acting. Kohn plays a lot with keys, modal borrowing, and uses dissonance to paint anxiety. For an intermediate level singer, they will have to learn to trust their abilities as a musician. If you were to give this to a less experienced singer, while the melody is easy enough, the dissonance and feeling of keylessness could really present a challenge. For a more experienced musician with some training, this can be a really unique piece with which to grow. Though as a side note, this song deals with being hung from a gallows tree, so some caution around that subject matter may be in order. The subject of hanging and specifically Jim Crow-era lynching could potentially be triggering to the student; though, it is also a chance for dialogue on the subject and an approachable piece for someone potentially putting on a recital that deals with those topics in question.

Traditional American Text

Traditional American Tune
Arranged by Steven Mark Kohn

Briskly $\text{♩} = 92-104$

f Opening Melody

Red.

5

Starting the melody on the sixth

f

Slack your rope, hangs a man! Slack it for a

F Major:

Red.

10

Musical Example 25. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Gallows Tree” mm. 1-13.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

The piece starts with a rousing opening melody extended in the right hand of the piano starting on an extended IV chord. Again, the vocal melody is simple and sits rather low, making its way up to F4 and coming back down to sit around D4 a few times in a row, ending on the tonic of F3. However, just before we reach that tonic, we’re given a cluster chord arpeggiation of

B-flat major and F minor that instantly throws the harmony for a loop. From this point the harmony gets thicker and less clear as the piece continues. There are a myriad of key changes between measures twenty-seven and thirty, before returning to F major for the entrance of the melody. However, we finish the phrase in D minor.

Musical Example 26. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Gallows Tree” mm. 23-32.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

When we start the melody again, we’re back in F major but now the harmonic texture is much thicker. In measure fifty-seven, the melody modally borrows into E major while the harmony underneath is E-flat Major. Granted, the melody line ends on an enharmonic equivalent of D-sharp. As the piece progresses, we see more modal borrowing and the piece gets muddier

and muddier in terms of tonal language, adding a healthy amount of dissonant tones and mirroring the anxiety our character feels about potentially being hung.

67 *rall. poco* *a tempo*
I have come to see you hang - ing

rall. poco *a tempo eerily, molto legato sempre*
on the gal - lows tree".

pp
Very crunchy for singer sustaining F naturals over these C-sharps
hold Ped. always

pp
F+7 chord over a d-minor ostinato

Musical Example 27. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Gallows Tree” mm. 67-77.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

What keeps it on the rails is that the melody doesn’t waiver much until measure one-hundred-and-two, when the key becomes steadier at the point where the main character’s lover tells him that he is free from the gallows. The piece then ends with the singer sustaining F-naturals again, but the harmony becomes a little ambiguous again with cluster chords and that

same opening ditty returns, implying that they might end up back at the gallows.

109 *pp* *rit.*
on the gal - lows tree.”

pp *rit.* *l.v.*
Cluster Chords
(hold Ped.)

114 *a tempo* *rit.* *Slower, more tranquil*
f sub. *poco rit.*
Return of opening melody
p

Musical Example 28. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “The Gallows Tree” mm. 109-117.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

This piece gives a unique opportunity to grow as a musician. While high notes and beautiful lines are important, in today’s musical landscape, a singer must be prepared to learn harder music. This song specifically helps build upon the confidence in learning to trust oneself, especially when it comes to singing against dissonance. While this song is certainly not as hard as learning a completely atonal piece or opera, voice teachers have to remember that students come from all different backgrounds and that it is part of the job to prepare students for harder repertoire and to give them the confidence to approach it without a teacher’s help. A piece like

this is a good challenge if a young tenor is not used to learning difficult music and can help bridge the gap for a lot of students.

“Red Iron Ore”

One of the most interesting pieces to categorize is “Red Iron Ore.” This was the first art song that Kohn ever wrote.¹¹² At first glance, the melody only goes up to an F-sharp⁴ (a note by now that a tenor should find fairly comfortable) in a mountain shape that starts in the lower middle voice, doesn’t overstay its welcome on the top, and makes its way back down.

4 *mp*
Come all ye bold sail-ors that fol- low the lakes, on an i - ron ore ves - sel your
Basic Melody

8 *p*
liv - ing to make. I shipped in Chi - ca - go, bid a - dieu to the shore, Bound a -

12 *mf*
way to Es - ca - na - ba for red i - ron ore. Der - ry down, down, down, der - ry
Melody ends on F-Sharp3 on the word "Down"

¹¹² Appendix A

Musical Example 29. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Red Iron Ore” mm. 1-15.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

However, this is Kohn’s longest piece, usually clocking in at around six minutes in performance time. The main melody repeats ten times, and the tenor has to sing a staggering twenty-seven F-sharp4s throughout the piece. In addition, the song is a modified strophic form, making it harder to memorize every single strophe, each with a litany of 19th-century ship names that change from verse to verse. In a vacuum, the melody is quite simple but when repeated that many times, it becomes a major test of stamina and doing this from memory is nothing short of a herculean task. In a recent interview with Kohn, he stated, “If I could change anything in this piece, I would have added a key change, maybe multiple, to change it up.” Had that been the case and the piece required G4s, A4s and beyond, I would no doubt categorize this as an advanced level piece, but because the melody does not change much in each repetition and only goes up to F-sharp4, it remains in an intermediary spot where some aspects are hard, and some aspects are easy.

If that weren’t enough, this is probably one of the thickest piano textures Kohn has written thus far. Harmonically, it doesn’t venture much from F-sharp minor. However, the piano is lush and played with gusto, even from the beginning. With each new verse, Kohn adds a rhythmic or harmonic motif that keeps adding to that texture. It’s not until measure one-hundred-twenty-nine that we see the texture pull back for “Now my song is ended...;” but even then, it’s a brief pause for the climatic finale of the last “derry down, down, down, derry down.”

4/

i-ron ore pile. They low-ered their chutes, and like thun-der did roar.

Thicker Piano Textures

51

They spout-ed in-to us that red i - ron ore. Der-ry down, down,

86

More Virtuoso Playing for the Pianist

88

ten. ten.

Musical Example 30. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Red Iron Ore” mm. 47-54, 86-89.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

97 *più p*

Ro-berts must go where the tug, Kate-y Wil-liams, will take us in tow. Der-ry

101 *f*

down, down, down, der-ry down. We went through North Pas-sage O

Escalation of Thicker Piano Textures

f

Musical Example 31. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Red Iron Ore” mm. 97-104.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

129

Very slow and free
, *p* wistfully

down. Now my song is end - ed, I hope you won't laugh. Our

Very slow and free

f

p

Pulling Back of Harmonic Texture for Character Change

40

132

dun-nage is packed and all hands are paid off. Here's health to the Ro-berts; she's

mf noble

Musical Example 32. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Red Iron Ore” mm. 129-134.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

138 **Slower still**

down, down, down, der - ry down, der - ry *f sub.*

Slower still

pp

141 **Molto ancora**

down, down, down, der - ry down.

Molto ancora

f

Climactic Ending

rall.

Musical Example 33. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Red Iron Ore” mm. 138-143.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

Another reason this piece is intermediate is because it is really a bigger showcase for the pianist. As the singer recapitulates the same simple melody, the piano becomes harder and harder. This makes the overall level of musicianship difficult by asking for more colors in the voice through the same melody as the piano is shifting more widely in dynamics. One of the most challenging things about singing a strophic piece is finding a new way to sing the same melody and while Kohn gives plenty of dynamic markings, this can be a great test to see how *piano* or *fortissimo* a tenor can sing those F-sharps and learning their particular limits.

At this point of a tenor's journey, a piece like this will be challenging but still very doable. When singing against a fuller sound in the piano, it becomes very easy for a singer to push or over sing. For a tenor that is still navigating technical issues in this area of the voice, it is incredibly easy to overblow and become fatigued before they finish. Luckily, the melody sits more in the middle of the voice. If they get too heavy singing the F-sharp4s in the first few stanzas, by the end of the piece the voice could begin to crack or could even become hoarse enough to not phonate. A huge working point for any tenor is how to save the voice and use dynamic shifts to not only color the voice but also save some fuel for more climactic sections.

“Ten Thousand Miles Away”

The next piece is Kohn's most well-known and performed piece, “Ten Thousand Miles Away.” It is arguably one of the best American arts songs written in this century so far and holds its own against other notable composers like Tom Cipullo, Lori Laitman, and Jake Heggie as a standard in American art song repertoire. “Ten Thousand Miles Away” consists of two verses and a repeated chorus that start in G-flat Major followed by a sudden key change to A-flat major for the second verse. The serene accompaniment creates a sense of longing memory.

Smoothly flowing, with feeling ♩ = 126–138 *mp*

Sing I for a brave and a

Smoothly flowing, with feeling ♩ = 126–138 *p*

Red. *legato sempre* *Signature Dream-Like Arpeggios in the Piano*

4 gal - lant barque, for a stiff and a rat - tling breeze, _____ A

l.h.

Red. *Red. on chord changes throughout*

Musical Example 34. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Ten Thousand Miles Away” mm. 1-6.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

The piece is in a steady 6/8 throughout and tells the story of someone missing their lover far away. It is not only beautiful, but it’s a great piece to work on the upper passaggio and guide the singer in their first foray past G4 into A-flat4. The song allows a tenor to build up stamina over the course of the piece by touching A-flat4 notes and then holding them out for a longer duration. It sits more in the lower and middle voice for most of the melody. What makes it a great teaching tool is that in the first verse, when the tenor sings the G-flat4s in the pseudo-chorus, they first touch them briefly and then work their way back down quickly. The next time they go up to that tessitura in the middle of the chorus, they hold those notes for a little bit longer, and the last time on the text “cross the raging main,” the G-flat4 is sustained for a full measure.

13

true love so gay, Who went on a trip on a

First iteration, just briefly touching G-flat4

Come back down to an easier tessitura

16

Gov - ern - ment ship ten thou - sand miles a - way. Oh,

mf

Musical Example 35. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Ten Thousand Miles Away” mm. 13-18.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

9

22

Second Iteration, sustain
the note a little longer

go. _____ I'll stay no more on Eng - land's shore so

25

Again, descends to easier tessitura

let the mu - sic play. _____ I'll start by the morn - ing

più f

20

7

28 train to cross the rag - ing main, For I'm

Longest sustained G-flat4

31 on the road to my own true love, ten thou - sand miles a -

Tessitura remains high until mm.33

mp espr.

l.h.

Musical Example 36. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Ten Thousand Miles Away” mm. 22-33.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

This gradual buildup is a great way to help train the strength and stamina needed for the modulation in the next verse.. The melody then repeats with different text, but now the highest notes are A-flat4s. A-flat4 can be tricky for a lot of tenors, because it’s squarely turned but it’s really the last pitch before A4 that can arguably be sung too heavy by a tenor without technical or physiological repercussions.¹¹³ Because of where it sits in the voice, many tenors can still connect A-flat4 to a full chest dominant sound. However, not allowing the voice to turn will stunt the range moving forward; and at A4 and B-flat4 the tone will get strained or potentially not even

¹¹³ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-8

phonate if the vocal weight is not released.¹¹⁴ As well, G4 and A-flat4 are notes that can very easily succumb to a tenor's worst nightmare—cracking.

Cracking can best be described as a miscoordination of vocal fold closure and breath pressure.¹¹⁵ The reality of training as a tenor is that voice cracks *will* happen. Learning to navigate this part of the voice is difficult, and there will be speed bumps along the way. As we are working on singing longer durations of A-flat4s, especially on “cross the raging main,” we can use each section of them to strengthen the voice and build confidence on these perilous notes. As a teacher, I always lean towards allowing these notes to crack while attempting them with solid technique in mind. For me, cracking is a step before the “Eureka!” moment of finding the correct coordination. No singer that I know of has ever cracked a note so hard it injured their voice, but consistently forcing notes to come out improperly almost certainly will.¹¹⁶ Also, when any voice tries to over push or put too much unturned chest-dominant sound into notes of the upper passaggio, what ends up happening is a loss of brilliance and a loss of *squillo*. *Squillo* is the term we use for the oscillation of overtones in the voice that allow the sound to travel over an orchestra.¹¹⁷ It is also referred to as spin or cut in the voice that allows it to carry without the use of a microphone. Without it, the voice might be heard over a piano in a small room, but not in a large music hall, and it will not carry over a full orchestra. Without learning to harness that spin and brilliance, we are teaching a young tenor not to trust the process or their technique.

¹¹⁴ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p. 95-112

¹¹⁵ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.60-68, 88-95

¹¹⁶ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.88-95

¹¹⁷ Davids, Julia, and Stephen A. LaTour. *Vocal technique: A guide to classical and contemporary styles for conductors, teachers, and singers*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc, 2021. p.26-40

Once these hurdles have been overcome, this is truly a beautiful piece of music that is perfect for any audition or competition. It has been sung by leading tenors and baritones all over the world and, even by Kohn's own admission, is the closest piece to his "one hit wonder."¹¹⁸

"Hell in Texas"

For any singer from Texas, "Hell in Texas" is a fun romp to add to the repertoire for tenors. Because of its comedic nature, this piece feels like the elevated version of "The Farmer's Cursst Wife." It's in 6/8 instead of 4/4. The text deals with the Devil again, who wants to build a new place to torture the souls of men, so he asks the Lord for materials and ends up making the great state of Texas...a worse place than the original Hell. It's very tongue-in-cheek and silly, as Kohn describes different parts of Texas being dry, hot, unlivable, and filled with scary and dangerous creatures that should scare you as deeply as Dante's *Inferno*. Again, it asks the singer to be playful and portray God, The Devil, and the narrator, finding different colors for each character. The difference this time is that whereas "The Farmer's Cursst Wife" required E4s and one F-sharp4, "Hell in Texas" presents a barrage of F4s, F-sharp4s, G4s, and ends with a large sustained A-flat4 to finish the piece. Not only is it important to find character beats, but now the tenor must balance the vocal challenges with being a present actor. It can be easy for a singer to lose themselves in the comedy of the piece; but unlike "Farmer's Cursst Wife," it's much less forgiving. If attention to technique is not given its due, this piece is very easy to have a mishap. Once it's in the body though, this is a great closer to any recital.

"Hell in Texas" starts off rather sparsely with open G-flat "power chords" and a rousing, drinking-song-inspired melody that continues through most of the piece. As it progresses, the melody stays consistent, but the piano becomes much more complicated. The melody sits in a

¹¹⁸ Kohn, Steven Mark, "Interview for DMA Document," by Matthew Corcoran, Telephone 2026

middling tessitura but occasionally travels up to E-flat4s and F4s. It becomes a little more complicated in measure fifty-three when the piece modulates a half-step up to G major and again in measure sixty-nine when we modulate again to B-flat major. While this is happening, the piece asks for more acting, the most the singer has had to do thus far. The actor has to decide what God and the Devil sound like. Are they sexy, snarky, classically good and evil, or something new? With all that in mind, the singer still must let the musical language elevate the piece even higher. In measure seventy-six, Kohn increases the interest by adding a section to the original poem to create a sense of conjuration that adds to the length of the piece but also adds a new melody and gives the “narrator” character more to do in the piece. This section also moves up in tessitura.

75

make up his Hell he be - gan! He scat - tered ta - ran - tu - las

Added section of text begins.

sfz p sub.

79

o - ver the roads, put thorns on the cac - tus, and horns on the toads, He sprin - kled the sand with

sf p

83

mil - lions of ants, so if you sit down, you need soles on your pants!

mf sub.

Musical Example 37. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Hell in Texas”
mm. 75-86.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

95
o - ver the trees. The heat in the sum - mer's a hun - dred and ten. Not

98
bad for the dev - il, but way too hot for

101
men!

Continuous modulation to raise the tessitura

End of added Text

gliss.

Musical Example 38. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Hell in Texas”
mm. 95-104.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

Once all the ingredients for this new version of Hell have been conjured, it modulates back to G-flat major, and the pianist is given a romantic-style, page-long solo before landing in A-flat major to close the piece.

93

105 *A bit slower* *ff* *hugely* *rall.* *(l.v.)*

— with Ped. *Ped.*

108 *cadenza-like* *mf*

109 *molto rall.*

110 *Slowly* *pp* *dolce, espr.* *And*

Slowly

— with Ped.

Musical Example 39. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Hell in Texas” mm. 105-113.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

Similar to “Ten Thousand Miles Away,” this song also builds up to an A-flat₄. However, this Ab₄ is harder, because it’s the finale of the piece. This adds a certain weight and pressure for perfection that “Ten Thousand Miles Away” doesn’t have.

For singers, it is important to finish strong. A good high note can change the perception of a performance for both the audience and the performer in terms of confidence. As well, this final line asks the tenor to shout spoken lines before going up to A-flat₄, flourishing down to G₄, and then sustaining an A-flat₄ for two measures. This could be a recipe for a vocal disaster, but it’s also a chance to work on a tricky section for the voice. In the shouted section of “So if you ever end up in Texas...,” it is very easy to get the voice out of line. There are eight pages of music leading up to this section, and more often than not, the tenor will be a bit tired and feeling the musical build of this piece. They will shout this section without thinking about breath, support, and pharyngeal space and then just try to send the high note without preparing for it. However, this is a good opportunity to teach a tenor to put the spoken dialogue into a resonant space that mimics their singing voice. When they switch back to singing the highest notes of this piece, the singer doesn’t have to reset the entire vocal mechanism. If they do not approach the spoken lines this way, they will almost certainly end up in a vocal mishap.

When approaching high notes, teacher Clifton Forbis advocated for the use of post nasality and the avoidance of what he called “double-dipping.” Post nasality is a way to describe

lighter mechanism resonance of what we normally call the *mask*.¹¹⁹ Singers can push the sound or sing in an overly nasal resonance. By asking the singer to put the sound “in the mask,” a voice teacher is asking the student to find a lighter phonation. This post nasality can be found by thinking of a French [ã] or [õ] vowel to find forward placement without *placing* the sound somewhere. “Double dipping,” is a term that describes when a singer has found a nice open, resonant sound that covers correctly through this section of the voice, but the singer succumbs to the temptation to find more volume or tangible feeling of loudness, thereby muscling the sound on high notes. Essentially, they’ve found the right resonance but push the sound out because it feels stronger, thus “double dipping” when they already have enough sound. For this piece, if a singer covers the voice correctly for the first A-flat4 but then bears down on the vocal mechanism looking for more weight and sound, when they return to the quick G4 they will end up pushing on the final A-flat4, which at best makes it sound driven or dull and at worst is not stable and cracks. Learning to balance the resonance and weight is how we start opening to even higher notes. If a tenor can sing this piece with few hiccups, they are ready to graduate to Kohn’s hardest repertoire.

Advanced Level

Once a tenor is comfortable with their passaggio, it’s time to start working on solidifying the top of the tenor range. While Kohn’s works do not provide occasion to work on the lauded “tenor high C,” very few art songs go up to the extremes of the tenor voice. For the purposes of training the voice, finding comfort into and out of the passaggio will open the top and strengthen it more than just screaming high notes until they start sounding good. A tenor is often paid for

¹¹⁹ Davids, Julia, and Stephen A. LaTour. *Vocal technique: A guide to classical and contemporary styles for conductors, teachers, and singers*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc, 2021. p.11-40

their high notes, but we can't start exploring those notes without a methodical process. The pieces grouped into the advanced level are intended for graduate- and emerging professional-level tenors. They explore the top of the voice and show a complete mastery of the passaggio. Many tenors don't start feeling a comfortability in the very top of the voice until 25 years old or older.¹²⁰ However, for young tenors, most of the repertoire that they will be hired to sing rarely goes above an A4. The following pieces work on strengthening A4 and everything around it.

“On The Other Shore”

“On The Other Shore” is a beautiful piece about passing on to the afterlife. It is the only piece that Kohn arranged from an Appalachian spiritual and is a great piece for any church job audition. While the melody is rather simple, the range of the melody is quite difficult. Tenors can tend to take too much weight in the bottom of the voice up to the top. The melody starts at a D-flat4 and works down to a D-flat3, a low note for many tenors, and then immediately asks the tenor to vault all the way to the upper passaggio, singing a declamatory F4 into an A-flat4, only to pull back dynamically for the words “on the other shore.”

¹²⁰ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.7-13

5 *a tempo* *pp* *And*
I have a moth-er gone to glo-ry, I have a moth-er gone to glo-ry, I have a moth-er
a tempo

10
gone to glo-ry, On the oth-er shore. By and by I'll go to meet her,

15
by and by I'll go to meet her, by and by I'll go to meet her,

16
19 *pp*
on the oth-er shore.
pp *espr.* *mp* *cresc. poco* *fp* *p*
24 *rall. poco* *a tempo*

Musical Example 40. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “On the Other Shore” mm. 5-23.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

For a tenor who is still figuring things out technically, they will weight the voice too much on the low D-flat3. Then when they rise back up into a normal tenor tessitura, it will often

be forced or will crack. As well, each verse and section where there are A-flat4s is colored differently dynamically. Some are *forte* while others are *piano*, and a tenor has to be able to shed the weight from the bottom of the voice up to the top to color the phrases correctly. If that weren't hard enough, Kohn asks the singer to modulate up a half step for the last verse, which now makes the high note an A4, where most tenor voices start to become mostly head dominant.¹²¹ Because of the way the piece is written, it is very easy to *stack* that high note. Stacking is when singers, but commonly tenors, anticipate high notes by taking in a big breath to sing a high note but haven't fully expelled enough carbon dioxide from the prior phrase before taking that breath.¹²² It creates a strangling feeling that causes, at best, forced sounding notes and, at worst, a lack of phonation. Teachers combat this by breaking down phrases and figuring out how to find a lighter mechanism that sheds extra breath pressure if it is not needed.¹²³

The tenor voice has a tough balancing act in which the phonation process has to be succinct at all times to function properly.¹²⁴ If tenors are too breathy, a high A4 will sound hollow, or it will crack because there's not enough breath pressure and adduction of the vocal folds is too weak.¹²⁵ If a tenor is too heavy, a high note might not even come out. It is that fickle. To combat this, the singer must break down the section that goes from F-sharp4 to A4. Often, I will have a tenor start high notes by having them squawk like a seagull, starting in falsetto and then adding more weight and volume until it sounds like a clear, supported onset. Then, I will have them do slides in between the F-sharp4 and A4, going slow enough to feel the pitches in between to feel where the turn of the voice is, then riding that sound up to the A4. Lastly,

¹²¹ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.95-112

¹²² Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.33-40, 100-105

¹²³ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.33-40, 100-105

¹²⁴ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.95-112

¹²⁵ McKinney, James C. *The diagnosis and correction of vocal faults*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc, 1994. p.60-68, 88-95

experimenting with optimal vowel shapes to help them find the optimal sound. The F-sharp4 to A4 leap is on the text “there we’ll.” “We’ll” on an A4 is a difficult vowel to phonate and resonate for most tenors. Often it will come out sounding like the word “wheel.” But to make it easier to sing, a tenor has to modify the tight [i] vowel into a taller [I] sound like in the word “will.” This simple change makes the high A4 much easier to sing.¹²⁶ As well, when a tenor is first attempting this piece, the highest notes are mostly a quarter or dotted quarter note in length, so they’re not sustaining that A4 as they get comfortable with it.

“Poor Wayfaring Stranger”

“Poor Wayfaring Stranger” is one of the most famous American folk songs dating back to the mid-nineteenth century.¹²⁷ Like many folk songs, the exact date and origin is debated, but most scholars agree that the song probably came from Europe and gained notoriety during the American Civil War as an anthem for displaced soldiers on both sides of the war.¹²⁸ The text lends itself to feelings of longing and missing home. Kohn paints this idea of longing and uncertainty with sparse cluster chords around the tonic to create a foggy or hazy feeling without falling into full atonal soundscapes. Many composers have arranged this piece, but Kohn’s arrangement sets the perfect atmosphere for this ubiquitous piece of Americana, and Kohn offers one of the more elevated versions ever written.

One could argue that the majority of this song might actually fit better in the intermediate level. Musically, the cluster chord texture creates tonal ambiguity for the singer, but the famous nature of the melody and its simplicity are a major boon for the singer. While the melody keeps its familiar shape, that abrupt pivot to D major in measure eleven is jarring and can be hard to

¹²⁶ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.1-10

¹²⁷ “The Libby Prison Hymn”. Accessed February 7, 2026. <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:278571/>.

¹²⁸ “The Libby Prison Hymn” Accessed February 7, 2026. <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:278571/>.

navigate as a singer.

5 through this world of woe, And there's no sick - ness, toil, or dan - ger in that bright

9 land to which I go. I'm go - in' there to meet my
Deceptive Shift to F Major
cresc. poco a poco

12 moth - er I'm go - in' there no more to roam. I'm just a -
Back to E Minor
mf, pp

Musical Example 41. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “Poor Wayfaring Stranger” mm. 5-14.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

The majority of the melody sits around B3 and only goes up to E/F4. The melody repeats starting at measure nineteen and ends on a comfortable E3. So then why is this piece considered so hard? Why is a piece that sits so low placed in the advanced category? It is in the advanced level because of measures twenty-seven through thirty-one.

In the pickup to measure thirty-one, there is an *ossia* or optional high note written to a high B4. In the medium key, the optional note for a baritone is a G4 which is a normal high note for them. However, a high G4 for a baritone functions more like a high A4 for a tenor. It is high, but not an extreme of the baritone voice. Equivocally, a baritone's "high B or C" in their voice is an A4, which they rarely sing, if ever, in traditional repertoire.¹²⁹ Andrew Garland, in the official recordings of "Poor Wayfaring Stranger," decides to option down at the end of the piece.¹³⁰

This phrase is incredibly challenging because of the measures leading up to the high note. Starting in measure twenty-seven, the texture thickens with big, romantic rolled chords leading to a fuller sound in the piano. It is very easy for any singer to get too emotional in this build. This causes the tenor to sing heavier and louder, but caution must be taken. If the tenor starts singing too heavy around E4, the high note will not come out; or if it does, it will be very strained. In conjunction, the high note is approached with an ascending G4, A4 and then B4, making it easy to bog down the sound and stack the breath. Though some tenors have a natural proclivity for producing high notes, even they can get in trouble quickly in the approach to the B4.¹³¹ To combat this, a teacher should work just on this section, finding the lyricism and connection in the melody line. The voice has to turn on that G4 to have any chance of that B4 phonating. Once the voice is turned, the singer can ride the steady stream of air and allow the weight of a more chest-connected sound to drop. If the notes leading up to the high note are supported by breath, connected in legato singing, and find the balance of vocal energy and breath pressure for the B natural, this is a truly exhilarating section of music reminiscent of another famous B natural—

¹²⁹ Miller, Richard. *Securing Baritone, Bass-Baritone, and Bass Voices*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008 p.10-15, 84-92

¹³⁰ Andrew Garland, Donna Loewy. American folk song settings. MP3. Naxos Digital Services US Inc, 2009

¹³¹ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.95-110

Calaf's climax in his aria "Nessun dorma" in Puccini's *Turandot*.

85

27

go. I'm go - in' there to meet my fa - ther, I'm go - in'

mf

Rolled chords that cause heavier mechanism singing

30

there no more to roam. I'm just a -

f (ossia) *ten.* *rit.* *a tempo* *pp*

Watch for stacking leading up to B4

ff

Musical Example 42. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice "Poor Wayfaring Stranger" mm. 27-32.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

The other issue that can arise during this section is that once the singer reaches the B4, they stop energizing the sound because they reached the high note. The lead up and onset may be good, but the breath energy doesn't sustain the note, or the tenor "sits" on the note, and it loses brilliance, possibly cracking. The singer must arrive to the note but also sustain that sound for as long as the voice will allow.

95

“California”

The final piece in the advanced grouping is “California.” While not extending to the same range of high notes as the other two pieces of this category, it is the amalgamation of all the pieces that have come before but with the added pressure of navigating the passaggio. The song is light in terms of subject matter, detailing the brotherhood and comradery of the California Gold Rush. However, vocally it is extremely difficult and requires laser focus through the passaggio. A recurring text and theme on “There’s plenty of gold or so I’m told” recapitulates notes in the passaggio in quick succession again and again.

11

ho, boys, ho! To Cal - i - for - nia go! There's plen - ty of gold, or so I'm told, on the

Repeated music that changes with each iteration

14

banks of the Sac - ra - men - to! We

17

Musical Example 43. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “California” mm. 11-16.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

It is incredibly easy to over sing and get fatigued if not approaching the passaggio passages with care. Furthermore, the verses, while usually in different keys, are very similar in melodic shape and tessitura, so memorizing the text can also be a challenge. The song also has a

quicker tempo that requires engaging acting and a slower B section that creates a sense of longing similar to other pieces in Kohn’s canon, having a flowing melody line over dream-like arpeggios.

53

Cal - i - for - nia go!

espr., molto legato sempre

f

dim poco a poco

Melody in Right Hand

57

rit. poco *mp* **A tempo**

As oft we roam the dark sea foam, we'll

rit. poco **A tempo**

mp espr.

Dream-Like Arpeggios in the Right hand as Well

Musical Example 44. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “California” mm. 53-59.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

This requires the tools that each level before have asked: good technique, rock solid musicianship, acting, and navigating the passaggio with expertise.

For the pianist, this song no easy task. It opens with the right hand furiously plunking out chords to mimic horse hooves, while the left hand plays a syncopated melody evoking the sounds of the Old West and the excitement of what the future holds with a pan filled with gold. The vocal melody is relatively strophic; however, by measure thirty, we’ve already gone through two

key changes, one from F major to A-flat major and then Ab to E major, eventually arriving at C minor in measure forty-two. This particular key change evokes the same feeling as the added section in “Hell in Texas,” though this was written well before that piece. The change to minor creates a sense of urgency and character change. Then in measure fifty-three, Kohn uses modal borrowing to move into E-flat major as the character reminisces about home. In measure seventy, the piece abruptly snaps back to F major, calling for a *sotto voce* section as the singer rallies the boys from the hills in a whole step key change to G major that, with a flurry, belts out the hope and joy of hitting it big in the gold rush.

The hardest part of this piece is the aforementioned repeating passages on the phrase “There’s plenty of gold, or so I’m told.” Each one feels a little bit different because of how it functions in the voice, and which note is recapitulating. In that phrase, the text “plenty of gold” always contains the highest notes of the line, usually consisting of two sixteenth notes and two eighth notes, which if sustained would make a dotted quarter note. If an advanced tenor had to sing an A-flat⁴ or G⁴ on a dotted quarter note at this point, it should be no problem. However, the constant recapitulation adds to the difficulty. Every onset for each new word is a chance for disaster to happen. Moreover, each statement of the phrase feels completely different. The first iteration is in F major, requiring four F⁴s in a row, which are right at the beginning of the passaggio and could even be sung uncovered if a singer wanted. However, when the key changes to A-flat major, now the repeating notes are A-flat⁴s that sit at the top of the passaggio and are fully turned. The next time this text appears, the highest notes are F-sharp⁴s, and the singer can become disoriented as to exactly where they are in the passaggio through all these fast shifts. And through it all, the piece is pushing a fairly quick tempo, which doesn’t allow the singer to set up these notes well, so the tenor has to know how much weight and stamina they need to get

through not only the phrase but the entire song. After a slight reprieve in the B section that slows down the tempo but also asks for softer dynamics, we arrive at the *piece de resistance* of the song with a staggering twenty-two high G4s that are sung like a rapid-fire machine gun between measures seventy-nine to ninety-three

78 *f* Count of G4s: 1

go! Then ho, boys, ho! To Cal - i - for - nia go! There's

81 2 3 4 5

plen - ty of gold, or so I'm told, on the banks of the Sac - ra - men - to! So ho, boys, ho! To

84 Long 6 *ff*

Cal - i - for - nia go! There's

11

Musical Example 45. Steven Mark Kohn, *American Folk Set*, for High Voice “California” mm. 78-95.

Source: Kohn, Steven Mark. *American Folk Set: For High Voice and Piano*. St. Louis, Mo: E.C. Schirmer Music Company, 2018.

In measure eighty-five, a long, sustained G4 crescendos to *fortissimo* with the phrase “There’s plenty of gold, or so I’m told.” That phrase then repeats three-fold, back-to-back. If a tenor has not mastered their passaggio, especially the turn of the voice at G4, this phrase will absolutely annihilate most tenor voices. It is incredibly easy to oversing this section, resulting in added weight in the voice for the final G4 of the piece. This piece offers the ultimate tenor moment—sustaining a G4 for two whole measures after running a gauntlet through the passaggio only moments prior. Many tenors would rather attempt the nine high C5s in “Ah, mes amis” from *Le Fille du Regiment* than sing a piece like “California,” but when sung well, it is the ultimate tenor closing song.

Conclusion

This document may be of use to any teacher who is looking to broaden their knowledge of teaching tenors while also learning more about an incredible living composer. While it was never Kohn’s intention, he has created a wonderful roadmap to understand the tenor voice through his folk song arrangements. The high key specifically poses certain pedagogical hurdles and subsequent milestones for a growing tenor while simultaneously building into their repertoire a sizeable list contemporary American art song.

Training a tenor voice is a unique experience that at times can be very daunting. In addition to the general hurdles of singing like breath coordination, resonance and stamina

building, the tenor voice deals with more technical hurdles than any other voice type.¹³² The myriads of mental gymnastics that all singers, but particularly high voices, have to contend with while pursuing a career in classical singing can be overwhelming and every bump in the training of a tenor voice can feel like a major setback. However, when a tenor voice does develop correctly, it can be one of the most exciting voice types to hear live. The tenor voice is already rarer than most other voice types but even more elusive is a properly trained tenor voice.¹³³

While this specific research is based on experiences with the tenor voice and my own experiences as a tenor, the methodology using art song as a pedagogical tool can be further explored with other art song repertoire and voice types. Any pedagogue could just as easily delve into the art song of Claude Debussy and why its composition is better for sopranos, or why Vaughan Williams wrote so many great art songs for baritone voices. With this methodology in mind, singing scholars can broaden the horizons of what art song repertoire's function is in the classical singing community. Often, art songs are looked at as etudes or supplementary repertoire, but this process has shown the possibilities it has as a pedagogical tool and as its own unique artform. So often as classical musicians, singers forget that classical music is still a living, breathing artform. Classical singers become complacent in learning their Mozart, Puccini and Wagner arias, but choosing to work on a living composer who has written these wonderful mini-dramas can not only be just as rewarding but can strengthen the voice as well. Even though the aim of this document is to grow a classical tenor voice, you could just as easily give these pieces to musical theater students because of their dramatic complexity, a jazz student because of their musical complexity, and a contemporary commercial music student because of their approachable vernacular. The cross pollination of musical genres in these pieces make them great

¹³² Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.ix

¹³³ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Group, 1993 p.ix

for many different genres of students, and could easily be modified to work on those styles pedagogically.

Truthfully, Kohn's attention to detail, musical language, and overall approachable nature in these fifteen folk song arrangements have created a wonderful addition to the canon of twenty-first century American art song, and into the cannon of American folk song. Just as Alan Lomax felt the call to catalogue these important melodies, Kohn's elevated musical language has immortalized these fifteen tunes into memorable and digestible pieces for various levels of singers.

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Appendix

Transcribed Text, MC= Matthew Corcoran, SMK= Steven Mark Kohn

[00:00] MC: Awesome. Hello, Steven. Thank you so much for joining me today to discuss your 15 folk song arrangements. It is such an honor to get to sit down with you today and discuss your works with you. It is increasingly rare to be able to sit down with a living composer and get their insight into the process of how they created art that so many people, myself included, love to sing and perform. So, first and foremost, tell me a little bit about yourself. Obviously, there's a lot of information online that they can find about you, but what is your background in music making and what eventually led you to composing and arranging these folk songs?

[00:36] SMK: Okay, Matt. I'll try to give you the short and skinny.

[00:39] MC: Yeah. (laughs)

[00:39] SMK: I grew up with a lot of music in the house; music theater, rock, pop, folk. My mother loved music and, uh, so I grew up with all of that. I had an epiphany when I saw Mary Poppins at the age of seven.

[00:54] MC: Mm-hmm.

[00:54] SMK: And I thought, "That's the most incredible thing I've ever seen."

[00:57] MC: Mm.

[00:58] SMK: And then I had a further epiphany when I discovered The Beatles. And then when I heard "Eleanor Rigby," I thought, "That's about the coolest thing I've ever heard."

[01:05] MC: Right.

[01:06] SMK: So, these are the little things that kinda trigger something in your mind that point you in a direction. But I played piano as a kid without having lessons. I just taught myself to play. I was playing by ear, and I was sounding out pretty much anything I could hear. I, I have very good ears.

[01:23] MC: Okay.

[01:23] SMK: So I was doing all that and, I was at parties playing and people were really amazed, and I was like, "Why? (laughs) Can't everyone do this?"

[01:31] MC: Mm-hmm.

[01:31] SMK: And then I discovered, no, not everyone can do this. And so as a senior in high school, I began piano lessons. I couldn't read until I was 18. Things happened very, very quickly. I jumped into it and studied very hard very quickly, jumped into a music major at Kent State and for the first time of my life started getting straight As, which is a really great motivator.

[01:54] MC: Mm-hmm. I agree.

[01:56] SMK: So I started composing and had very good mentorship from Walter Watson at the time, and just got hooked by the idea of putting notes on paper and, and the intoxication of looking at a score with the beauty of notated music and realizing it, it's your own work. I mean, there's something really... it's an egotistical thing, but it's very cool to look at.

[02:20] MC: Mm.

[02:20] SMK: And I got caught up in that and then I went for a master's at CIM (Cleveland Institute of Music) and a lot of things started to explode. I was hired to write and arrange commercials for TV and radio in my early 20s.

[02:34] MC: Mm-hmm.

[02:35] SMK: I did a lot of arranging and writing and then, that led to just all sorts of things. {including}, I wrote an opera.

[02:44] MC: Mm.

[02:45] SMK: I started writing more and more things, and I wrote a bit of everything. I've scored a handful of films, I've written hundreds of commercials, lots and lots of songs, lots of song lyrics, and guided imagery tapes. I mean, you name it.

[02:59] MC: Mm-hmm.

[02:59] SMK: I've really been sort of a journeyman. I've been lucky enough, Matt, to be paid to learn.

[03:05] MC: Yeah. You know, it's always nice to get a paycheck for anything music related, even if it's not exactly what you're looking for at the moment, but that feeling of like, oh, well I did what I love to do and I got paid for it.

[03:16] SMK: It, it's a beautiful thing.

[03:17] MC: Mm-hmm.

[03:18] SMK: I've never applied for a job in my life. I've just been offered work.

[03:25] MC: Mm.

[03:25] SMK: So I was offered studio work, and then I was offered an opportunity to teach, then I was offered this and that, and then CIM offered to... just asked if I wanted to join the composition department.

[03:36] MC: Cool.

[03:36] SMK: They gave me electronic studio and I built it up from scratch, wrote the textbook, taught there for 21 years, loved it,... And then I got a publisher around 1999.

[03:50] MC: Mm.

[03:51] SMK: Glenndower Jones. You know Glen?

[03:55] MC: Yeah. Of course, from Classical Vocal Reprints.

[03:57] SMK: He's great. He's great. So he published my haiku, and they started to make their way out there because Glen knows a lot of people, and I was inspired by that. And around 2000 I thought, okay, I love music theater. I'd written several musicals, I've written the lyrics for four musicals. I thought, it's too hard to get a musical produced on stage, but it's not too hard to engage my love of music theater and storytelling and put something in a concert hall because every music school has a recital hall with a piano.

[04:31] MC: Mm-hmm.

[04:32] SMK: And vocal majors who need to perform. So I made my mind up around 2000 that I was going to write art songs, and I guess the definition of art song is something that is notated strictly and that only trained musicians can interpret because they have to be able to read it.

[04:51] MC: Hm.

[04:52] SMK: ... in terms of subject matter, I decided I'm going to find stories, essays, anything that tells a story and has characters and situations as opposed to descriptive poetry. ...I decided around 2000, I knew the Copland *Old American Songs*, I knew some of the L. E. Siegmeister arrangements.

[05:15] MC: Mm-hmm.

[05:15] SMK: And I particularly loved Vaughan Williams' treatment of folk material.

[05:20] MC: Mm-hmm.

[05:21] SMK: He just has a,... he's one of my favorite composers. He has a quality about him that's very lyrical. ... And I love Copland.

[05:31] MC: Right.

[05:31] SMK: But I don't think Copland has Vaughan Williams' sort of lyrical quality. So, I decided I was going to arrange five folk songs into a set. Since I had a publisher, I thought, well, why not capitalize on this? And I thought, it was almost a tactical move, Matt. I thought, okay, I love folk music, I grew up with the folk movement of the '60s. I mean, Peter, Paul and Mary and all the way up through Joni Mitchell. I mean, just all that stuff was in my head.... and the Great American Songbook. I know it back and forth. And I wanted to pull all that together into some folk song arrangements, and I'm American, and I grew up with, you know, you name it, um, (laughs) Star Trek, The Three Stooges, Bugs Bunny, you know.

[06:19] MC: Right.

[06:20] SMK: ...its all part of our DNA, so I decided I was going to set five American folk songs.

[06:26] MC: Mm-hmm.

[06:27] SMK: put them into a set that could be performed as a {whole} set. ...So I started to research looking for songs that I didn't know.

[06:38] MC: Right.

[06:38] SMK: {Songs} that told a story, and that involved characters, so there had to be either a dramatic or lyrical or a musical component worth exploring.

[06:49] MC: (laughs)

[06:50] SMK: I knew I was going to set them in my own voice, which is really an amalgam of everything from modern 20th century writing all the way to rock and roll, and everything in between.

[07:00] MC: Of course.

[07:01] SMK: Sondheim. Sondheim, of course, is one of my great heroes.

[07:04] MC: Mm-hmm.

[07:05] SMK: So I found... And it took a while, a lot of the folk songs, I started to look at the Alan Lomax book of folk songs arrangements.

[07:15] MC: Yes.

[07:15] SMK: John and Alan Lomax, very famous. Penguin American Folk Songs, Our Singing Country, Folk Songs of New England. I just bought stacks of books of these American folk songs and started poring through them and found very few were worthy of being set.

[07:32] MC: Mm. Mm.

[07:33] SMK: They just weren't interesting, or they didn't tell a story or they were repetitive-

[07:38] MC: Yeah.

[07:38] SMK: ... or they were silly or they were too specific. So I found eventually... The first one I set was "Red Iron Ore" from book one.

[07:48] MC: Interesting. Was that just because of the nature of you kind of being from that area? 'Cause "Red Iron Ore" deals with that area of the country, right? It's like the Ohio River Valley.

[07:57] SMK: Well, it, it's a Great Lakes, it's a Great Lakes song and I live on the Great Lakes in the shore of Lake Erie.

[08:02] MC: Okay.

[08:02] SMK: I'd like to say it was that, but no. I think, I think it was just that it was a sort of an epic journey.

[08:08] MC: Mm.

[08:09] SMK: I liked the idea. It was strophic, but I liked the idea that we start here and we follow through the Great Lakes and we end up in Cleveland and this is what our journey is about. I like the melody, and I like the idea that it gave me the opportunity to set each verse differently in the accompaniment. I just liked the story, and maybe that's just the first thing that percolated, so I set Red Iron Ore.

[08:34] MC: Mm.

[08:35] SMK: And, and then I went back and I did "Ten Thousand Miles Away" which was the next one.

[08:40] MC: Okay.

[08:40] SMK: The whole idea was to create a set of five songs, and the five songs would follow an arc; a formula regarding mostly tempo.

[08:52] MC: Mm.

[08:53] SMK: The first one would be medium uptempo, then a slow one-

[08:57] MC: Mm-hmm.

[08:57] SMK: ... then a comical one. The third one would always be something comical. The fourth one would be something slow and perhaps sad or thoughtful or wistful or something.

[09:07] MC: Okay.

[09:07] SMK: And the fifth one, the fifth one would always be more of an epic tale, something a little larger in scope that concludes the set.

[09:17] MC: And was that the mindset for all three sets or was that just....

[09:21] SMK: Yeah. It was the mindset and I followed it for all three.

[09:24] MC: Very cool.

[09:25] SMK: If you look at them, if you break 'em up one through five, six through ten, they all follow that same formula.

[09:31] MC: Hmm.

[09:32] SMK: What happened, which was really cool, is Glenndower published the first book, and I didn't even call it Book One, it was just like American Folk Set, here are five songs.

[09:41] MC: Mm-Hmm.

[09:41] SMK: And Glen, through his contacts, all of a sudden they're being done in Carnegie Hall.

[09:47] MC: Yeah.

[09:48] SMK: And they're being done on recitals around the country because of people he knows.

[09:51] MC: Mm-hmm.

[09:52] SMK: And I was fired up by that, so a couple years later I did the second set in the same formula, this... It took a while. I think "Down, Down, Down" was the first song of the second set that I did.

[10:05] MC: Mm-hmm.

[10:07] SMK: There are some that I'm very fond of, some less so. You know, you always have stronger feelings about certain things.

[10:14] MC: Of course.

[10:14] SMK: But I finished the second set and sent that on to Glen. Next thing I know, Andrew Garland is doing the second set at the Phillips Gallery and I thought, okay, let's try one more set. And it... Man, it took me forever to find five more songs.

[10:30] MC: Yeah. talking about that legacy of teaching, so I found your music first because of my teacher Penelope Bitzas, in my masters who was good friends with, Glenndower Jones, and Andy studied with Penny the same time I did.

[10:50] SMK: Oh, hey.

[10:51] MC: Yeah, it was this very serendipitous kind of thing, so when my masters recital came up, the same kind of thing happened. {Penny} was like, "Hey, you know, I found this really great set of American song and this is a chance to do something different," and yeah, I mean, I have always been a humongous advocate for your music!

[11:09] SMK: Well, thank you. I appreciate that.

[11:10] MC: Of course. ...the process of writing, do you feel as an American composer that it's important to continue that kind of like legacy of keeping folk song alive in your own way?

[11:27] SMK: (clears throat) The answer would be yes, but I don't say yes out there waving a huge American flag.

[11:36] MC: Mm.

[11:36] SMK: You know? Uh, we live in very difficult political times right now.

[11:41] MC: Of course.

[11:41] SMK: And, I think America is/was a great country.

[11:48] MC: Yeah.

[11:49] SMK: I have a very strong connection to this country.

[11:50-12:15] "Redacted as it was not pertinent to this document"

[12:16] SMK: ... to select these songs. I think I felt that this is a cultural connection that resonates with me. I can relate to these. They're in my language.

[12:24] MC: Mm-hmm.

[12:25] SMK: I understand the regions where these songs emanated, the stories and the characters in them are very much a part of American history. So we are who we are because of what we've been exposed to our entire lives.

[12:41] MC: Mm-hmm.

[12:43] SMK: I found that these stories, I could relate to them, and I felt comfortable, you know, digging into them. So yes, I guess there is a cultural and nationalistic connection that I felt.

[12:55] MC: Yeah. I agree with you, that it's the sense of pride that comes with being American that is not nationalistic. It's the idea that the way that the country's always been portrayed to us is like, "You should be proud of the fact that you come from the land of the free and home of the brave." You know, you got your baseball and your hot dogs and your grilling on Sunday.

[13:16] SMK: (laughs)

[13:16] MC: And for me, folk song is one of the few art forms that we can really claim as saying like, yes, we... Well, you could also argue that a lot of folk song comes from European and African traditions and all these different things that kind of amalgamate. But the idea of American folk song is as much American as, say, country music or, jazz and rock and roll....

[13:38] SMK: Which are very American.

[13:40] MC: Yes.

[13:41] SMK:, I purposely avoided the African-American experience-

[13:47] MC: Yes.

[13:47] SMK: ... because I didn't feel it was my privilege to tell that story.

[13:51] MC: Hm.

[13:52] SMK: I just, you know, it's, I think Black artists should have the privilege of telling their own story.

[14:00] MC: Of course.

[14:01] SMK: And so I leaned more toward folk songs that emanated from the British Isles, from Appalachia, from-

[14:07] MC: Mm.

[14:07] SMK: ... from the American West. I did consciously avoid any slave songs.

[14:15] MC: Yeah.

[14:15] SMK: ... it didn't seem it was my right to do those.

[14:19] MC: Yeah, and, you know, it's something like “On the Other Shore” is a piece that I sing at church all the time 'cause I'm like, oh, this is a spiritual that I know I can sing and I'm not, stepping on toes or doing anything-

[14:29] SMK: Mm-hmm.

[14:30] MC: ... that could be conceived as minstrelsy or anything like that, so...

[14:34] SMK: Yes, no, I agree with you. I haven't fully researched every one of these songs, man. I mean, I didn't do a lot of scholarly research on these.

[14:43] MC: Sure.

[14:44] SMK: “On the Other Shore” actually struck me almost like a cowboy ballad.

[14:52] MC: Interesting.

[14:52] SMK: Or almost like a fireside ballad. There was nothing in it musically that was particularly bluesy.

[14:58] MC: Mm.

[14:59] SMK: I didn't associate it with that. it seemed safe to me. (laughs) I mean, I can, I can get away with this.

[15:05] MC: I know what you mean.

[15:16] SMK: Went out and published them all. All of a sudden, [All three original volumes] are in libraries.

[15:19] MC: Mm-hmm.

[15:19] SMK: All of a sudden, they're all over the place. And then Michael Ching, who you probably know-

[15:24] MC: Yes.

[15:25] SMK: Michael and I were, buddies from Aspen back in, get this, 1978.

[15:29] MC: Wow.

[15:30] SMK: And Michael said, "Hey, I'm working for Schirmer. We're looking for American art songs. Would you like us to move your catalog to EC Schirmer?"

[15:39] MC: Mm.

[15:39] SMK: And I said, "Terrific, yes." So then they put all 15 into one book.

[15:45] MC: Very cool.

[15:46] SMK: That's how that happened.

[15:47] MC: Yeah, and obviously, I talked a little bit about them because I know that you've seen my lecture recital on it and kind of how my doc-

[15:55] SMK: I did! I appreciated that. It was very much about the physicality of the voice.

[16:00] MC: Yes.

[16:01] SMK: Which is something you are expert in, I am not. (laughs)

[16:04] MC: (laughs)

[16:05] SMK: But you know, I really appreciate it. I'm all about storytelling. You know, your story.

[16:11] MC: Yes.

[16:11] SMK: I know how to write for the voice, I know how to use-

[16:13] MC: Mm.

[16:13] SMK: ... use the range. I know when to put the proper vowel on a high note and all those things. But you, you put it into a pedagogical and physical and technical context, which is really beyond me.

[16:27] MC: Sure.

[16:27] SMK: So I really appreciated that. It was nice to see that they could service you in that way.

[16:31] MC: Oh, for sure. In fact, I was gonna ask you, when you were composing these pieces, did you have a particular voice in mind or a specific voice type when you were writing them? Or did you design these first for low voices and then you decided to put them into higher keys? I know Vaughan Williams has done this as well too, where he might have written a song for a high voice and a song for a low voice, but then when he put them together in a cycle or a collection, he kinda just figured out which keys would work best. So, did you have anybody in mind when you were writing these?

[17:01] SMK: I had no individual in mind, but I always started with medium voice.

[17:05] MC: Okay.

[17:05] SMK: I avoided high extremes of the register.

[17:10] MC: Mm.

[17:10] SMK: 'cause folk songs usually do. I mean-

[17:13] MC: Yep.

[17:13] SMK: ... these are sung by average people. So I tried to keep the ranges at a tenth maybe.

[17:20] MC: Mm-hmm.

[17:21] SMK: So they all started with the medium range, maybe topping out around an F maybe.

[17:27] MC: Yep.

[17:27] SMK: And getting down around maybe a B below middle C. I would transpose them up and down. And it's interesting, when you hit the transpose button, that doesn't mean the (laughs) accompaniment is going to work as well-

[17:41] MC: Right.

[17:42] SMK: ... all of a sudden. So then you have to go back in and start tweaking the voicings of some of the chords because they don't fall under the fingers the way they originally did.

[17:49] MC: Mm-hmm.

[17:50] SMK: It's harder than people think. They think you can just hit a button and send them a new version, and it doesn't always work that way. But I always started with medium voice. And the medium voice would, as you know as a singer, is low enough that even a bass could sing these.

[18:06] MC: Oh, for sure.

[18:06] SMK: ... there's a low version as well, but some of the low and medium versions are identical.

[18:13] MC: Well, yeah. I mean, even Wanderin' is the same key throughout all of them. Like, they, it, it goes from D to D basically, no matter what.

[18:20] SMK: Yup, it just... I mean, it just falls right into the wheelhouse of almost everyone.

[18:24] MC: Yeah.

[18:25] SMK: So, yeah. So started with medium, and then popped up and down when necessary.

[18:31] MC: ...a big part of my document is expanding upon this idea that once they have been transposed into the higher key, they function really differently for a tenor's voice than the medium key does for a baritone's voice. Like, yes, the ranges are similar, but because of the pedagogical intricacies of it, some of them are very approachable in any kind of way that a normal folk song would be. And some of them are intense. Like "California" in the tenor key is like... It's just, high, it's just sitting at a G the whole time, but it makes it so exciting because of that, right?and it takes a lot of {stamina}

[19:14] SMK: Sure.

[19:14] MC: ... depending on how these are used, they have a completely different kind of feel, or as the kids say nowadays, that it has a different vibe, right? Like, it has a whole different kind of connotation to it. ...do you find in your listening, and I know a lot of famous recordings of these songs are mostly baritones.I would actually love to do a recording of all your stuff in the tenor key, just to have something for tenors as a resource. But do you feel like there's a difference in intensity between the way some of your pieces sing in the different types of voices? ...sometimes when you hear it in a lower voice, it sounds more serene, or if you listen to a higher voice, it sounds more intense.

[19:53] MC: Do you ever get that from listening to different sorts of-

[19:57] SMK: Oh, yes, absolutely. I mean, that the different vocal ranges have different tonal qualities and-

[20:04] MC: Yes.

[20:05] SMK: ... and different intensities in the various tessitura. I mean, you're absolutely right, they are different.

[20:10] MC: Mm-hmm.

[20:10] SMK: depending on the singer and the quality of their voice. The big answer is yes.

[20:17] MC: Okay, great.

[20:18] SMK: I would love you to record these for tenor voice. Please do. If you need to fill out the album, grab the, The War Prayer while you're at it, 'cause then that tells me-

[20:27] MC: Absolutely.

[20:29] SMK: ... uh, that would be... You have my, you have my go-ahead on that.

[20:31] MC: Right.

[20:31] SMK: But, yes, the different vocal ranges have very different qualities. It's like playing a cello solo and a violin solo, you know?

[20:38] MC: Yeah and I actually met Professor Loewy, the pianist who played it with Andy Garland. I met her this summer at CCM,

[20:47] SMK: Yeah.

[20:48] MC: ... 'cause I was part of the Cincinnati Song Initiative. So she was there!

[20:52] SMK: Oh, right. Nice.

[20:53] MC: She said, "Oh, I heard you were writing a paper."

[20:55] SMK: Oh, I know those folks. Yeah, and Sam Martin....

[20:58] MC: Yep.

[20:59] SMK: ... Yep, they're doing good work down there.

[21:01] MC: They are. I got to meet another one of your colleagues, Tom Cipullo, who really put into perspective the idea of that composing can be a very solitary job, because you're just in your office writing until it gets performed. And getting a chance to see performers and get to know performers is such a huge aspect of composing that I think a lot of singers don't understand.

[21:24] MC: That you can reach out to composers and be like, "Hey, I'd love to get to know you more and open up a dialogue about your music and all this stuff."

[21:30] SMK: Well, you just hit on something rather key. You just brought to mind one thing. The world of opera and art song-

[21:36] MC: Mm-hmm.

[21:36] SMK: ... I've discovered is a real family.

[21:39] MC: Mm-hmm.

[21:40] SMK: Everybody seems to be one degree of separation away.

[21:43] MC: Yes.

[21:44] SMK: And when we had our opera Riders of the Purple Sage-

[21:48] MC: Yeah.

[21:48] SMK: ... performed out in Phoenix, the conductor, Joey Mekavej and Josh Dennis, who was singing one of our roles, they had sung my songs. I'd never met these guys.

[21:59] MC: Yeah.

[22:00] SMK: So there's a real connection within the world of art song and opera. And then another step beyond that is I've reached a point in my life, I'm not a kid anymore, I'm in my late 60s.

[22:10] MC: Mm-hmm.

[22:10] SMK: I will write a song cycle every couple years.

[22:16] MC: Hmm.

[22:17] SMK: And I'm very, very picky about the subject matter. It's gotta say something... Actually, at this point, it's gotta say something important. So, I will approach an artist before I even begin.

[22:29] MC: Mm-hmm.

[22:29] SMK: And just say, "I'm thinking of doing this." That's what I did with Adriana Zabala. Do you know Adriana?

[22:34] MC: I know the name, but I don't know her personally.

[22:37] SMK: Oh, she's super. She teaches at Yale. She's performed all over the place.

[22:40] MC: Of course, yeah.

[22:41] SMK: She's just a prime talent. We're Facebook friends, and I just said, "Hey, I'm thinking of doing this Susan B. Anthony piece."

[22:49] MC: Hmm.

[22:49] SMK: "Would you be willing to premiere it?" And she said yes. I started writing it and sending her bits as it went along. She ended up recording it on video. It was COVID, um-

[23:02] MC: Yeah.

[23:03] SMK: ... time. But I reach out to artists now before I even begin a piece so I have a person in mind and, quite honestly, a venue. You know, we can write these things. You talk about being solitary. Yes, so I can write all I want and just keep cranking this stuff out there. But until it gets in the hands of a performer, it's inert.

[23:23] MC: Yeah.

[23:24] SMK: I also keep in mind the audience. I think the audiences has never been given the credit they deserve.

[23:32] MC: Mm-hmm.

[23:33] SMK: Especially when I was a student. I studied composition during the toxic 1970s and '80s-

[23:39] MC: Hmm.

[23:40] SMK: ... where if you didn't write really strident either 12-tone or something music-

[23:47] MC: Right.

[23:47] SMK: ... you were selling out.

[23:49] MC: Yeah.

[23:50] SMK:..... no teacher ever said to me, "The audience is important."

[23:57] MC: Hmm.

[23:57] SMK: "You need an audience and you need to reach them and you need to engage them in some way." That's so vital.

[24:04] MC: Hmm.

[24:05] SMK: And that's another reason that the folk songs appealed to me, because I felt that they were, forgive the word, accessible.

[24:11] MC: Yeah.

[24:12] SMK:...that was a dirty word when I was a student. There's nothing wrong with that word.

[24:16] MC: No, and it's something that I bring up when I teach my students about folk song, or when I give them arrangements of folk song. These are supposed to be a little bit easier in terms of the musical structure, because you as an artist have a chance to make something special with them, right? And like you said, connecting with an audience, they don't know the difference between different inversions of chords and all the things of all the minutiae that goes on in the

music-making process. They're just like, "Wow, that sounds awesome, and you touched me in a way that I wasn't expecting emotionally." You know?

[24:49] SMK: Well, that's very satisfying, and I've always {said} if the blue-haired lady in the fourth row says, "Oh, I love to hear music."

[24:57] MC: Exactly.

[24:58] SMK: That means that a hell of a lot to me. That means more to me-

[25:00] MC: (laughs)

[25:01] SMK: ... than some trained musician saying, "I appreciated your piano writing." You know?

[25:06] MC: Yes.

[25:06] SMK: It's very satisfying to connect with a listener.

[25:15] MC: Yeah.

[25:17] SMK: So, yeah.

[25:18] MC: Cool. The last thing I wanted to ask you about before we kind of get into just a little lightning round of stuff is a big part of my document is using your pieces as pedagogical tools. And I don't think any composer goes into composing unless it's something like a book of etudes or something specifically designed for a teaching purpose with a sense of pedagogy leading their process. Since your pieces get done a lot by a lot of collegiate singers, do you feel like your pieces, because of the ubiquity of folk song, make for good teaching tools?

[25:54] SMK: (sighs) That's a tough question for me to answer. I certainly never set out for these to have any pedagogical depth the way, the way a piano etude might. I wasn't thinking, "Well, this piece is going to... They're gonna have to do this, and in this piece, it's gonna focus on this aspect of their technique." No, wasn't even thinking that way.

[26:13] MC: Right.

[26:13] SMK: I'm guessing perhaps if they have a pedagogical value, it's just because perhaps they cover enough turf that there's something in each of them that you as a teacher can zone in on.

[26:32] MC: A lot of my document is just that, this idea of taking each of the songs and finding what are the little nooks and crannies that a teacher can find in them? So a lot of the times it's talking about things like how do we build stamina? How do we build that tessitura of a tenor... Because specifically, the document leans more towards tenors than it does male voices in general because tenor voice-

[26:57] SMK: Mm-hmm.

[26:57] MC: ... is such a finicky beast to deal with. You know, it's beyond just singing high C's in front of people. It's like, "Oh, well, if things aren't lined up that day, I might not be able to phonate correctly."

[27:08] SMK: Mm-hmm.

[27:09] MC: ...finding all the things in each of the songs, and the things I always come back to pedagogically are the way that you write music for the tenor voice is that it sits really well, it sits in a nice spot, and it allows for tenors to explore acting and explore storytelling, like you said. That many times you're given pieces in an academic setting and are told "You need to learn this 'cause it will make you a better singer." And it's like, "Okay, but that doesn't necessarily speak to every single student, right?" -

[27:41] SMK: Mm-hmm.

[27:42] MC: ... I find that incorporating a little bit more, especially for American composers, getting American art song involved with students even from the beginning, it opens up their palate to be able to start saying, "Oh, well, I really liked this. I wanna explore other American composers. I wanna explore new music in general. I wanna do things that are living and are living art."

[28:05] SMK: Mm-hmm.

[28:05] MC: So let's go ahead and let's pivot now and kinda get into the minutiae of each piece.

[28:10] SMK: Sure.

[28:10] MC: ... go over specifically what drew you to each of the 15 songs. Just if you wanna give, like, one or two sentences. It doesn't have to be a whole essay on each song. But just talking about any kinda insight into why you picked that poetry and what made you kinda compose that song in that way.

[28:30-28:50] "Redacted as it is not pertinent to this document"

[28:51] SMK: ...you mentioned storytelling and acting. I assume that whoever's gonna sing these songs has at least a technique to be able to render them.

[29:05] MC: Yes.

[29:05] SMK: It's not my job or skill set to focus in on their technique.

[29:11] MC: Mm-hmm.

[29:11] SMK: It's my task is to give them a character to portray, a story to tell, the opportunity to act, 'cause again, music theater is one of my first loves. I'm very keen on singers being able to inhabit characters and being able to emote, being able to-

[29:28] MC: Hmm.

[29:28] SMK: ... make a journey, being able to take us on a journey. That, to me, is much more compelling than some of the traditional art songs, you know, from Europe perhaps that we've encountered, which are beautifully set-

[29:42] MC: Yeah.

[29:42] SMK: ... uh, but may not resonate with us as English speakers-

[29:47] MC: Mm-hmm.

[29:48] SMK: ... and may not necessarily tell narrative stories. I also have no problem with a character, with a singer changing character inside of a song.

[29:57] MC: Hmm.

[29:59] SMK: I love to do that. In Susie B Anthony, the singer plays five different roles.

[30:03] MC: Right.

[30:04] SMK: I love the notion of a musical interlude where a singer can sort of pause, change their posture a little bit, and now they're someone else.

[30:13] MC: Yeah.

[30:14] SMK: ... that to me is just, that's just good storytelling. I find it interesting. So, all right. "Ten Thousand Miles Away" appealed to me because I just thought the flowing nature of it, I thought it had a beautiful melody.

[30:25] MC: Mm.

[30:25] SMK: I should throw this at you, man. I changed the melodies in these songs if I felt like it.

[30:31] MC: Yes.

[30:32] SMK: I used the original lyrics that I found, and if I wanted to change them, I did. if I wanted to write new lyrics and throw them in, I did.

[30:43] MC: Mm-hmm.

[30:43] SMK: "Hell in Texas" has stuff that isn't even in the original text.

[30:47] MC: Right.

[30:48] SMK: That is my right as a folk to embellish these any way I like, the same way the originators did around the campfire-

[30:58] MC: Sure.

[30:58] SMK: ... you know, making stuff up. So "Ten Thousand Miles Away" had a lovely melody. I love the three-chord. I love the emotional quality of the three-chord, which comes to us in the chorus. I like the opportunity to create a flowing accompaniment that is, yes, a little like the waves of the sea, but let's not be too, you know, self-indulgent about that. But it does-

[31:20] MC: That's fine.

[31:21] SMK: ... have, it does have a flowing quality to it.

[31:23] MC: Yeah.

[31:24] SMK: I was attracted to that melodically. I liked the story. I think it's a very sweet story. It's a very... It's longing, so that attracted me.

[31:35-32:10] “Redacted as it is not pertinent to this document”

[32:11] SMK: Thank you to the Lomaxes-

[32:14] MC: Yeah.

[32:14] SMK: ... for putting lead sheets {together}. You know, they went door to door, and they had these people-

[32:18] MC: Mm-hmm.

[32:18] SMK: ... on front porches singing them songs. And a lot of them are notated into... a single staff, so there was a tune there.

[32:25] MC: Mm.

[32:25] SMK: I didn't write {these melodies}... None of these... Now, every one of these songs, I was given a tune.

[32:31] MC: Mm.

[32:31] SMK: Okay? I was given a tune. There was something notated from the Lomaxes or Carl Sandburg or something that I could look at and work with. So it was either the melodic shape of it, which had to be somewhat attractive-

[32:45] MC: Yeah.

[32:45] SMK: ... and then the lyrics had to pull me in terms of telling a story, and those were the principal things. It was telling a good story, it's melodically engaging, and then does that material deserve or inspire an accompaniment that might go places?

[33:03] MC: Yeah.

[33:04] SMK: 'cause I'm... I really am very keen on things like... I don't do it a lot in the folk songs, but I will modulate at the drop of a hat. I will change dynamics abruptly. I will use silence or pauses for dramatic effect. I mean, the end of, "The Ocean Burial"

[33:24] MC: Yeah.

[33:24] SMK: ... you know, is acapella.

[33:25] MC: Mm-hmm.

[33:26] SMK: And that was just one of those little strokes of genius, where you're running along, and you think, "How do I set this last verse? I'm just gonna let the accompaniment disappear."

[33:34] MC: Yeah.

[33:35] SMK: And that was just one of those... There is such a thing as inspiration. it's mostly work, but there are ideas that come to you, and you're like, "Oh, ooh, yeah. Oh, yeah."

[33:44] MC: Yeah.

[33:44] SMK: And sometimes, it's recognizing a happy accident-

[33:47] MC: Yeah.

[33:47] SMK: ... or it's just conjuring up a good idea. So, that's "Ten Thousand Miles Away," which is, as you know, the most performed, and I'm happy for that. I-

[33:55] MC: Yeah.

[33:56] SMK: ... I guess I'm a one-hit wonder, but that's-

[33:58] MC: I-

[33:58] SMK: ... better than a no-hit wonder.

[33:59] MC: ...here's the thing, I agree that "10,000 Miles Away" is kind of like your "Stairway to Heaven," if you will. It's like the one that people know about, even if they don't know you as a composer that well. But there are ones that I enjoy singing more than that song, so...

[34:15] SMK: Mm.

[34:15] MC: ... The first piece that I worked on for my master's recital was that. But then going into it and learning more about these pieces, I could go on for, for hours about, why I feel like every single one of them is really, really good.

[34:30] SMK: Oh, thank you, man.

[34:31] MC: Yeah.

[34:31] SMK: I appreciate that. I really appreciate that. Um, shall I go on?

[34:35] MC: Yeah, go for it.

[34:37] SMK: All right. “On the Other Shore” appealed to me because of its pathos, and the sadness and the reality of dealing with loss, which is something none of us can ever avoid.

[34:50] MC: Mm-hmm.

[34:51] SMK: And I liked... I thought it was a lovely melody, and it gave me the opportunity to use different piano registers with different verses. One verse might have a high, sort of Vaughan Williams-style rolled chord. Another one might have thicker chords in the midter- mid to low register. It gave me an opportunity in its strophic nature to mix up the registers in the piano part. It was an appealing sentiment that I was happy to work with.

[35:22] MC: Right.

[35:22] SMK: Uh, “The Farmer's Cursed Wife” was just plain funny, and-

[35:25] MC: Yep.

[35:25] SMK: ... and that's a banjo song. I mean, that's the closest thing in there to one of the Copland, you know, uh, "The Dodger" or something like that, you know?

[35:35] MC: Yeah.

[35:35] SMK: Um, it gave me the opportunity to do that and I just thought it was fun. I mean, I thought it was silly in body, and you could kinda, You know, it's rustic. It's something very American about that song.

[35:48] MC: Mm-hmm.

[35:49] SMK: ... it doesn't take itself too seriously. It sort of... It sort of jabs at the human experience in these little tongue-in-cheek ways. And I needed an uptempo, good-natured number, and I found that it was just a lot of fun.

[36:08] MC: Mm-hmm.

[36:08] SMK: then the accompaniment, you know, flows with the story too. When he goes to hell, you have all these descending minor triads, and it's-

[36:14] MC: Mm-hmm.

[36:14] SMK: ... there's a lot of text painting.... It was fun. "Wanderin'," I just, I love the static nature of that. I love the fact that this person is lost, and it doesn't change key, and it just has this rolling triplets, and it's just this kind of, "I don't know where I'm going."

[36:36-36:40] "Redacted as it is not pertinent to the document"

[36:41] MC: ... that I was like, "Why does this song sound so familiar?" And I realized that James Taylor has a version of "Wanderin'."

[36:47] SMK: I did discover that. And I love James Taylor. I know him well. I just didn't know that he had done that.

[36:53] MC: Hm.

[36:53] SMK: But I wasn't gonna let that deter me. I thought, "Okay, well, he did it great. I love James. I'll do my own version of it."

[36:58] MC: Yeah.

[36:58] SMK: The only other song in the whole set that I ever heard before was "Poor Wayfaring Stranger"

[37:03] MC: Yeah.

[37:03] SMK: ... which we all know.

[37:04] MC: Yeah.

[37:04] SMK: ...but "Wanderin'," yeah, the, the plaintiff, lost kind of roaming quality of Wanderin' was very attractive to me, particularly in the fourth slot of the first set.

[37:16] MC: Mm-hmm.

[37:17] SMK: And then that set up the "Red Iron Ore" piece, which is really much more epic.

[37:22] MC: Yes.

[37:23] SMK: I just like the journey. We started here, we came to here, we worked our fingers to the bone, then we came to here, then they towed us out, then we worked our way down here. And you could almost trace it across the top of the Great Lakes.

[37:36] MC: Mm.

[37:36] SMK: My only regret right now is that I should've modulated. I don't know why. That was my first set. Had I reset that now, I would've changed key several times.

[37:49] MC: Yeah.

[37:49] SMK: As I did in "California."

[37:51] MC: Hm.

[37:52] SMK: I would've done that. But, that's what attracted me to "Red Iron Ore" is it was a good finale for the first five song set. It was an epic tale.

[38:01] MC: Mm.

[38:01] SMK: And, it gives you a sense of a journey and an arrival. So that was that for that.

[38:08] MC: Mm-hmm.

[38:08] SMK: Shall I go, shall I keep going?

[38:09] MC: Yeah, keep going. I'm having-

[38:11] SMK: Okay.

[38:11] MC: ... a blast, so you, you go-

[38:12] SMK: Oh, great.

[38:14] MC: ... as long as you like.

[38:14] SMK: Well, thank you. I'm, I'm just, I'm digging into my memory banks here.

[38:17] MC: Mm-hmm.

[38:17] SMK: "The Bachelor's Lay," I came up with a rolling accompaniment for it, which I kinda liked. I thought it was just cute. I mean, here's this pathetic character who can't get anyone to fall in love with him.

[38:29] MC: Yeah.

[38:30] SMK: ...and it still goes through a series of key changes and pauses, and it stops, and there's this high accompaniment, and then he kind of laments. It's a tongue in cheek kind of lament.

[38:41] MC: Mm-hmm.

[38:42] SMK: I thought it was kinda cute. I like the idea of this pathetic character. (laughs) And, uh, and I think I also like the melody and the opportunity it gave me to roll up through these different keys as he tells his story.

[38:56] MC: Right.

[38:57] SMK: “Down, Down, Down” appealed to me because I came up with the three chords for the three downs. And I thought, well, this is nice. If we're gonna repeat these three words, they should each have a different, and not necessarily all that related chord.

[39:11] MC: Mm.

[39:12] SMK: So I had that, and then I liked very much the story. ...it's local. It's coal country; it's someone who knows nothing but this, and this is the life he's sort of been born into.

[39:29] MC: Mm-hmm.

[39:29] SMK: Even though his father said, "Don't do this," he did it anyway. And at the... one day this mountain's gonna fall down on top of me.

[39:37] MC: Mm-hmm.

[39:38] SMK: You know, it's very... It's a work song, but I think, in a way, all of these are a little bit the tale of every man.

[39:49] MC: Yeah.

[39:50] SMK: I think every one has a universality to it, which I really like. Uh, the stories are different, but it's all about the human experience, the experience in this country.

[39:58] MC: Hm.

[39:59] SMK: And I think every one of them has something we can relate to. So that was “Down, Down, Down.” I like the pesante quality of it. I like the sort of weight of that thing with the low Cs in the left hand. And it just has a sinking into the earth kind of quality about it, which I like.

[40:17] MC: I agree.

[40:18] SMK: ...”The Old Woman's Courtship” is just plain old fun, and it had a whole bunch of verses. Like, it's only a minute (laughs) a half long.

[40:26] MC: Yep.

[40:27] SMK: ...each verse goes up a step. I just thought it was very funny. I mean, that's like an old joke, you know. It's really a joke. This woman can't hear you until you say, "I love you," and then she's like, "Oh, now I hear you." You know?

[40:41] MC: Oh, okay. Yeah.

[40:42] SMK: So that was just a fun diversion, really and again, another banjo song with that sort of accompaniment.

[40:53] MC: I was gonna say that just makes sense, thinking about the accompaniment, that comparatively, it's just,, kind of boom, ba, ba, boom, ba, boom, that it, it was a banjo tune, uh, to begin with. That makes a lot more sense just thinking about that.

[41:07] MC: ... like I use that song pedagogically to help train tenors, I talk about in the document that finding falsetto and head voice and finding that ability to just be like, "Uh, speak a little louder, son. I need to hear you more clearly."

[41:21] SMK: Yeah.

[41:21] MC: ... that section of the voice to help start to open up high notes and things like that.

[41:24] SMK: It forces them to do that. The trick is not to be too silly.

[41:29] MC: Yes.

[41:30] SMK: It's not... when you really go hard for a joke, it might not land.

[41:35] MC: Mm.

[41:36] SMK: I've always... A lot of the music, a lot of the songs that I write have a satirical quality. Not the folk songs, my other art songs.

[41:42] MC: Mm.

[41:42] SMK: They have a satirical subtext that's quite serious.

[41:46] MC: Mm.

[41:47] SMK: That's saying something rather deep, but you can't, you can't wink. You can't say, "Hey, check this out," or, "Listen to me. Aren't I clever?"

[41:56] MC: Yeah.

[41:56] SMK: Everything has to be treated seriously.

[41:59] MC: Mm.

[42:00] SMK: And another sidebar is audiences today, as you know, are much more informed than they've ever been in the past.

[42:10] MC: Yes.

[42:10] SMK: We can never dumb down for our audiences. I mean, they've grown up with movies and TV and recorded music, and they've absorbed a ton of stuff. This isn't the medicine show that slides through the medieval village and the puppets come up, and they're all so enticed by it.

[42:25] MC: Right.

[42:25] SMK: ... no, the audiences are much more savvy than they've ever been, and I think it's important to respect them when you're writing. So, um, now one of my favorites is The Ocean Burial.

[42:35] MC: Yeah.

[42:36] SMK: I just think it's a lovely melody, and I've heard it as "Bury Me Out on the Lone Prairie." You know, and a lot of these songs, there's multiple versions of these songs with completely different sets of lyrics, and you realize how they've cross-pollinated themselves over the centuries perhaps. And when I found "The Ocean Burial," I was familiar with the tune and I was familiar with the idea. I loved the, I approached it with a very thin emotional tone, pleadingly.

[43:11] MC: Mm-hmm.

[43:12] SMK:for someone to be dying and to actually have presence of mind to say, "Please, please don't do this."

[43:18] MC: Yeah.

[43:19] SMK: ... it's deeply profound to me, and then it even has in the middle of it, it's got that piano interlude, which is like fortissimo, and it's like-

[43:27] MC: Hmm.

[43:27] SMK: ... you know, 12 bars. And of course, as a teacher, (laughs) our big question is, what is the singer gonna do for those 12 bars?

[43:35] MC: Right.

[43:36] SMK: You know they're just standing there. I mean, do you gaze off into space meaningfully in the middle distance, or do you move, or do you look at the accompanist? I find that an interesting challenge, and I put a lot of interludes into my stuff because I want the singer to have a challenge.

[43:53] MC: Mm-hmm.

[43:53] SMK: How do you interpret when you're not singing?

[43:57] MC: Mm-hmm.

[43:58] SMK: ...And I don't necessarily have the answer.

[44:01] MC: Yeah.

[44:01] SMK: It's a challenge, but the storytelling, as you and I both well know, music can say something quite profound-

[44:08] MC: Mm-hmm.

[44:09] SMK: ... uh, beyond what words can say. And when that interlude in “The Ocean Burial” comes through it's really saying in musical terms, this is heavy.

[44:20] MC: Yeah.

[44:21] SMK: This is profound. This person's at the end of their life. What's going to happen? Oh my God. Then, it pulls out with this lovely, “I've always wanted to be buried where my father's buried.”

[44:30] MC: Yeah.

[44:32] SMK: ...I think that emerges from the turbulence of the interlude. It... I... that very satisfying way to me. So I love the melody, I love the interpretive plateaus. I always write in plateaus, man. I think of my language as a series of tonal plateaus, like a chart. You can actually look at these slabs going up, coming down, dropping up, peaking. And, um, and the folk songs all embody that, even by just their own inherent storytelling nature.

[45:02] MC: Plateau, okay.

[45:02] SMK: But “The Ocean Burial” clearly has these whole series of plateaus that mirror the mindset of this character. I'm particularly fond of that, and I like the acapella thing at the end. I like the idea of leaving the audience in stunned silence.

[45:18] MC: Yeah.

[45:19] SMK: ...they might not even know the song is over, then there's this moment, and they're like, “Oh, God. Oh, geez.”

[45:24] MC: Well, to me, there's so much interpretation to it, the idea that, you know, the music dies when we die, or the idea that, we don't get to tell how we die, right? {The music} takes on a kind of narration as well.

[45:40] SMK: Mm-hmm.

[45:40] MC: ... just painting the picture of we've been at sea with this man dying, and now we're looking from the shore, and it's silent, right? That it the crashing waves of dying There's a lot of imagery that goes into it when I think about that section.

[45:55] SMK: I think there's a lot to act. I think it gives the singer something to act as well.

[45:59] MC: Yeah.

[46:00] SMK: ... which is very satisfying, and that's one of my favorites. But then on the other side of the coin now, "California"-

[46:07] MC: Mm-hmm.

[46:07] SMK: ... is one of my other favorites, and I love that because it's just rollicking. And I was caught by the exuberance and optimism of the text. The gold rush, this promised land everybody's going for. Now, you and I both know that didn't usually work out.

[46:25] MC: Yep.

[46:26] SMK: And, and at the end of that song, it actually has this little sort of suspended, augmented sixth chord and that one chord right before the very end, that one chord tells you, "This ain't gonna work, dude."

[46:38] MC: Yeah. (laughs)

[46:40] SMK: I love "California" 'cause I, I like the way it jumps in and out of keys, and I like the way each verse has this new surge to it. And then, when he, when he reflects about the people he's left at home, everything's augmented rhythmically.

[46:55] MC: Yeah.

[46:57] SMK: I'm very fond of "California." I like the story, I like its arc, I like its very terraced, variations in range and register and accompaniment. I think it's a good storytelling song. "The Gallows Tree," I know the Led Zeppelin "Gallows Tree," but that's a completely different song.

[47:21] MC: Yes.

[47:21] SMK: I like the idea of this person about to be hung. I thought, "Well, that's a good dramatic context."

[47:29] MC: Mm-hmm.

[47:29] SMK: Even though the accompaniment is pretty straight. I mean, this, this could be dissonant clangs-

[47:34] MC: Yeah.

[47:34] SMK: ... and it's really not. I think I was struck by the situation it presented.

[47:42] MC: Mm-hmm.

[47:43] SMK: I liked that it was fairly uptempo, so I could start the third set with that. And then I liked that his love comes over and says, "I brought money. I'm going to save you." And the

accompaniment gets very, very sweet. I just think it's a good story. I like the situation. I'm a Stranger Here is another of my favorites.

[48:06] MC: Mm-hmm.

[48:07] SMK: That's another one of those, uh, I'm lost {songs}.

[48:11] MC: Mm-hmm.

[48:12] SMK: I'm just lost and the accompaniment rolls, and it's got this thumb in the right hand with this moving line. ...I liked the melancholy rolling..... this gentle angst about it was very attractive to me.

[48:32] MC: Mm.

[48:33] SMK: I like "I'm a Stranger Here." I was attracted by the melancholy and the sort of other side of human nature that we don't all succeed.

[48:47] MC: Mm.

[48:48] SMK: We don't all land, we don't all find our pocket. ...there are lost souls out there, and you and I may know some as well.

[48:56] MC: Yeah.

[48:57] SMK: I feel for people who are lost. I think life is an absolute crapshoot, everything from what family are you born into, to what you experience, to what opportunities present themselves, to what friends do you choose. I mean, you name it, it's a crapshoot.

[49:16] MC: Mm-hmm.

[49:17] SMK: ... poetically, presents, and again, in a, in a poetic and lyrical nature, the underside, the underbelly of success, the underbelly of finding your way.

[49:30] MC: Mm.

[49:31] SMK: I like the grayish, quality of it. I think it gives the singer an opportunity to get a little severe without going over the top.

[49:42] MC: Okay.

[49:43] SMK: I think it's dramatically a good opportunity for the singer. If they've just sung something that's kinda robust, they can now pull back and say, "Here's the other side."

[49:53] MC: Okay.

[49:53] SMK: "The Drunken Old Fool" was just a fun story, and that's another, you know, one of those sort of, not a banjo, but a kinda silly reel. I liked the story that this guy's so drunk that he can't even tell his wife he's been (laughs) having an affair with someone.

[50:08] MC: Yeah. (laughs)

[50:08] SMK: And I needed a comic number for the center of that third set.

[50:12] MC: Mm-hmm.

[50:13] SMK: So, that just worked out...coming up with those repeated chords, everything else, either rolls or has some sort of movement to it. But just to have those chunky cords underneath it, like he's trotting, plodding his way home-

[50:27] MC: Yep.

[50:27] SMK: ... he's drunk, that worked for me. "Poor Wayfaring Stranger" I think is another, just a lovely, familiar song. But I approached it with higher accompaniment.

[50:39] MC: Yes.

[50:40] SMK: Slight, slight dissonance, but only slight.

[50:43] MC: Mm-hmm.

[50:44] SMK: I was attracted to the melancholy, the searching, trying to find your place. 'Cause I think almost every work of art, Matt, that you and I encounter, almost every one has a subtext of trying to find a home.

[51:00] MC: Yeah.

[51:01] SMK: Just everything does. ...you can take your favorite movie and you pick it apart, like Casablanca-

[51:08] MC: Mm.

[51:08] SMK: ... one of the greatest movies ever made. What every one of these people is trying to get someplace.

[51:13] MC: Right.

[51:14] SMK: It's desperately powerful. "Poor Wayfaring Stranger." I think it's melodically strong, I think it gives them a decent range, and I think the accompaniment is sensitive to the text.

[51:29] MC: Yes.

[51:30] SMK: Which works for me. "Hell in Texas" was just, I was immediately attracted to the text.

[51:36] MC: Mm-hmm.

[51:37] SMK: This is fun. The devil wants to make hell and the only land suitable is in Texas.

[51:42] MC: Yeah.

[51:43] SMK: And even that's not good enough.

[51:45] MC: Yep.

[51:46] SMK: So let's take a poke at Texas, I don't care.

[51:49] MC: Yeah. (laughs)

[51:49] SMK: I changed material. The middle eight has completely new material where he's making hell.

[51:56] MC: Hmm.

[51:56] SMK: He's scattering tarantulas and doing all this, that's original material.

[52:00] MC: Very cool.

[52:01] SMK: ...melodically I just, I strayed away, otherwise it would've just been the same material again and again. I said, "No, we need something new here. We can tell the story, and I can use some of the existing text. But let's break away, then we can return." So, I just thought Hell in Texas would be a good, a fun acting song.

[52:18] MC: Yes.

[52:19] SMK: I think it's funny without busting anybody up necessarily.

[52:25] MC: Mm-hmm.

[52:26] SMK: And I think it gives the actor a chance to cut loose a bit. What a lot of singers don't get, Matt, and maybe you do-

[52:33] MC: Hmm.

[52:33] SMK: ... is that that huge piano interlude in Hell in Texas-

[52:36] MC: Yeah.

[52:39] MC: Yeah, that's what I always assumed what it was. I always talk about it, it sounds like all of a sudden you're just playing like a Rachmaninoff concerto outta nowhere, and it's got this

very thick texture of him just creating all this crazy stuff. And then you come back in and just being like, "Well, you know, if you, uh, you ever need anything else, you know?"

[52:59] SMK: Mm-hmm. This is, tthis place works for me. I could have put in parenthesis, he makes hell.

[53:06] MC: Yeah.

[53:06] SMK: Or he builds his hell. And one singer whose name escapes me right now, actually had the stage person flick the lights on and off during that.

[53:15] MC: That's so funny.

[53:16] SMK: It was great. It really was great. And he did, I have to, uh, God, I don't have his name, Matt, but he, when he was checking out the dirt, the soil, he got on his knees and he reached down-

[53:26] MC: Mm-hmm.

[53:27] SMK: ... and he's like holding this stuff, and he rolls up his sleeves and he acted it in a very engaging way. I think Hell in Texas is, is a fun acting piece.

[53:35] MC: Yes, okay.

[53:37] SMK: So, there we go. Was this, is there anything there you can use?

[53:40] MC: There's a ton that I can use (laughs) trust me. We're good in terms of, uh, being able to use a lot of this stuff. Yeah, I mean, I just wanna say, I think it's awesome to get to know a living composer and, you know, I have to say on a personal note that I love singing your music. I have always wanted to advocate, your music more to people that don't know about it, though

you are very well known in our circles in general. So, it holds a very special place in my heart. And Steven, I just wanted to say thank you so much for this wonderful insight. And, you know, I hope you have a wonderful day and I hope that you've had fun doing this as well too.

[53:4-54:52] “Redacted as it is not pertinent to this document”

[54:53] SMK: And just, just to sum it up, I'm pleased that you like them. I appreciate that and I'm glad they're getting out there. I do think that they serve as a bridge to American folk song to American art song.

[55:07] MC: Yeah.

[55:07] SMK: I think they serve as a bridge to that. I think there is value in that. If you're gonna get into American art song, this may not be a bad place to begin.

[55:15] MC: Hm.

[55:16] SMK: So, thank you so much, Matt. I appreciate it. Wish you all the best.

[55:19] MC: Yeah, and of course, you know, uh, stay in touch and I will obviously let you know anytime I'm performing your pieces or doing anything or if we end up doing some kind of recording project.

[55:29] SMK: I would love that. Thank you so much and good luck to you.

[55:31] MC: Thank you, appreciate you.

[55:33] SMK: All right, take care.

[55:34] MC: Bye-bye.

[55:35] SMK: Bye-bye.