UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

EXPLORING THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF CHOREOGRAPHING OPERA PRIOR TO AND AMIDST THE COVID-19 GLOBAL PANDEMIC: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND COMPLEXITIES

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN DANCE

By

CHRISTA ST. JOHN

Norman, Oklahoma

2021

Downloaded from SHAREOK. Persistent Handle URL: https://hdl.handle.net/11244/329522

EXPLORING THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF CHOREOGRAPHING OPERA PRIOR TO AND AMIDST THE COVID-19 GLOBAL PANDEMIC: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND COMPLEXITIES

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF DANCE

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Mary Margaret Holt, Chair

Michael Bearden

William Ferrara

© Copyright by CHRISTA ST. JOHN 2021
All Rights Reserved.

Acknowledgments

The culmination of this research is a product of the support, guidance, and collaboration of a great number of persons without whom this work would not have been possible.

First, I thank my committee chair, Dean of OU's Weitzenhoffer Family College of Fine Arts, Nichols Chair, Presidential Professor, and Regents' Professor of Dance, Mary Margaret Holt, for her choreographic and academic mentorship throughout this process. One of the most valuable things a person can give another is their time. Dean Holt generously gave her time and the mentorship she provided is of inestimable value and is the model from which I endeavor to mentor my future students.

Thank you to committee members Director of the School of Dance, Michael Bearden, for his choreographic mentorship and continued support, and OU Opera Theatre Stage Director and Professor, William Ferrara, for his flexibility and creative problem-solving abilities as we navigated unprecedented circumstances throughout our collaborations together.

To Professor Jeremy Lindberg, thank you for recommending me as choreographer for OU Opera Theatre and fostering my love of choreographing opera.

Many thanks to the artistic collaborators on both opera productions, Associate Producer Kasey Allee-Foreman, Professor of Costume Design Lloyd Cracknell, Artistic Director and Conductor Dr. Jonathan Shames, and many others, and to the OU Dance Faculty whose willingness to make numerous emendations to accommodate opera rehearsals is greatly appreciated.

A huge thank you to my dear husband Dr. Brian St. John for allowing the opera productions to be a third party in our marriage for several years, and for always being willing to help with creative ideas, musical input, and a significant amount of humor.

Abstract

This thesis explores opportunities, challenges, and complexities of choreographing opera by examining the creative process of choreographing two full-length opera productions at the University of Oklahoma, Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel* (October 2019) and Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers* (March 2021), under vastly different circumstances. The research period for *The Pearl Fishers* spanned the time leading up to and amidst the outbreak of COVID-19, which led to a global pandemic that greatly affected daily life in the United States. OU's production of *The Pearl Fishers* was conceived and initially choreographed prior to the outbreak of COVID-19; the choreography underwent two substantial revisions as the virus proliferated, resulting in three different versions of the opera which was, in part, choreographed through a combination of rehearsals in-person and via the computer application, Zoom. The outbreak of COVID-19 required the development of new strategies to produce an opera while observing university, local, state, and national COVID-19 safety protocols, which resulted in creating a socially distanced, hybrid digital and live, in-person production of *The Pearl Fishers* which premiered in March 2021. Choreographing both operas in relatively quick succession under vastly different circumstances highlighted the pandemic's radical effect on the fields of dance and opera. While the findings are limited in scope, they have broader implications for studying dance and opera together and contribute to the limited scholarly discourse on opera choreography. This thesis offers strategies for choreographing opera productions, sheds light on opera choreographers who, at times, take a subsidiary role for their contributions to the art, and serves as a timely account of the complexities of choreographing an opera production during a global pandemic.

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction **1**
Project Description 1
A Review of the Literature 6
A Brief Overview of the History of Dance in Opera 9
The Scholarly Study of Dance in Opera 15
A Note: The Effect of COVID-19 on the Performing Arts During the Research Period 19
Chapter II: Historical Precedence of Ballet in *The Golden Cockerel* **27**
Chapter III: OU's Production of *The Golden Cockerel* **31**
The Golden Cockerel Production Overview 31
Spring 2019 32
Fall 2019 41
Chapter IV: Analysis of OU's Production of *The Golden Cockerel* **55**
The Use of Dance in Act I and Act II of *The Golden Cockerel* 55
Analysis of the Final Performances of *The Golden Cockerel* 65
Chapter V: *The Pearl Fishers*: Historical Background **69**
Chapter VI: OU's Production of *The Pearl Fishers* **77**
Fall 2019 77
Spring 2020 82
Summer 2020 99
Fall 2020 103
Spring 2021 118
Chapter VII: Analysis and Reflection **147**
Analysis of OU's Production of *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)* 147
Comparative Analysis of *The Golden Cockerel* and *The Pearl Fishers* 157
Reflection 160
Bibliography **165**
Appendix **170**
Appendix A: Staging Diagrams: *The Pearl Fishers* Version 1 170
Appendix B: Outline *The Pearl Fishers* Version 2 233
Appendix C: Outline: *The Pearl Fishers* Version 3 234
Appendix D: Costume Designs *The Golden Cockerel* and *The Pearl Fishers* 239
Appendix E: Video Links to *The Golden Cockerel* and *The Pearl Fishers* 249

Chapter I: Introduction

Project Description

Ballet and opera have a shared lineage and, at times, a mercurial relationship. Throughout its history, opera reflects the ideas and ideals of society. Similarly, ballet is often an expression of societal aesthetic preference. Although the two art forms evolved together, eventually their paths diverged. While often historically intertwined, ballet and opera are vastly different, and the traditions and conventions of each can be incongruous. Ballet can, however, greatly enhance, support, and drive the dramatic action of an opera when the choreographer is provided a clear definition of the role of dance within a larger operatic opus. Creating effective movement supporting the needs of the opera requires a specific choreographic skillset. Throughout history, prominent choreographers have been drawn to the world of opera and have contributed to the choreographic repertoire of operatic performance. While the significance of dance in opera varies from production to production, the power of the two art forms together is compelling and historically rich.

In this thesis, I explore the creative process of choreographing opera productions as well as analyze how external factors surrounding the creation of a production can greatly affect the aesthetic outcome. I examine the complexities, challenges, and opportunities that choreographing opera can present and offer strategies to support different functions of dance in opera. During the research period, not only did I have ample opportunity to examine the creative process by serving as choreographer for two full-length operas at the University of Oklahoma (OU), but the research period spanned the time leading up to and during the outbreak of the novel coronavirus COVID-19, which led to a global pandemic that radically changed our way of life and thus, the

fields of dance and opera. In this document, I analyze and record the process of choreographing two different opera productions under vastly different circumstances.

While musicians are bound often by the dictates of the score, opera choreographers *may* have considerable freedom to interpret music and text into movement. It is essential to develop strategies to create work that complements the opera's needs and aligns traditions and conventions of ballet with that of opera.

Throughout the research period, I explored how the relationship between dance and opera changed based on production needs as well as examined the challenges and opportunities inherent in choreographing opera that differ from choreographing concert dance. I analyzed how the complexity of circumstances under which the choreography was conceived had significant effect on the choreographic work's aesthetic outcome. As my research continued and the COVID-19 virus ravaged the US, I pondered under what circumstance the adage “the show must go on” no longer applies. Due to the subjective nature of this research, I did not seek to draw definitive conclusions from these topics. Rather, I sought to gain insight into the creative process of creating choreography for opera, an aspect of opera production that does not appear to be a frequent focus of significant study. I also sought to provide a real-time account of choreographing under such unusual and historically challenging circumstances.

The origins of this thesis began in the fall of 2018 when I served as ballet master for the production of Maurice Ravel’s *The Child and the Spells (L'enfant et les Sortilèges)* choreographed by Professor Jeremy Lindberg for OU’s University Theatre season. In 2019, at Lindberg’s recommendation, I was asked to choreograph composer Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov’s *The Golden Cockerel* (*Le coq d'Or*) for the University Theatre’s fall season. The production premiered in the October of 2019. Later that fall, after collaborating with OU Opera Theatre Stage

Director, William Ferrara, and Artistic Director and Conductor, Jonathan Shames, on *The Golden Cockerel* production, we began discussing ideas for a version of composer Georges Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers (Les Pêcheurs de Perles)* for the University Theatre's fall 2020 season. Professor Ferrara suggested creating a non-traditional version of the opera that would feature expanded use of dance. In this reimagined version, the chorus would sing from the orchestra pit, and the dancers would embody the vocal parts of the chorus onstage with principal singers. This unconventional staging of the opera would provide significant opportunity to devise strategies for choreographing an opera in which dance would be a primary component. The production of *The Pearl Fishers* was conceived and choreographed prior to the outbreak of COVID-19; the choreography then underwent several minor and two substantial revisions as the virus proliferated across the world.

When I was engaged as choreographer, OU Opera Theatre was scheduled to present *The Pearl Fishers* in October 2020. The fully-staged production was to include a live orchestra, four principal singers, and a supporting chorus of singers and dancers. Dance rehearsals for the opera commenced in February 2020. By March of 2020, however, OU shifted in-person instruction online due to the rapid spread of COVID-19 across the US. In May 2020, a decision was made to postpone *The Pearl Fishers* performances to March 2021 for safety reasons. To honor social distancing guidelines, we devised a new version of the opera with a reduced score, a smaller cast, no physical contact, and limited interaction between the dancers and singers. In the fall of 2020, however, as cases of COVID-19 increased exponentially, we reconceived the production yet again with an eye toward increased safety. We reworked the opera to eliminate all interaction between the dancers and singers. We reverted to recorded orchestral music for the dance scenes, used only live piano accompaniment for the principal singers, eliminated one of the principal

singing roles, and removed the chorus of singers altogether. In addition to reducing the cast size, we video recorded and projected the dance scenes during the live concert to minimize the number of persons both onstage and off. Due to necessary but substantial cuts to the score, we included pre-recorded narration throughout the opera to keep the narrative intact. Despite significant challenges and delays, we may be the only opera performance-based entity fortunate enough to see a production, conceived prior to the pandemic, come to fruition in the COVID-19 era.

The purpose of this thesis is three-fold: to experiment with and develop new strategies for choreographing for opera in the age of COVID-19 through a socially distanced staging of *The Pearl Fishers*, to contribute to the limited scholarly discourse on opera choreography by analyzing the creative process prior to and amidst a global pandemic, and to explore challenges and opportunities working in opera can present for choreographers that may differ from choreographing concert dance. While the findings are limited in scope, they have broader implications for studying dance and opera together. This thesis sheds light on opera choreographers who, at times, take a subsidiary role for their contributions to the art and serves as a timely account of the complexities of putting on an opera production during a pandemic. The culmination of the research resulted in collaborative performances of *The Golden Cockerel* and *The Pearl Fishers* involving Oklahoma Festival Ballet, OU Opera Theatre, OU Helmerich School of Drama design and production team, and OU School of Music supporting this thesis document.

I have been fortunate to create choreographic works throughout my career and sought to expand my knowledge regarding the unique process of choreographing opera. I joined OU's School of Dance as a Graduate Teaching Fellow in 2018. During my time at OU, I served as a

ballet master for the Oklahoma Festival Ballet and ballet master and choreographer for OU Opera Theatre. Prior to my time at OU, I was Artist-in-Residence at Western Kentucky University (WKU) where I produced a number of choreographic works for the WKU Dance Company and WKU Symphony, and for collaborative performances with a local professional orchestra, Orchestra Kentucky. Before working in higher education, I was the Elementary Division Director for the Northwest Florida Ballet Academie, a public, academic school and ballet conservatory for which students auditioned for admittance. I also performed as a professional ballet dancer with ballet companies across the United States, including Ballet Austin, Louisville Ballet, Charleston Ballet Theatre, Atlantic City Ballet, and the Northwest Florida Ballet. My professional choreographic career began in 2011 when Ballet Indiana commissioned me to create my own full-length version of *The Nutcracker.*

I remain humbled to have the opportunity to challenge my creative process in ways it has not been challenged before. Creating effective movement fitting with the needs of both opera productions was no small task. Furthermore, creating effective movement without physical proximity, touch, and an ability to travel freely through space required an open mind and the ability to experiment. A good working relationship with the stage director, conductor, and production team was paramount throughout the process, especially as we navigated uncharted waters of producing an opera during a global pandemic of this magnitude.

During the research and writing of this document, millions of people lost their lives worldwide, and countless more suffered economic, physical, and emotional trauma, the lasting effects of which we will not know for some time. It was a privilege to continue to pursue this project under these conditions.

A Review of the Literature

Literature pertaining to the creative process of opera choreography is limited, yet several scholars have provided substantial insight into the role of dance in opera. Professor of Music at Cornell University, Rebecca Harris-Warrick, specializes in French baroque music with an emphasis in interdisciplinary performance and practice in musicology, dance history, and literature. Harris-Warrick's 2016 book, *Dance and Drama in French Baroque Opera; A History*, examines the role of dance in the operas of Jean-Baptiste Lully spanning from Lully's first opera (1672) to start of Jean-Philippe Rameau's operatic career (1733).[1] Harris-Warrick argues against the notion that dance served merely as incidental decoration to operatic productions and provides evidence that dance was fundamentally integral to the core of the development of French opera.

Professor Emerita of Musicology at the University of Oregon, Marion Smith's 2010 book, *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle,* bears many similarities to Harris-Warrick's research but focuses on the Paris Opéra a century later.[2] Smith centers her research on the Paris Opéra from the 1830s to 1840s as ballet began to stand alone from opera. Similar to Harris-Warrick, Smith denotes the significance of ballet in the evolution of French opera, yet concomitantly demonstrates the relevance of opera in ballet's development during the same period. Smith advocates for the study of opera and ballet together - an argument relevant today.

Daniel Albright, Harvard Professor of Literature and specialist in theories and strategies of comparative arts, is the author of the 2009 book, *Music Speaks: On the Language of Opera, Dance, and Song*. Albright's chapter that has been published separately in several academic

[1] Rebecca Harris-Warrick, *Dance and Drama in French Baroque Opera: a History* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[2] Marian Elizabeth Smith, *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

journals, “Golden Calves, the Role of Dance in Opera,” offers a unique and somewhat sardonic analysis of the relationship between dance and opera.[3] Albright highlights the mutable role dance can serve in an operatic production and emphasizes the importance of understanding the role dance plays to either support, provide relief from, or resist the action of the opera. He points out that incongruities can occur when one artform attempts to do the work of another.

Albright’s article is cited by University of Chicago Professor of Germanic Studies David Levin in his 2012 essay, “Choreographing Opera: How Ballet ReThinks Operatic Performance.”[4] Levin who has worked as a dramaturg and collaborator for opera houses and as a collaborator for choreographer William Forsythe, among others, makes the distinction between a “director’s opera” and a “choreographer’s opera” by examining operatic productions in which the choreographer had a significant influence on the production’s aesthetic outcome. Levin distinguishes his research from Albright’s by focusing less on the mercurial relationship between dance and opera and the perceived intrusion of dancers on stage in an operatic work as in Albright’s essay but emphasizes the outcome of reshaping opera in the hands of a choreographer. He uses Pina Bausch’s 2009 version of Gluck’s, *Orpheus and Eurydice* (retitled *Orpheus und Eurydike)* as an exemplar of this notion. Bausch relegates the singers to the orchestra pit and generally marginalizes the principal singers’ bodies in favor of the dancing body as a focus. Bausch’s choreographic concept is akin to the notion of choreographer Michel Fokine in several iterations of his version of *The Golden Cockerel* (outlined in his memoir *Fokine: Memoirs of a*

[3] Daniel Albright, *Music Speaks: on the Language of Opera, Dance and Song* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009).

[4] David Levin, “Choreographing Opera: How Ballet ReThinks Operatic Performance” (Essay presented at the international conference How Performance Thinks, Kingston University, London, April 13-14, 2012.), http://elenacologni.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/conference-performance-thinks-proceedings.pdf#page=137 137-142.

Ballet Master) in which he had the singers sing from the sides of the stage in one version and forewent singers altogether in another.[5]

Despite dance being a primary feature of French opera, there is not a significant amount of literature that describes dance and opera together (likely a component of the impetus for Harris-Warrick's and Smith's research). For example, despite Georges Bizet's being known in part for his operatic compositions, Bizet biographers Hugh McDonald and Mina Curtiss make little mention of the role of dance in Bizet's operas.[6] French musicologist Hervé Lacombe, author of one of the most definitive resources on nineteenth-century French opera, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, dissects Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers* and offers significant insights into the production.[7] And yet, in 351 pages there is only one choreographic description of dance in *The Pearl Fishers* (from a review of the production) and no mention of who choreographed the dance scenes. Lacombe frequently mentions the importance of dance to French opera, however.

Notable to this research and the topic of dance in opera, is that the vast majority of scholarly literature on dance in opera is written by those outside the field of dance. Much of the writing is by scholars who possess insight into the world of dance but who are not professional dance practitioners or choreographers themselves. This does not discredit their contributions to the field; on the contrary, those outside the field of dance performance and choreography provide

[5] Michel Fokine, *Fokine: Memoirs of a Ballet Master*, ed. Anatole Chujoy, trans. Vitale Fokine (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961).

[6] Mina Kirstein Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977) and Hugh Macdonald, *Bizet* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[7] Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

a unique perspective on the topic. It is notable, however, because there is an opportunity for practitioners of dance performance and choreography to contribute their perspective on the topic.

A Brief Overview of the History of Dance in Opera

Opera has relied on the aesthetic power of movement since its inception. The shared lineage of opera and ballet can be traced back to the Renaissance courts of Italy. The premieres of the earliest surviving operas, such as Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* (1600) and Claudio Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607) at the start of the seventeenth century, coincided with the transition from the Renaissance to the Baroque era of music. Renaissance means "rebirth," and the emphasis placed on science and art from antiquity was reborn during this era. The Catholic Church became less influential, and science, art, and architecture were more frequently created for humanist tastes rather than for church use.

The Renaissance saw the rise of the aristocracy and a slow, gradual shift in the focus of art toward philosophy and drama based on ancient Grecian models. Concurrently, members of the aristocratic class felt emboldened to support secular art. The subject matter of early operas tended to be derived from tales from Antiquity, affording composers and librettists the ability to engage in metaphor rather than to address contemporaneous societal issues with direct language. Italian aristocrats of the late Renaissance and early Baroque era enjoyed lavish spectacles; elaborate wedding celebrations sometimes lasted days. Pastoral theatre and *intermedi* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries began to emphasize the blending of music, singing, and dance, thereby leading to the development of early opera. Opera and dance were entwined to a certain extent from the beginning.

A musicologist specializing in late Renaissance and early Baroque music in Italy, Tim Carter states regarding opera's origin, "Few genres in the history of music have their origins

fixed with such apparent precision as opera: we know when and where the first through-composed music dramas appeared on the stage - in Florence in the mid-1590s - and the precise political, social and cultural contexts that gave them birth."[8] Similarly, renowned dance scholar Ivor Guest describes, "Ballet is a theatre art that, by virtue of its origins, is essentially and incontrovertibly European. Those origins are, in large measure, to be sought in the Italian courts of the Renaissance in the fifteenth century, where it developed as means of displaying the splendour and power of the ruling prince."[9]

In the sixteenth century, Italian Catherine de' Medici brought her love of music, dance, and spectacle with her to France when she married King Henry II. The roots of ballet took hold under de' Medici in France's royal courts and, in the seventeenth century, flourished under King Louis XIV's reign. Guest states regarding ballet in France, "At first it took the form of an adjunct to opera, as in the opera ballets of Rameau, but from the mid-eighteenth century, it became an independent theatre art, in which the stage action was conveyed by the dancers themselves in pantomime. This was one of the great theatrical turning-points that marked the Age of Enlightenment."[10]

While ballet and opera have similar origins, the development of ballet into a codified form and as a professional enterprise in the seventeenth century eventually led to ballet's independence from opera. Ballet and opera, at times, co-existed onstage instead of working as one complete, cohesive piece of art. The insertion of ballets into opera grew in popularity in the seventeenth century, in part, to adapt to French tastes and ameliorate the *laissez-faire* attitude the

[8] Tim Carter, "The Seventeenth Century," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera*, ed. Roger Parker (New York, New York: Oxford University Press ,1994), 1.

[9] Ivor Guest, "Foreword," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, ed. Marion Kant (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xi.

[10] Ibid.

French seemed to show toward Italian opera. The insertion of unrelated balletic material continued throughout opera's history, though it is less common in contemporary opera. The nineteenth century composer Giacomo Meyerbeer is known for his insertion of unrelated ballets into his operatic works with little to no regard for the complementary nature of the ballet to the dramatic action of the opera. Musicologist Daniel Albright calls Meyerbeer, "The great master of inconsequential ballet."[11] In his article, "Golden Calves: The Role of Dance in Opera," Albright explains,

> We can take *Le Prophéte* as a sort of limit-point of un-relatedness between a ballet and the opera in which it is included…But few composers possess Meyerbeer's godlike indifference to dramatic propriety. Typically some relation, however tenuous, can be found between opera and ballet, and in this relation, there is often something disturbing, challenging- something that calls into question our usual ease at accepting the conventions of either ballet or opera.[12]

French society had significant influence on the inclusion of ballet within operatic productions especially as Italian operas were exported to France under the reign of King Louis XIV. Italian opera was not particularly well-received even though ballets were intentionally inserted into the operas to appeal to French tastes.[13] In his book on opera, music professor Charles Hamm states, "Most of the earlier operas had dance sequences, but it was the French who were most enthusiastic about dance and retained it as an essential feature of their operas. At first, dance was treated as pure diversion, with dramatic action stopping for a sequence of dance; later, composers often tried to integrate dance scenes into the flow of the action."[14]

---

[11] Daniel Albright, "Golden Calves: The Role of Dance in Opera," *The Opera Quarterly 22,* no. 1 (2006), https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/211853, 22.

[12] Ibid., 23.

[13] Carter, "The Seventeenth Century," 33.

[14] Charles Hamm, *Opera* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1966), 196.

Although no other country matched French audiences' demand for ballet in their operas, dance has been a prominent feature of opera in other countries throughout history. The English masque, a pre-curser to early English opera, featured dancing, a tradition that continued in early English opera. Early Italian operas such as Monteverdi's *Orfeo* included dance. Ballet, which underwent significant development in nineteenth century Russia, was featured regularly in autochthonous Russian opera.[15]

The art form of opera has a rich history of entwinement with the ideas and ideals of society and popular tastes. Public taste can be a dynamic force. Each generation of opera creators responded with new compositional techniques, new modes of communication, and new pathways of expression. Similarly, dance in opera evolved with changing public preferences. The start of the twentieth century saw the rise of modernism, and composers like Berg and Stravinsky were at the razor's edge of innovative ideas. As musical forms gave way to radical change in the twentieth century, the balletic genre saw considerable transformation in the US thanks, in part, to influences from the Ballets Russes (and subsequent Ballets Russes companies) and the rise of modern and jazz dance. By the second half of the twentieth century, the lines between modern dance, jazz dance, and ballet began to blur, and the emergence of postmodern dance challenged preconceived notions of the definition of dance.

In Alban Berg's 1925 opera, *Wozzeck,* dance does not serve a primary role. The inclusion of one dance scene and the use of movement throughout, however, adds a dynamic layer. Scene four of Act II foreshadows the opera's bloody conclusion amidst the backdrop of wild, bibulous dancing. The end of *Wozzeck* serves as an example of the importance of opera's visual aspect for dramatic effect. *Wozzeck* closes with an unsettling image. The action unfolds as follows. A boy is

[15] Ibid.

galloping on a hobby horse while other children sing and play. Another child enters and tells the young boy his mother is dead. As the boy learns from other children that he has been orphaned, he blithely resumes playing with his hobby horse repeating "hop, hop!" over and over. As the other children run off stage to look at his dead mother's corpse, the boy is left alone and continues to gallop, with his horse, in an endless loop repeating "hop, hop!" until the opera's end. The repetitive circular movement indicates the child's possible decent into madness —a disturbing image to conclude an unsettling opera.

More recently, prominent contemporary choreographers have made a name for themselves in the world of opera choreography. Director Peter Sellers, known for modernizing classic operas (e.g., *The Marriage of Figaro* set in Trump Tower), devised an opera in 1987, titled *Nixon in China,* depicting the relatively recent 1972 visit of Nixon to China. Sellers engaged John Adams to compose, Alice Goodman for the libretto, and Mark Morris for the choreography. While opera has a long history of representing historical figures (e.g., Verdi's *Don Carlo,* Handel's *Julius Caesar*), it is uncommon to find a contemporaneous depiction of persons still living.

The music for *Nixon in China* could be considered postmodern. It challenges the barriers between low and high art forms and is embedded with hints of irony.[16] Adams' blends both popular music and the sophisticated "high art" of the past. He even quotes other composers such as Richard Wagner, George Gershwin, and Philip Glass. Rather humorously, Adams' melodic lines follow Nixon's distinctive speech patterns.[17] Similarly, Mark Morris' choreography merges

[16] Jonathan D Kramer, "Postmodern Concepts of Musical Time." Indiana Theory Review 17, no. 2 (1996): Accessed December 31, 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24044674, 21-22.

[17] Allan Kozinn, "Nixon in China." Grove Music Online. 2002; Accessed 31 Dec. 2020. https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000903478.

the disciplines of ballet and modern dance with popular, social dance of the period and eschews barriers between opera singers and dancers in a somewhat ironic fashion.

Morris was given significant artistic freedom when creating the choreography for *Nixon in China*. Peter Sellers (director, production designer) and John Adams (composer, conductor) report conducting a significant amount of research in order to create an operatic interpretation of Nixon's 1972 trip to China. Contrarily choreographer Mark Morris explained in a panel discussion for the Metropolitan Opera House that he omitted doing research at all and choreographed based on a memory of a Chinese dance film he had seen as a teenager.[18] While Morris' lack of historical accuracy is apparent in the opera, it does not necessarily detract from the production. In many ways Morris' modern movement lexicon superimposed over Adam's retrospective composition creates a dynamic contrast.

A particularly effective scene featuring Morris' choreography unfolds as follows: Morris establishes that Richard and Pat Nixon (played by singers) are in the audience of a ballet and a traditional "show-within-a-show" format ensues. The "show-within-a-show" construct has been used throughout opera history to help provide a reason for dance to occur in the "reality" of the opera. Initially, Morris approaches the scene in a traditional manner, yet the boundary between what is the "show" (or rather ballet) and what is "real" becomes unclear. The singer in the role of Henry Kissinger plays the role of a seedy landlord (who resembles Kissinger) in the political ballet, *The Red Detachment of Women* (or rather, Morris' reimagining of the ballet). As the ballet takes on a more violent tone, Pat Nixon is so disturbed by the whipping of a dancer that she leaves her place in the "audience" and steps into the ballet to protect the dancer (fearing she will be murdered). Once Richard Nixon joins Mrs. Nixon, the three singers along with the dancers

[18] Susan Hall, *Creators Discuss Nixon in China at the Metropolitan Opera*, February 11, 2011.

finish the scene in a manner that obliterates the show-within-a-show construct. The dancers and singers communicate via their discipline with no pretense that one exists in reality while the other does not. It is a prime example of how singers and dancers can complement each other on stage in an opera and share the task of driving the narrative.

Since the visual aspect is of great importance to the narrative of most operas, it is unlikely that the two art forms will sever ties permanently. Opera and dance in the twenty-first century still have a strong relationship. In the era of COVID-19, however, presenting the two art forms onstage together provides a unique set of challenges. It is unclear how the two disciplines will relate in a post-coronavirus world.

The Scholarly Study of Dance in Opera

The history of opera has been relatively well-documented compared to the history of ballet. Production notes, correspondence, scores, libretti, and performance reviews have left records of opera productions from their conception. In the foreword to *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera,* Roger Parker writes, "Words about and around opera have never been lacking, if only for the simple reason that, of all events involving music, opera seems to produce the most abundant quantities of text. It is typically a collaborative enterprise, the product of composers, poets, scene designers, and interpreters of all kinds, and this fact – particularly in the last two centuries – has often given rise to a great deal of written communication between its various creators, a well-documented, sometimes even public genesis."[19] The record of dance in opera, however, is not particularly well-documented and significantly more challenging to study due in part to the comparatively ephemeral nature of the art form.

[19] Rodger Parker, "Foreword," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera*, ed. Roger Parker (New York, New York: Oxford University Press ,1994), xi.

While documentation of opera productions may be plentiful, a lack of detailed, written scenarios of dance scenes coupled with a lack of a universal dance notation system leaves scant information regarding dancers, choreographers, and choreography. If we compare the study of the rise of romantic ballet, which has been a source of fascination for dance scholars, and consider the same period at the Paris Opera viewed through the eyes of music scholars the accounts have little overlap. This disparity is a focus of the book, *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle,* in which author Marion Elizabeth Smith writes,

> Most musicologists tend to depict the Paris Opéra of the July Monarchy as the house of 'French grand opera' – of *Guillaume Tell, Les Huguenots,* Meyerbeer, Scribe, Damoreau, Nourrit – and if they sometimes acknowledge that operas entailed ballet segments, they rarely mention the Opéras ballet-pantomimes. On the other hand, many dance historians overlook the operas (except for the ballet divertissements therein) and portray the Opéra mainly as the place where the Romantic ballet pantomime flourished – the house of *La Sylphide, Giselle,* Taglioni, Elssler.[20]

Dance Historian Rebecca Harris-Warrick furthers Smith's argument in the book *Dance and Drama in French Baroque Opera* by stating,

> Since its inception, French opera has embraced dance – a reality operatic historiography has not yet fully fathomed. …yet all too often operatic dancing is treated as if it were merely decorative. The few music historians who recognize that dance matters to French opera have tended to endorse such a view implicitly, studying the music in isolation using formalist tools (dance types, rhythmic profiles, key structures, and so forth). On the other hand, dance historians are obliged to locate the roots of ballet in its operatic history, but tell the story as a struggle to for ballet to free itself from opera's shackles. The viewpoints of the two disciplines may differ, but the result is the same; few music or dance historians have taken an interest in how dance participates dramatically within operatic works.[21]

I concur with Smith and Harris-Warrick's assertion to an extent, although it may not be a "lack of interest" that is the cause for lack of documentation and comparative analysis. While dance

[20] Marian Elizabeth Smith, *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), xiv-xv.

[21] Rebecca Harris-Warrick, *Dance and Drama in French Baroque Opera: a History* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016), I.

and opera share their origins, dance and music have different languages and few possess fluency in both. Dance does not have the same unified notation system as music. Even those adept at one of the methods of dance notation may not truly be able to capture the intended performance of the dance sequences due to ephemeral nature of the dancing body which constantly changes. Prior to the use of film, it was challenging to document choreography. Although filming, and now more commonly video recording, helps tremendously to preserve choreographies, it is only helpful to a certain extent. Even if one can view dance in opera outside of live performance – opera choreography, and the role dance serves in the production, is more likely to change from production to production than the music and libretto.

During my research for *The Pearl Fishers* and *The Golden Cockerel* productions, I found scant mention of the original choreographer (if there was one), dancers, or the role of dance within the original work (choreographer Michel Fokine's reimagining of *The Golden Cockerel* for the Ballets Russes is a different matter). Yet, both Bizet's and Rimsky-Korsakov's scores contain delineated dance music with some, albeit minimal, stage direction regarding dance making it evident that dance likely occurred in both productions. It is possible the unclear nature about who choreographed the original production could be due to someone who served a dual role in the production. Perhaps the conductor or stage director also choreographed the dance scenes. The lack of clarity of who choreographed the dance scenes highlights how subsidiary the choreographer and dancers may have been considered to the production of the opera.

In the book, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, French musicologist Hervé Lacombe analyzes the genesis, performance, and reception of select nineteenth century French operas. Lacombe uses *The Pearl Fishers* as an exemplar of quintessential French opera of the period and explores elements of the production to gain insight into opera and

contemporaneous society. Yet despite reference to the inestimable importance of dance in French opera and the in-depth analysis Lacombe devotes to the production, he makes few references to dance in *The Pearl Fishers.* In the entire book only one instance of choreographic description exists, and Lacombe makes no reference to the choreographer or dancers involved. In the chapter, "The Historical Background of Exoticism – Perceptions of the Exotic World," Lacombe examines French audiences' taste for exoticism in opera in the 19th century and states,

> Johannas Weber railed against traditional choreography as inadequate to dramatic truth; this was particularly obvious in the third act of *Les Pecheurs de perles,* when Nadir is seated before the statue of Brahma: 'A charming corps de ballet dances around him in a ring, portraying Indians thrilled at the cannibal feast that awaits them. Frankly, women who gambol with joy because poor young people who loved each other too much are about to be stabbed could be nothing but appalling shrews. Now I ask you: does any ballerina whatsoever, on any stage, look ferocious or savage? But to demand dramatic verisimilitude in a ballet would be sheer pedantry.[22]

While Weber's statement may have been a bit ahead of its time in terms of realism in ballet (a concept Diaghilev's Ballets Russes began to address), it was a fantastic but rare insight into ballet's relation to the opera. Dance in opera can serve various purposes; it can enhance, support, and drive the narrative. It can appear in the background of an opera, or it can serve as respite from the dramatic action. Regardless of the role of dance in opera, there is tremendous power in studying the two art forms together. Smith furthers the argument for joint study by stating,

> Historians of the arts have long since recognized that fracturing any theatre piece into its component parts and studying one without the other can yield only a limited interpretation… By viewing opera and ballet together, in the same frame, we stand to discover a rich array of connections that can increase our understanding of both of them and, at the same time, allow us to experience some of the same pleasures and recognition and familiarity that helped attract their first audiences to the opera house.[23]

---

[22]Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Edward Schneider (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 188.

[23] Smith, *Ballet and Opera*, xvii

Many marvelous (along with mediocre and poorly conceived) choreographies in opera have been lost to time which may have provided a rich modality for operatic study. As scholars document contemporary opera productions, dance, and its role within the operatic work should be included in the analysis and study. Similarly, as historians consider ballet's history with opera, the divergence of ballet as an independent art form could perhaps be viewed not as a break, as a person would break away from the confines of a controlling, codependent lover, but as a continued autonomous relationship in which both art forms can exist without the other, but magic occurs when the two join forces.

A Note: The Effect of COVID-19 on the Performing Arts During the Research Period

The COVID-19 outbreak in the United States has caused considerable vicissitudes for the performing arts industry. When I began to solidify details for this thesis in 2019, I had no inkling such a dramatic impact on everyday life was about to occur. Through the course of writing this document, the Coronavirus exploded from cases in Wuhan, China, to outbreaks in Italy and other parts of Europe. In January 2020, the World Health Organization released a statement declaring, "the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) disease outbreak a public health emergency of international concern."[24] A few seemingly isolated cases in the United States quickly led to significant outbreaks across the US. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic.[25] Initial outbreaks hit the East and West Coast of the United States the hardest at first. Yet, the alarming death rate and seemingly nefarious communicability of the virus forced universities, schools, performance venues, and public businesses nationwide deemed

[24]"Timeline: WHO's COVID-19 Response," World Health Organization (World Health Organization), accessed January 4, 2021, https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/interactive-timeline.

[25] Ibid.

"non-essential" to close or move to remote work only. As the virus spread across the world, many other countries enforced similar lockdown measures.

Initial lockdown measures in the US included the cancellation of live performances. At the start of the pandemic, many dancers did not have access to dance studios to continue their training regimens. Dancers turned their living quarters into makeshift dance spaces: kitchen counters became ballet barres, furniture was pushed aside to make room for center work, and backyards became staging areas for *grand allegro.* The phrases "alone together," "socially distanced," "unprecedented," and "new normal" permeated everyday parlance. Hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, and toilet paper were in short supply. Broadway went dark for the first time since the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, and according to CNN journalist Alicia Lee, the Broadway League called off all performances until 2021.[26] The Met Opera canceled their season. In a video message to the public regarding the closure, the Met General Manager Peter Gelb states,

> Social distancing and grand opera simply don't go together. Our doctors, our medical advisors, [and] health government officials agree that as long as social distancing is required, we can't put on performances here, and clearly, that is the state of affairs for the fall. So, sadly our orchestra will not be in the pit, our chorus will not be on the stage, our wonderful artisans will not be backstage working on scenery, and of course; our audience will not be inside the house.[27]

As large performance venues closed, some ballet and opera companies transitioned to virtual seasons, but live, in-person, performances, ceased to exist. The closure of performance venues was similar to safety measures implemented in the US during the 1918 Spanish flu

[26] Alicia Lee, "Broadway Will Remain Dark for the Rest of the Year," CNN (Cable News Network, June 29, 2020), https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/29/entertainment/broadway-shows-canceled-2020-coronavirus-trnd/index.html.

[27] Peter Gelb, "2020–21 Season Update," Metropolitan Opera | 2020–21 Season Update, March 2020, https://www.metopera.org/user-information/2020-21-season-update/.

pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),

> The 1918 H1N1 flu pandemic, sometimes referred to as the "Spanish flu," killed an estimated 50 million people worldwide, including an estimated 675,000 people in the United States. An unusual characteristic of this virus was the high death rate it caused among healthy adults 15 to 34 years of age. The pandemic lowered the average life expectancy in the United States by more than 12 years.[28]

To help mitigate the spread of the virus, many places where people gathered were closed. In the article, "Destroyer and Teacher: Managing the Masses During the 1918–1919 Influenza Pandemic," history professor Nancy Tomes writes regarding theatre closures across the US,

> Theater owners often voiced the 'why us and not them' argument. In many cities they were the first, and sometimes the only, businesses to be shut down. By mid-October, *Variety r*eported that more than 90% of American theaters, including motion picture houses as well as live performances, were on "the dark list." Theater owners faced a difficult problem: they did not want to appear irresponsible in the face of a public health emergency, yet they resented being singled out for closures.[29]

In many ways, theatres faced a similar situation during this pandemic. In a December 2020 article titled "Will Broadway shows reopen in 2021?" reporter Sophie Thomas writes, "Currently, Broadway theatres are shut until at least May 30, 2021. This shutdown marks the longest [time] that Broadway shows have been suspended or postponed, longer than union strikes in the 1970s and the closure after 9/11."[30] In the US, as of January 2021, many performance venues have not been able to reopen. The Met Opera, after shutting down in March 2020, does not plan to be able to reopen until the fall of 2021.

---

[28] "The Deadliest Flu: The Complete Story of the Discovery and Reconstruction of the 1918 Pandemic Virus," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, December 17, 2019), https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/reconstruction-1918-virus.html.

[29] Nancy Tomes, "'Destroyer and Teacher': Managing the Masses during the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic," Public health reports (Washington, D.C. : 1974) (Association of Schools of Public Health, April 2010), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2862334/.

[30] Sophie Thomas, "Will Broadway Shows Reopen in 2021?," New York Theater Guide (New York Theatre Guide, December 17, 2020), https://www.newyorktheatreguide.com/news-features/will-broadway-shows-reopen-in-2021.

The pandemic has challenged the performing arts industry; nonetheless, many found ways to continue practicing and sharing their art. Professional organizations of artistic and medical practitioners devised plans to continue in-person training during the pandemic. With no end to the pandemic in sight, private dance studios, universities, and dance companies implemented "safety" measures to reopen. Dance USA Task Force for Dancer Health (comprised of medical professionals) released the following recommendations for dance training in addition to wearing masks at all times, taking temperatures, and staying home if symptoms are consistent with COVID-19 or if exposed to someone with COVID-19:

Barre

- Dancers need to stand at least 6 feet (2 meters) apart or 43 square feet (4 square meters)
- May want to mark this with tape
- Wipe down the barre before and after each use
- Dynamic exercises with larger movement should be avoided to minimize air turbulence in the room

Center Work

- For stationary center work, dancers should be able to maintain 8-10 feet distance
- Normal breathing should be encouraged over forced breath cues, as forced exhalation spreads larger droplets farther distances

Across the Floor

- Dancers should avoid following right behind each other; it is safer to work next to each other. If dancers travel directly behind each other, they are in the slipstream, where droplets remain suspended. To avoid contact, dancers need to allow even further distance.
- Dancers should maintain 6 feet distance apart, standing side by side in one line, and allow each group to complete the combination to the end of the room before the next group starts.
- Dancers should be reminded to maintain a distance of at least 6 feet when waiting to go across the floor and after completing the combination.

Air exchange & quality

- Open windows and doors to try to maximize improved air circulation
- Consider a delay of at least 10 minutes between classes to allow for cleaning
- As the virus is thought to be is less virulent in humid conditions, monitor air conditioning and encourage a more humid environment
- Avoid dancers exiting and entering the studios at the same time

Music

- Live musicians should be assigned to a consistent studio since disinfecting instruments may be difficult.
- Stationary instruments should be cleaned appropriately between musicians.

- Sound equipment should be cleaned before and after use.
- Consider the volume of music. The louder the music, the louder the instructor will have to project, potentially causing droplets to travel further.[31]

Returning to in-person training for singers appeared to be especially challenging. At the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, examples of substantial virus spread due to choir practices led to scrutiny about the dangers of COVID-19 and singing. A two-and-a-half-hour church choir practice in Skagit County, Washington, in March 2020 turned into a "super spreader" event that led to the sickening of 52 of the 61 persons in attendance - two of whom died.[32] To help outline best practices for musical training, the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) reported results of an aerosol study for voice, wind instruments, acting, speaking, and dance. ACDA continued to update guidelines and resources throughout the pandemic. They reported the following on their website, "In its ongoing task of identifying ways to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in performing arts activities, a third set of preliminary results has been released in the unprecedented aerosol study commissioned by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), the College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA) and a coalition of more than 125 performing arts organizations." The report continued, "Among the key findings in the most recent results – which focused on the distribution of respiratory aerosol generated while playing wind instruments, singing, acting, speaking and dancing – was that if music participants wear surgical-style masks with a slit for the mouthpiece, and use an

[31] Heather Southwick, Selina Shah, and Kathleen Bower, "Return to Dancing and Training Considerations Due to-COVID-19," Dance/USA Task Force on Dancer Health, 2020, https://dance-usa.s3.amazonaws.com/page_uploads/COVID%20-%20RETURN%20TO%20DANCE%20-%20MAY%202020%20-%20PDF.pdf.

[32] Lea Hamner, Polly Dubbel, Ian Capron, et al. High SARS-CoV-2 Attack Rate Following Exposure at a Choir Practice — Skagit County, Washington, March 2020." MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020;69:606–610. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6919e6

appropriate bell cover, that aerosol emission is reduced between 60 and 90 percent."[33] The article makes the following recommendation for training:

- Masks – Masks should be worn by students, and masks/bell covers should be on instruments and materials.
- Distance – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) distancing guidelines of 6 feet by 6 feet should be followed, with additional space (9 feet by 6 feet) for trombone players. The distancing guidelines apply for outdoors as well as indoors.
- Time – Rehearsals should be limited to 30 minutes. Indoors, the room should be cleared, and leaders should wait until at least one HVAC air change has occurred before the next rehearsal.
- Air Flow – Outdoor activity remains the best place for air flow. Indoors, HEPA filters are strongly recommended to increase the amount of clean air and the number of air changes per hour (ACH).
- Hygiene – The strong emphasis continues on hygiene, including frequent handwashing, and cleaning of spit valves and storage areas.[34]

In the July 2020 article, "Safer Singing During the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic: What We Know and What We Don't," authors Matthew Naunheim et al. state, "A recent webinar with a panel of experts in the world of voice care and singing left the audience with the message, 'There is no safe way for singers to rehearse together until there is a COVID-19 vaccine and a 95% effective treatment in place.'[35] Naunheim et al. continue, "Although, this may ultimately prove to be accurate, evidence-based practice (defined as an approach to health that integrates scientific research, patient preferences and values, and clinical expertise to make the best recommendations possible) does not allow for such a definitive conclusion to be made at this time."[36] The article concludes with recommendations for "safer" practice,

[33] "Third Round of Performing Arts Aerosol Study Produces More Scientific Data for Return to Activities," NFHS, accessed January 4, 2021, https://www.nfhs.org/articles/third-round-of-performing-arts-aerosol-study-produces-more-scientific-data-for-return-to-activities/.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Matthew R. Naunheim et al., "Safer Singing During the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic: What We Know and What We Don't," *Journal of Voice*, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvoice.2020.06.028.

[36] Ibid.

1. Rehearse outside when possible. Inside, open windows and doors and use ventilation strategies such as fans to blow air away from the singer(s).
2. Use PPE, at least cloth face masks. Singing is possible with a mask. Masks can cause breathing challenges for some, and this may affect especially singers with underlying pulmonary dysfunction.
3. Rehearse alone, remotely, or in smaller groups. When with others, physical distancing of six feet or more appears paramount.
4. Rehearse in shifts or smaller sections, if possible, ideally in separate locations. Consider having a few representatives from each voice part and, if necessary, change the repertoire to accommodate.
5. Shorten rehearsal times. There is no absolutely "safe" duration of for rehearsal, and so organizations should do everything they can to limit rehearsals to the shortest possible time period.
6. Limit extraneous activities (e.g., breaks, socializing, food, etc.).
7. Wipe down items that have been set up or touched by others before and after use (chairs, scores/paper music, instruments, music stands, etc.).
8. Screen for symptoms, including fever, upper respiratory infection symptoms such as coughing and nasal congestion, loss of smell and taste. Take temperatures of singers prior to entering the rehearsal space. Remember that some infected patients will not have any symptoms.
9. Avoid direct contact (e.g., hand-shaking, joining hands).
10. Practice meticulous hygiene. Wash or disinfect hands before, during and after rehearsals. Singers should not touch their face as part of a warm up exercise or singing instruction method (or anytime unnecessarily).
11. Sick singers should stay home as should singers who have been around a COVID-19 positive patient. Exposed singers should self-quarantine for two weeks.[37]

Following the recommendations listed above, Naunheim et al. caution, “These points must be taken as only recommendations. They are based on scant and often weak scientific evidence and on ‘common sense’ that, while based on a wealth of experience, could still prove to be wrong."[38]

Throughout the pandemic, performing artists engaged in measures to practice their art as "safely" as possible. Even during the darkest times of human history, artists have not ceased to produce art. Ballets and operas have been created against the backdrop of wars, famine, disease, and despair. Alongside death and horrid conditions of the Terezín Jewish ghetto/concentration

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

camp during World War II, musicians composed and played music; artists drew pictures, and inhabitants created costumes and put on plays. While these are markedly different circumstances, it is still difficult to comprehend the number of persons dying each day from COVID-19. As of the writing of January 2021, vaccines have only just begun to be distributed and it is unclear how long vaccines will provide immunity or even if they will provide protection from variant strains of COVID-19. The virus leaves some completely unharmed, kills some within a matter of days or in some cases months, and leaves some with irreparable damage to their long-term health. COVID-19 is not the first pandemic, nor will it be the last. So, we do what other artists do during a time of significant turbulence and uncertainty; we create while we still can.

Chapter II: Historical Precedence of Ballet in *The Golden Cockerel*

The original three-act opera, *The Golden Cockerel*, composed by Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, libretto by Vladimir Nikolayevich Bel'sky, is based on a poem by Alexander Pushkin. *The Golden Cockerel*, often referred to in the west as *Le coq d'Or* due to the popularity of the Ballets Russes' 1914 production (translated to French), was never viewed by Rimsky-Korsakov. Although he completed the composition of the opera in 1907, delays due to Russian State censorship postponed its premiere. Eventually, the opera premiered in 1909 in Moscow at the Solodovnikov Theatre after Rimsky-Korsakov's death in 1908.

Numerous choreographers have translated Rimsky-Korsakov's music for *The Golden Cockerel* into movement. The role of dance in the context of the opera changed significantly with each choreographic interpretation. Michel Fokine, Ballets Russes choreographer, and Serge Diaghilev, impresario and founder of the Ballets Russes, introduced Parisian audiences to the opera in 1914 in the form of an opera-ballet. Fokine created a new version, staged as a one-act ballet, in 1937. More recently, Russo-American ballet choreographer Alexei Ratmansky choreographed a historically informed, though largely reimagined, version for American Ballet Theatre in 2012. Dance critic, Alastair Macaulay summarizes the various forms of the opera in his review of Ratmansky's version of *The Golden Cockerel*. Macaulay states, "[Ratmansky's *The Golden Cockerel*] is the 2012 two-act ballet adaptation of a one-act 1937 ballet of a 1914 three-act opera-ballet production of Rimsky's 1907 opera, which had its first production in Russia in 1909, the year after his death."[39] The opera, in its various forms, arguably has as much of a place in dance history as music history.

[39]Alastair Macaulay, "An Eye-Popping Fairy Tale Still Honors its Origins," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 08, 2016. https://search-proquestcom.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/2310039994?accountid=12964.

Fokine staged *The Golden Cockerel* in 1914 as an opera-ballet in which the singers remained to the sides of the stage, and the dancers portrayed the dramatic action. The *ballet d'action* set an important precedent for the world of opera and ballet. Musicologist Richard Taruskin reports that the concept of an opera in which the dancers enact the narrative in place of the singers influenced similar staging in Stravinsky's works *Le Rossignol, Renard, Les Noces,* and *Pulcinella*.[40] Taruskin claims, "It was an important stage in the modernist dismantling of *Gesamtkunstwerk*."[41] While Taruskin views Fokine's staging of *The Golden Cockerel* as a dismantling of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* (the synthesis of music and drama into a total work of art), from a balletic perspective, it is very much in keeping with Diaghilev's concept of total theatre in which the best artists, choreographers, and composers came together to create one artistic product. In his memoirs, Fokine argues, "Rimsky-Korsakov specified in the preface to each opera: 'An operatic work is first of all a musical composition.' But I still claim that when several art forms are united into one effort they all become equally important, and one art form should not dominate the others."[42]

Fokine received a significant amount of criticism for the 1914 opera-ballet and for the 1937 ballet in which he eliminated the singers altogether and used instruments to replace vocal lines. Fokine writes, "The curious disagreement among critics was based primarily on the transformation of an opera into ballet; while some held to the opinion that 'it is impossible to deny that this idea contains an artistic truth,' others felt that this was 'the mutilation of the

[40] Richard Taruskin, "Golden Cockerel, The." *Grove Music Online*. 2002; Accessed 10 Nov. 2019. https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000007911.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Michel Fokine, *Fokine: Memoirs of a Ballet Master*, ed. Anatole Chujoy, trans. Vitale Fokine (Boston: Little, Brown, 1961), 232.

composer's ideas, and interpretation contrary to the nature of the composition,' and so on."[43] Fokine continues, "The question of the principle involved interested me and, I believe, should concern everyone who loves the art of the theater. Is it permissible to stage operas in a manner different than they have been staged up to now? Is it permissible to substitute dancers and mimes for singers, and turn an opera into a ballet?"[44] Fokine determined it was not only permissible but necessary to complete his artistic vision for Rimsky-Korsakov's music. He is not alone in this view. Dance Critic Jack Anderson writes, "It's no wonder that choreographers are drawn to operas. Their plots are passionate; their music is gorgeous. There's even a tradition of balletic and operatic metamorphosis. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, opera occasionally inspired ballets and ballets prompted operas."[45] More recently, Bizet's *Carmen,* for instance, has been transformed from opera into ballet by choreographers across the globe.

It is unlikely that Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel* would have achieved as much success in the west without Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. The popularity of Rimsky-Korsakov's music outside Russia is due in large part to Diaghilev's programing of Rimsky-Korsakov's compositions for the Ballets Russes; yet, Diaghilev owes much of his success, and that of his ballet company, to opera.[46] Still, According to Taruskin, "[*The Golden Cockerel*] is the only one of Rimsky-Korsakov's 15 operas to have achieved repertory status beyond

[43] Ibid., 235.

[44] Ibid., 226.

[45] Jack Anderson, "Opera Into Dance? Not as Simple as It Sounds," March 3, 2002, https://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/03/arts/dance-opera-into-dance-not-as-simple-as-it-sounds.html.

[46] Oleg Minin, "Synthesizing Beauty: Rimsky-Korsakov's Music in the Context of Diaghilev's 'Russian Seasons' in Paris," August 6, 2018, https://blogs.bard.edu/bmf/2018/08/03/synthesizing-beauty-rimsky-korsakovs-music-in-the-context-of-diaghilevs-russian-seasons-in-paris/.

Russia."[47] Yet even before Fokine's 1914 staging of *The Golden Cockerel*, opera played a large role in establishing the Ballets Russes as a formidable company. According to authors Majel Connery and James Steichen,

> Opera and dance also enjoyed comparable aesthetic and institutional symbiosis in Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. A production of Modest Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* served as the launchpad for Diaghilev's career as a performing arts impresario, and it was in part through the appropriation of opera's higher aesthetic status that the Ballets Russes established dance as a worthy modernist endeavor. Over its two-decade history, operatic and other vocal music—from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Le coq d'Or* to Stravinsky's *Le Rossignol* to Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*—would enjoy a prominent place in the company's repertory."[48]

Regardless of the form *The Golden Cockerel* takes, opera with ballet, opera-ballet, or ballet, Rimsky-Korsakov's music lends itself extraordinarily well to the balletic genre due to the use of regular rhythms, memorable melodies and musical motifs, and colorful, engaging orchestration.

[47] Taruskin, "Golden Cockerel, the."

[48] Majel Connery and James Steichen, "A Note from the Guest Editors: Between Opera and Dance." *Opera Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (Summer 2015): doi:10.1093/oq/kbv010, 152.

Chapter III: OU's Production of *The Golden Cockerel*

The Golden Cockerel Production Overview

Rimsky-Korsakov's final opera, *The Golden Cockerel,* has captured the imagination of ballet choreographers for over a century. In 2019, I had the opportunity to serve as choreographer for the University of Oklahoma (OU) production of the opera. The OU production of *The Golden Cockerel* was presented in two acts and staged similarly to the original production of the opera in which dance played a supporting role to the singers.[49] The choreographic concept, style, and staging of this work, however, served to drive the dramatic narrative of the opera. My choreographic intent was to establish a harmonious relationship between the dancers and singers while evoking the otherworldly exoticism (and eroticism) of Rimsky-Korsakov's music.

During the performance of Act I, the dancers appeared to King Dodon in his dreams. Dance served as *divertissement* and foreshadowed the events that were about to unfold with the appearance of Queen Shemaka in the subsequent act.

In the second act, dance was incorporated to enhance and propel the plot of the opera. The dancers' presence on stage created a dynamic contrast between the mysterious land of Queen Shemaka and the gluttonous idolatry of Dodon and his kingdom. Rimsky-Korsakov provides musical contrast using Shemaka's *leitmotiv,* which evokes a sense of magic and mystery contrasted by rustic, folksong-like elements in many other passages. In the article, "Golden Calves: The Role of Dance in Opera," music scholar, Daniel Albright, states, "…a ballet can have multiple sorts of relations to the opera in which it finds itself: it can try to

[49]*The Golden Cockerel,* Music by Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, Libretto by Vladimir Ivanovich Bel′skiĭ, Trans. by William Ferrara, Choreography by Christa St. John, Reynolds Performing Arts Center, Norman OK, September 2019. Recorded Sept. 21, 2019, https://youtu.be/0NCkqpV-olk

advance the opera's action, it can complement the opera's action, it can offer relief from the opera's action- in theory, a ballet might even resist the opera's action."[50] My choreographic intent for each dance had a different relationship to the opera. Keeping with Albright's statement, I approached the choreography in the second act in different ways: to complement the singers, to embody the role of the singers, and to advance the plot. In the first act, however, dance offered a brief interlude from the opera's action. While it is unclear whether Rimsky-Korsakov intended there to be dance outside of a few instances indicated in the score, the music is imbued with movement potential.

Spring 2019

Studio Rehearsals

The origins of my engagement to choreograph *The Golden Cockerel* began in the Spring of 2019. I was recommended by OU Associate Professor of Dance Jeremy Lindberg, with whom I had worked as Ballet Master for OU Opera Theatre's production of Ravel's *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*. On March 14, 2019, I received the following email from William Ferrara, OU Opera Theatre Stage Director.

> Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel*
> 3/14/2019 12:38 pm
>
> Hi Christa,
> Jeremy recommended you for choreographer for our fall opera. I hope you will find this an interesting and exciting project. Can you make time in your schedule to help us? The performances are Sept. 19-22. We are coming back a week early to start rehearsals August 12-19. There are several short incidental dances. Most notably, the mirror image of the Queen of Shemaka does a seductive, middle-eastern flavored dance, joined by her handmaidens. I've told Lloyd we will have 3 to 5 handmaidens, plus the Queen's mirror image. I can get you the score and recording after spring break, and then we can meet to discuss concept and schedule, etc.

[50] Daniel Albright, "Golden Calves: The Role of Dance in Opera," *The Opera Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2006), https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/211853, 24.

I hope you can join us!
Bill[51]

Professor Lindberg sent a follow-up response to Professor Ferrara's email.

Re Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel*
3/14/2019 1:03 pm

I do hope this can happen- perhaps rehearsals can be started in April.
Christa St. John will be an asset to this OU Opera Theatre Production

Best Regards,
JL[52]

After a series of emails between the Director of the School of Dance, Michael Bearden, Conductor and OU Opera Theatre Artistic Director Jonathan Shames, Jeremy Lindberg, William Ferrara, and myself, by 8:41 pm that evening, I was engaged to choreograph *The Golden Cockerel* and rehearsals were to begin in April 2019.

I met with Professor Ferrara Wednesday, March 27, 2019, to discuss the dancers' involvement in the opera. At that time, the production details and choreographic needs seemed straightforward. We listened to a recording, and I made notes in the score regarding when Professor Ferrara would like the dancers to enter and exit along with a few notes about the action on stage. Professor Ferrara shared ideas for each scene, and we discussed the look of the Queen's Mirror Image and some staging ideas for her *variation*. He shared a reference link to the Bolshoi Theatre's 1989 production in which the Queen's Mirror Image dancer removed her clothing and wore only a nude unitard with a fringed, translucent skirt while she danced for the King.[53] I felt the illusion of nakedness in the Bolshoi's version was less tantalizing than if she were clothed.

[51] William Ferrara, email to Christa St. John, *Rimsky-Korsakov, The Golden Cockerel,* March 14, 2019.

[52] Jeremy Lindberg, email to Christa St. John, *Rimsky-Korsakov, The Golden Cockerel,* March 14, 2019.

[53] Rimsky-Korsakov: The Golden Cockerel - Bolshoi Theatre/Svetlanov (Bolshoi Theatre, 1989), https://youtu.be/AJnAkpqVDcc.

The sensuality should have been in the potential for nudity and not the result. Professor Ferrara and I agreed on this point. He felt it might be intriguing if the Queen and Mirror Image were dressed identically, and the Mirror Image disrobes to unveil a more revealing costume. He also suggested that the Mirror Image let her hair down from a traditional ballet bun for the *variation*. I felt this had excellent choreographic potential. We discussed that the costumes and overall style should demonstrate Russian influence (something that would change later in the process).

I left the meeting with a recording and an annotated score, complete with numerous cuts, ready to embark on creating the choreography. I found it helpful to work with a stage director who had a clear vision for the dance scenes from the start of the process. After our meeting, I felt aware of the role dance needed to play in each scene and had a concept of the production's aesthetic.

Although there was not a tremendous amount of dancing called for, a few challenges arose after our first meeting. The score had a significant number of cuts and was translated from Russian to English, and reinterpreted by Professor Ferrara with a high dose of humor. The recording provided to me had a significant number of cuts, though not the same cuts as the score. Also, the recording was in French, which made it difficult to follow the English words in the score. Adding to the complexity, the score I was provided was a piano reduction, quite common in opera, while I had a full orchestral recording. It was not always easy to determine which instrumental lines were reflected in the piano reduction. Furthermore, the score and the recording did not align on several occasions. Often there was music on the recording that was not in the score. Other times there was music in the score that did not appear on the recording. The latter of the two proved to be most challenging since I had no aural reference from which to choreograph.

A valuable skill to have as an opera choreographer is the ability to read music. There are, however, ways to compensate if the choreographer is not musically literate; it may be necessary to enlist a colleague who can help. Significant challenges can arise if the choreographer does not have at least a working knowledge of reading an orchestral score, or in the case of this production, a piano reduction of the orchestral score. I have a basic knowledge of music theory; however, I do not play a musical instrument, nor can I see music on the page and translate it to an aural reference in my imagination. Yet, the more I choreographed opera, the better my ability to listen to a recording and keep track in the score became. Furthermore, the ability to follow a score can prove beneficial during piano rehearsals. I could request to go back a few measures before a rehearsal number, and the pianist was able to execute my request. I was able then to indicate choreographically to the dancers where we would resume rehearsing. I was less able to follow sections of the opera for passages that did not correlate between the score and recording. It took a significant amount of time studying the score with the recording to work in that manner.

At times, the challenges rectifying the score and recording for *The Golden Cockerel* were a bit beyond my musical capabilities. I enlisted my husband, Dr. Brian St. John, an orchestral conductor and composer, to help. Professor Ferrara was of great assistance as well. Several email exchanges between Dr. St. John, Professor Ferrara, and me ensued.

> Help with Golden Cockerel Score and Recording
> 4/10/2019
>
> Dear Brian,
> In the score, there is a cut at reh. 158, (pg. 118). It says cut to reh. 180. While there is no cut in the recording, if there were to be a cut that corresponds with the notation in the score, what point in the recording would that happen. Alternatively, at what point does reh. 158 correspond with the recording?
>
> -Christa[54]

[54] Christa St. John, email to Brian St. John, *Help with Golden Cockerel Score and Recording,* April 10, 2019.

Re: Help with Golden Cockerel Score and Recording
4/10/2019

Dear Christa,
Rehearsal 158 = 14:44 in the recording.

-Brian[55]

Re: Help with Golden Cockerel Score and Recording
4/11/2019

Dear Brian,
On page 118, reh. 158, there is a cut to page 133. The cut occurs at 14:44 minutes into track 11. Could you help me find where in the recording reh. 180 (pg. 133) occurs? Does it occur near the start of track 12?

-Christa[56]

Re: Help with Golden Cockerel Score and Recording
4/11/2019

Dear Christa,
Rehearsal 180 is on track 12, 4:24.

-Brian[57]

Possible cut in opera recording
4/25/2019

Dear Bill,

Based on our conversation yesterday at the production meeting, I listened again to the recording of pg. 133-136. Upon closer review, it appears there is a cut in the recording at reh. 182 around the 5-minute mark on track 12. It sounds like they cut to two before reh. 184. Is this correct? Since I do not have a recording of the music from reh.

---

[55] Brian St. John, email to Christa St. John, *Help with Golden Cockerel Score and Recording,* April 10, 2019.

[56] Christa St. John, email to Brian St. John, *Help with Golden Cockerel Score and Recording,* April 11, 2019.

[57] Brian St. John, email to Christa St. John, *Help with Golden Cockerel Score and Recording,* April 10, 2019.

> 182-184, for now, I will plan to have the Queen's Mirror Image end at reh. 181 (rather than reh. 183). Once I can hear the music cut out of the recording, let us revisit what makes the most musical and choreographic sense for the Mirror Image to end.
>
> -Christa[58]

Despite reviewing other recordings, I did not hear all the music as intended until the first rehearsal with the orchestra in September; the piano rehearsals that preceded the orchestral rehearsals, however, were quite helpful. Upon reflection, enlisting a pianist for dance rehearsals, prior to stage rehearsals with the singers, would have been of tremendous assistance.

After meeting with Professor Ferrara on March 27, 2019, I listened to the recording of *The Golden Cockerel* as often as possible. I found that many of my movement ideas came to me while listening to the recording while driving. While I cannot recommend choreographing while driving for safety reasons, familiarizing oneself with the music of the whole opera (not just the dance scenes) can prove beneficial in case dancers need to be added to a scene late in the process or a scene requires reworking on the spot. Greater familiarity with the opera, as a whole, revealed how the composer used thematic material, especially with motivic intention for character and plot development. In the book *The Creative Habit,* Twyla Tharp states that she excludes all other forms of entertainment to focus her energy when she begins working on a new piece. She does not watch TV, see movies, or go to shows in order to remain immersed in the creative process.[59] Due to the limited time (a little over a week) from receiving the score and recording to the start of rehearsals with the dancers, I adopted a similar approach. I tried not to

[58] Author email to William Ferrara, *Possible Cut in Opera Recording,* April 25, 2019

[59] Twyla Tharp and Mark Reiter, *The Creative Habit Learn It and Use It for Life: A Practical Guide* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

listen to any other music besides *The Golden Cockerel* before the first rehearsal with the dancers. I was, however, rehearsing dancers for two other works, so this was not always possible.

I began choreographing the two more complex dance scenes first: The Queen's Mirror Image *variation* and the Handmaidens' final dance in Act II. I spent many hours alone in the studio working through the Mirror Image's *variation*. Once I developed the Mirror Image's movement style, I felt I could refashion her movement lexicon to form the stylistic qualities of the Handmaidens, who were of the same realm but subservient to the Queen.

Conditions at OU did not allow for time to audition dancers for the opera. Therefore, I elected to engage dancers who had opera experience, or who I felt had some of the qualities required of dancers working in opera: reliability, adaptability, and the ability to learn choreography quickly. The dancers also had to be willing to return to campus a week early for opera rehearsals at the end of their summer break.

Initial opera rehearsals began in April 2019. At the same time, I was restaging an excerpt from Amy Hall Garner's ballet *"I Rise"* for the university's College of Fine Arts convocation in May. I was tasked with recasting the finale section from Garner's work, reducing the cast size from 27 to 11 dancers, and restaging the piece. Concurrently, I was reworking one of my original ballets, *Divertimento,* and setting it on several OU ballet majors for a performance at the end of April. While juggling these projects created some scheduling challenges, my regular involvement rehearsing the ballet majors assisted with making better-informed casting decisions regarding which dancers to include in the opera. My prior experience working with the dancers proved useful since there was no time for a formal audition.

I felt that the lead role of the Queen's Mirror Image was the most significant casting decision. I knew of only one undergraduate ballet major who I felt had similar enough physical

features to the singer who was cast in the role of Queen Shemaka. The dancer had pronounced exotic features and a movement quality appropriate for the role as I envisioned it. I felt she would be able to handle the seductive movement style with poise and maturity. Once she was cast as the lead dancer, I sought to find a suitable understudy and began casting the Handmaidens whom I originally envisioned as tall and long-legged.

I had preliminary casting complete and posted on April 2, 2019, only to find out a few days later that changes were needed. One dancer received a position with a ballet company out of state and would not be returning for the fall. Another dancer was entering her senior year and was set to participate in a joint trainee program with OU School of Dance and Oklahoma City Ballet, which made scheduling on campus problematic. I needed to replace these dancers very quickly. A day later, a dancer, with whom I had worked on several occasions but did not cast because she was not as tall as the other dancers, was in the hallway near my office speaking to a fellow student. She expressed feeling upset she was not cast in the opera and recounted how much she enjoyed dancing in past opera productions. I am not sure if she knew I could hear her (although I have my suspicions). Regardless of whether or not I was meant to hear her statement, I sought to work with dancers who would be invested in the process. She had previous opera experience and made clear that she treated dancing in the opera as an opportunity rather than an obligation. The combination of the time constraints to find two replacement dancers and the conversation I overheard was enough for me to reconsider my aesthetic preference for tall dancers and cast her in the opera. I engaged another dancer of a similar height, who had previous opera experience, to fill the other open spot. I did not realize it at the time, but including more dancers who had experience dancing in opera turned out to be a tremendous asset once we began rehearsing on stage with singers. I found dancers who had prior opera experience were more

adaptable to last-minute changes and additions and better able to follow the piano reduction once we began using a pianist for rehearsals in lieu of the orchestral recording. They also adapted quickly once we moved to orchestral rehearsals. By April 8, 2019, I had solidified the casting. I met with the Director of the School of Dance and Artistic Director of Oklahoma Festival Ballet, Michael Bearden, to work out the dancers' rehearsal schedule. Dance rehearsals for *The Golden Cockerel* began April 13, 2019, less than one month after Professor Ferrara initiated contact with me about the production.

During my first rehearsal with the Queen's Mirror Image, I was excited to see how the dancer would embody the fluid, undulating choreography. The dancer cast as the Mirror Image struggled to conform to more typical classical choreography because she had a very affected movement style. It was precisely because of these eccentricities that I felt she would fit the role well. I desired her to stand out amongst the Handmaiden dancers. It was fortuitous that she did not blend in well with the other Handmaidens since, for the performances, she was costumed almost identically to them, something I did not know at the time. For the *variation*, I exploited the dancer's hypermobility, especially the malleability of her back and her distortion of the classical line. When I began choreographing the *variation*, I did not know where King Dodon or the Queen would be positioned on stage. I envisioned the King seated downstage right but told the dancer she needed to be prepared to perform the choreography to the other side in case the King was seated on the opposite side of the stage. We worked on the choreography with the King downstage right and downstage left in subsequent rehearsals. When we attended staging rehearsals with the singers in the fall, she was able to adapt to the King positioned downstage left even though the choreography was set initially with him on stage right. Rehearsing the dancer

executing two different versions of the *variation* in the dance studio, while initially time consuming, helped onstage rehearsals with the singers run more efficiently.

I began rehearsals for the final dance of the Handmaidens in Act II the same day. Initially, I thought that the costumes and setting for the land of Queen Shemaka were going to have a Russian aesthetic. In our design meeting earlier that week, Professor Ferrara presented a pair of Russian nesting dolls as inspiration. To gain inspiration and insight into a Russian folkloric dance aesthetic, I watched Russian folk-dance recordings of *Kalinka* dance and *Preesyadka*-dance. Early in the process, I attempted to incorporate some stylistic material into the final dance of the Handmaidens. Much of the style and steps had to be changed after subsequent design meetings during which it was determined that the land of Queen Shemaka would have a decidedly less Russian and more of a fictitious eastern exotic quality, more akin to the orientalist ballets of the Ballets Russes like *Schéhérazade*.

We had a brief opportunity for rehearsals between April 13 and April 25, 2019, before OU final exams began, soon after which the dancers departed for summer break. During our brief rehearsal period, I was able to set a few different versions of the dream sequences in Act I. At the time, however, I did not know precisely how big the throne would be or if the Mirror Image would be able to hide behind the throne. I taught the dancers a few different versions of both dream sequences, so they would be more adaptable when we were onstage with the throne in the fall. I was able to complete the Queen's Mirror Image *variation* and the Handmaidens' final dance prior to summer break as well. While much of the choreography was complete by the end of the 2019 spring semester, only the Mirror Image's variation remained unchanged by the time we resumed rehearsals in the fall of 2019.

Fall 2019

The Golden Cockerel: Stage Rehearsals

The fall 2019 semester began with challenges and exciting opportunities. Rehearsals for the opera resumed a week prior to the start of the fall 2019 semester. The Queen's Mirror Image was set to rehearse during the week and the Handmaidens were called to rehearsal over the weekend. During the first week back, I rehearsed with the two sopranos cast in the role of the Queen and the dancer cast as the Queen's Mirror Image to set the choreography for the scene in which the dancer appears behind a large mirror as the Queen's reflection. The dancer was supposed to mirror the singer's movements then step through the mirror and dance for the King. I was unsure if the dancer would be able to see the singer through the fabric of the "mirror," so I identified specific gestures and timing for the singer and dancer to memorize. It proved somewhat challenging for both sopranos, alternating in the role of the Queen, to remember the sequence and timing. Through this part of the rehearsal process, I discovered yet another instance of music in the score but not in the recording. In lieu of using the orchestral recording, I asked both sopranos to sing live and video recorded their natural movements. I took their gestural tendencies and merged them with the original choreography. I video recorded the sequence, so they could practice independently. Both singers seemed able to memorize the movement better using this method.

Much of the first "vision scene" for Act I had to be choreographed on the spot because I did not know in advance what movement would be possible and safe to accomplish. During the week prior to the start of the semester, I was able to test out the comically oversized throne on stage and choreograph the dream sequences in Act I. Since I did not have a significant amount of time to experiment with movement, I found it more expedient to crawl up the ladder to see for myself what could be accomplished while balancing on the throne's armrest several feet in the

air. It seemed imprudent to risk the dancer's safety. Once I had determined what could and could not be done (I gained a few bruises as a result), I had the Mirror Image try the sequence without music. The dancer was familiar with the music since we had rehearsed a few versions of the scene the previous semester; by the time we added the music back in she was able to interpret the musicality of the scene with little coaching.

The same week, I was able to hear the piano reduction of the end of the Mirror Image's *variation*. Professor Ferrara suggested a "cat and mouse game" of sorts with Queen and Mirror Image taunting the King. We attempted several versions of the scene. At first, we tried the Queen and Mirror Image circling the King. The King alternated between chasing the Mirror Image and the Queen as though confused about which of them was real. While an interesting concept, the visual result fell a bit short. In subsequent rehearsals we decided the King should chase the Mirror Image as she toys with him then disappears into the mirror.

It was ideal to have a week of rehearsals prior to the start of the semester. As soon as the semester began, the amount of rehearsal time in the studio was limited.

After a week of working with the Mirror Image and the principal singers, it was time to add the Handmaidens. One of the dancers, cast as a Handmaiden, suffered from a degenerative physical condition that worsened over the summer and led doctors to advise her to stop dancing and switch career paths. I had engaged a dancer during the spring semester to understudy the production and was able to cast her in the opera instead. I reorganized the casts since this dancer was significantly shorter than the dancer she replaced. Due to a scheduling miscommunication with a movie that was filming in the theatre, the first stage rehearsal with the Handmaidens was moved a day earlier. Therefore, several of the dancers' first day back on campus was the same day as the first rehearsal on stage with singers. There was no time to rehearse the cast with the

new dancer, nor was there time for the dancers to practice together after being away from campus for the summer. Fortuitously, I video recorded most of the choreography prior to the summer break, which enabled the dancers to review the footage and practice independently. Video recording proved instrumental in running efficient rehearsals, especially when dancers were unable to attend opera rehearsals due to rehearsals for another production.

Oklahoma Festival Ballet (OFB) performs a version of *The Nutcracker* every four years and engages community children from local ballet schools to perform along with the college dancers and OU Symphony Orchestra. OU's School of Dance received the rights from Ballet West to perform Willam Christensen's version of *The Nutcracker* in the fall of 2019. Over the summer, I was engaged to serve as Children's Ballet Master for the production. As a component of a ballet pedagogy practicum course, several ballet pedagogy undergraduate students were assigned to assist with rehearsals, overseen by instructor Jan Fugit. Concurrent to opera rehearsals and performances, I administered children's *Nutcracker* auditions, executed all communication with parents, followed OU's rules and regulations regarding minors on campus, led children's *Nutcracker* rehearsals, and supervised pedagogy practicum students. To facilitate opera rehearsals and *Nutcracker* rehearsals running simultaneously, I coordinated the dancers' rehearsal schedule between OFB Director Michael Bearden, Associate Director Boyko Dossev, Practicum Instructor and Ballet Master Jan Fugit, and Opera Stage Director William Ferrara. After the schedule was set, I determined which rehearsal dancers needed to attend and sent a weekly email to the OFB faculty and dancers, outlining the schedule for the week. See example schedule below:

> *Nutcracker* and Opera overlap Sept 9-15
> 09/06/2019
>
> Dear All,

The following accommodations are a result of scheduling overlap between the Opera and *Nutcracker* for next week (Sept. 9-15). Please let me know if you have any questions, and thanks again for your flexibility while these two productions are in rehearsal simultaneously. (Jan, please note that this schedule has changed since the earlier draft. I've added Koshansky to Spanish and adjusted some of the dancers' availability to accommodate Eggers and Ansinn's exam conflict as well as some changes in the Opera Schedule.)

M 9/9 *7-10pm: Run Show Red Cast Handmaidens*
Karel: Spanish 6-7: Turpin and Koshansky leave Spanish early to arrive at RPAC Stage by 7:00
Jan/Boyko: Doll/Bear 7-8: LeComte not available for rehearsal, Ansinn and Eggers – leave Doll/Bear rehearsal early to arrive at RPAC stage by 7:45.
MM: Sugar Plum 7-8: Knorr not available for Sugar Plum rehearsal

T 9/10 *7-10pm: Run Show - Crew View, Blue Cast Handmaidens*
Mary Ann: Arabian Corps 6-7: Moss-Tisdale & Mitchell leave Arabian Corps rehearsal early arrive to stage by 7pm, Swearingen & Koshansky excused from 7pm call – arrive to stage by 7:15
Michael/Jan: Snow Pas 6-7: Moss-Tisdale leave Snow Pas rehearsal early arrive to stage by 7pm
MM/Michael: Grand Pas 7-8: Knorr excused from stage Opera rehearsal until 7:45 – leave Grand Pas rehearsal early to arrive to stage by 7:45 pm.

W 9/11
No Opera Rehearsal (No Conflict)

TR 9/12 {No Ansinn or Eggers due to exam} *7:00pm: Piano Tech, run show with stops, Red Cast Handmaiden*
Mary Ann: Arabian Corps 6-7: Swearingen & Koshansky leave Arabian Corps rehearsal early arrive to stage by 7pm, Moss-Tisdale & Mitchell excused from 7pm call – arrive to stage by 7:15
Michael/Jan: Snow Pas 6-7: Moss-Tisdale excused from 7pm call – arrive to stage by 7:15
MM/Michael: Grand Pas 7-8: Knorr not available for Grand Pas rehearsal

F 9/13
7:00pm Piano Tech, Run Show with Stops, Blue Cast Handmaidens (No Nut rehearsals – No Conflicts)

SAT 9/14
5:30-6:30 Warm-up on own FAC 110 (RPAC studios are in use for Nut Auditions)
7:00pm Orchestra Dress Rehearsal, Red Cast Handmaiden (No Nut Rehearsals (Children's *Nutcracker* Audition) -no conflict)

SUN 9/15
5:30-6:30 Warm-up St. John RPAC 3002
7:00pm Orchestra Dress Rehearsal, Blue Cast Handmaiden (No Nut Rehearsals – No Conflict)

-Christa[60]

It was helpful to have two casts of Handmaidens, so there was almost always a full cast to work with the opera singers while the other cast attended *Nutcracker* rehearsals. Although the process of scheduling was time consuming, it helped to alleviate confusion between faculty and students.

The few times available to work with the dancers outside of stage rehearsals with the singers occurred during the first four days of the semester prior to the start of *Nutcracker* rehearsals. After the first week of rehearsals prior to the start of the semester, Professor Ferrara and I determined that although we had not planned to incorporate the dancers with the singers again until the week of August 27, it would be beneficial to call the Handmaidens to a stage rehearsal sooner. Fortuitously, I had scheduled studio rehearsals for the dancers from 6:00 to 8:00 pm Monday through Thursday the first week of classes. We agreed that the dancers should join the singers on stage for rehearsal on the evening of Monday, August 19. On Friday, August 16, I received the following email from Professor Ferrara,

Queen's Aria
08/16/2019

Hi Christa,
What would you think about adding some background movement for the Queen's aria at the beginning of Act II? I envision the 4 dancers holding open the flaps of her tent for her entrance and first verse, then doing some slo-mo movement or poses behind her for verses 2 and 3. I'll show you what I have in mind Monday. OK?

Thanks,
Bill[61]

[60] Christa St. John email to Michael Bearden et. al., *Nutcracker and Opera Overlap Sept 9-15,* Sept 6, 2019.

[61] William Ferrara, email to Christa St. John, *Queen's Aria,* Aug. 16, 2019.

I was delighted at the idea of adding more dance to the opera, and I knew I had Tuesday through Thursday evenings to rehearse the dancers. On Monday, after the evening staging rehearsal and after Professor Ferrara and I had a chance to discuss his vision, I worked late into the night to choreograph the Queen's aria. I set the choreography on the dancers the next day. I found the challenge of being creative within a limited timeframe to be artistically stimulating. George Balanchine's quote, "My muse must come to me on union time," was quite fitting.[62] Rather than feeling as though I was in constant war against the clock, I tried to view time, or rather the lack thereof, as a motivating factor to fuel my creative process. It forced me to create first and analyze later. The result of the rushed composition process led to a few revisions later in the rehearsal process, however, the initial framework and style of the scene remained unchanged.

The Golden Cockerel: Costumes

During the week prior to the start of classes, I met with costume designer Lloyd Cracknell to view the Mirror Image's costume. The previous semester we had determined the costumes would represent more of an exotic fantasy than a specific culture. Cracknell's costumes did not disappoint.[63] In the fall, however, it was also determined that there were not enough funds to create a replica of the Queen's costume for the Mirror Image to wear briefly and then disrobe. Professor Ferrara suggested that it could be the Queen that removes a part of her dress to unveil a more revealing costume similar to the Mirror Image's costume. The Queen would disrobe at the same time the Handmaidens would lower a sheet covering the mirror, revealing the

[62] Arlene Croce, "Balanchine Said," The New Yorker, January 19, 2009, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/01/26/balanchine-said.

[63] See Appendix D.

Mirror Image to the audience. The undressing would coincide with the cheeky line "Now my naked form is hidden, but you may yet be forgiven, if the King, with my consent, takes a peek inside my tent."[64] Then the Mirror Image would emerge from behind the mirror, and both singer and dancer would let down their hair before the Mirror Image began her variation. While a good solution at the time, we ran into a bit of a challenge. One of the singers was pregnant, and by the time we were in dress rehearsals, she was not comfortable in the more revealing costume. The day before opening night wardrobe decided to add a fabric draping over the abdominal area for both the Queen and Mirror Image. Unfortunately, the extra draping kept catching on other parts of the dancer's costume and proved unsafe when she had to climb the ladder at the back of the throne for the dream sequence in Act I. The wardrobe staff had to remove the extra draping from the costumes.

The costumes were delightfully bejeweled and seemingly right out of the ballet *Schéhérazade*. Unbeknownst to me, Cracknell and I had sought inspiration from the same source. The costumes for the Mirror Image and Handmaidens beautifully complemented the dancers' movement and significantly elevated the look of the production. The dancers had costume fittings well in advance of the first dress rehearsal; however, during the first rehearsal in costume, the dancers discovered they could not lift their arms above shoulder height due to tightness of the fabric in the shoulder area. Two events had occurred. First, despite instructions from Cracknell, the fabric was not cut in a way that allowed greater range of movement, something that may have gone unnoticed on singers but proved problematic for the dancers. Second, the dancers had not tested the costumes in their fittings to ensure they had full range of motion of their arms. Regardless of the miscalculation cutting the fabric, the error should have

[64] William Ferrara, "The Golden Cockerel," (unpublished libretto, March 2019), pdf.

been discovered when the dancers first tried on the costumes and not during the first dress rehearsal. While not entirely disastrous, it created a significant amount of last-minute work for an already busy costume shop. It was also a lesson for me; when working with student dancers, it would be prudent to either discuss what to do in a costume fitting in advance or be there for the fitting to supervise.

Act II began with corpses and dismembered limbs strewn about the stage after a horrible battle during which Dodon's two sons were killed. A point was raised in a production meeting that there was not enough armor to fill the stage to create the right amount of carnage. While brainstorming ideas, someone joked that the dancers should serve as dead bodies. Everyone laughed, but I thought it was a resourceful idea. The dancers could contort their bodies in unnatural-looking ways, and there was a full alternate cast of Handmaidens who were required to be at the theatre anyway. It was decided that the dancers would alternate in the roles of Handmaidens and Dead Bodies for the run of performances. The costume shop was able to repurpose costumes from another production for the dancers without added expense. One of the benefits of working with an artistic team was the creative problem solving that came from sharing thoughts and ideas.

The Golden Cockerel: Lighting

The lighting of *The Golden Cockerel* was a crucial element of the production. Two critical moments occurred for which lighting played a vital role in the dance scenes: the Mirror Image's first appearance in the dream sequence in Act I and the mirror scene in Act II. Lighting designer Richard Sprecker achieved great effect when he timed the spotlight to highlight the Mirror Image's leg just as she wrapped it around the back of the throne while the rest of her remained out of view. The moment called for precise timing. A spotlight too soon would ruin the

illusion, and a spotlight too late would miss the leg altogether. The appearance of light hitting the dancer's leg just as it unfurled from behind the massive throne had a magical affect, as though a disembodied limb appeared out of thin air.

The mirror scene in Act II was fraught with complexity. The light needed to illuminate the fabric behind the mirror in such a way that the silhouette of the Mirror Image was visible but not so bright that the audience could see through the material. Several elements in this scene caused a bit of a challenge. In rehearsals leading up to the first technical rehearsal, the dancer in the role of the Mirror Image had been cheating slightly by looking over her shoulder at the singer. As rehearsals progressed, the singers embellished and improvised some of the gestures the Mirror Image had to replicate. As the performances neared, the timing of the gestures became less exact and inconsistent between the two casts of singers. Likely it would not have been problematic, if the dancer had been able to see the singer's silhouette through the fabric of the mirror. We discovered at our first technical run through that the dancer could not see the singer at all. After trying several remedies that were ineffective, I found two solutions to the dilemma. First, I asked both singers to tone down their gestures and slow down their movements. The faster the singer moved, the more disparity occurred between the Queen and the Mirror Image. Upon reflection, it would have been beneficial to further simplify their movements or call for another rehearsal with the Queen and Mirror Image. The second technique I employed was to position the lead dancer's understudy in the wing in a way that the understudy could see the Queen and the Mirror Image could see the understudy. The understudy was able to mirror the Queen's movements and the Mirror image was able to copy the understudy. While there was a bit of a delay between the Queen's and Mirror Image's movements, it helped the effect.

For two of the four shows a light was out of focus which resulted in a portion of the mirror remaining unlit. The issue with the light did not occur during technical or dress rehearsals. The mispositioned light made it more difficult for the Mirror Image to see the understudy and the audience could only see a partial silhouette of the dancer. In retrospect, I should have simplified the movement, spent more time coaching the singers, and requested the light be tested before the curtain rose on each show.

The Golden Cockerel: Orchestral Rehearsals and Performances

The weekend of the first orchestral rehearsals overlapped with children's *Nutcracker* auditions and meetings regarding casting. The following week of dress rehearsals and performances coincided with the first week of running evening and weekend *Nutcracker* rehearsals for the children. As a result of the overlap in rehearsal schedules I had the dancers warm themselves up for several rehearsals and performances and communicated notes through email. Despite the rigorous schedule, I was tremendously grateful for all of the opportunities.

Rehearsals with the orchestra began four days prior to opening night. As useful as piano rehearsals were to help resolve discrepancies between the score to the recordings, it was marvelous to have Rimsky-Korsakov's colorful instrumentation voiced by a full orchestra. Not all of the instrumentation was covered in the piano reduction, and sometimes it was unclear which instruments were represented. After several piano rehearsals, I began questioning some of my choreographic choices. I had to return to the orchestral recording periodically to ameliorate my concern. On very few occasions did the tempi require adjustment. The only significantly divergent opinion on tempo occurred at the start of the Handmaiden's final dance. Differing opinions about the interpretation of *andante* tempo can be quite common in the musical world. Dr. Shames' interpretation was considerably faster than mine, and faster than the recordings

provided. After a rather comical run through during which the Handmaids had to sprint across the stage, adjustments needed to be made. Since the choreography did not have the same effect when performed faster, Dr. Shames was kind enough to decrease the tempo for the Handmaiden's entrance.

During the final rehearsal for the opera, I noticed that there were only three, instead of four, dancers on stage as dead bodies for the start of Act II. I was about to rush backstage to see who missed their entrance when a stage manager informed me that one of the Handmaidens had fallen ill, and her alternate (the missing dead body) was changing quickly to take her place. The weeks leading up to the opera had been especially busy for the dancers. They were navigating *Nutcracker* rehearsals for a version of *The Nutcracker* intended for professional dancers and attending opera rehearsals in addition to their other classes. It was great practice for the professional world. Often dancers perform in one production while simultaneously rehearsing for another. That stated, they were still students, and I could tell the late nights in the studio and theatre were having a deleterious effect on them.

During the week of technical and dress rehearsals, another Handmaiden had several blisters on her feet which became infected. She was not able to dance for several days. By opening night, however, she had healed enough and was able to perform despite not being able to participate in some critical rehearsals. The Handmaiden who fell ill during dress rehearsal was only able to perform in the final show. One of the benefits of having two casts was the ability to navigate these challenges without disruption to the production. Furthermore, it helped disperse some of the workload.

Prior to the final dress rehearsal, the dancer in the role of the Queen's Mirror Image expressed that she was feeling rather ill. She was scheduled to assist with *Nutcracker* rehearsals

the next day, so I told her to stay home and rest. She was still able to perform but was not feeling well throughout the run of shows. While I could have figured out a solution, I was grateful she was able to push through, since I had my concerns about the understudy's ability to step into the Queen's Mirror Image role. Dancing while sick, a common practice, may be a bygone of the pre COVID-19 era.

I was sensing from the dancers that the demands of both productions were becoming a bit overwhelming. I tried to advocate to help lighten their workload. I requested that the production team consider not having the dancers involved in striking the set after the final show and requested they receive a day off on the following Monday.

> Warm-up and Dead Body Call (Also Strike and Monday)
> 08/21/2019
>
> Dear Dancers,
>
> Tonight: Red Cast and Turpin meet at 6:00pm RPAC 3002 for a light warm-up (6:00-6:30) sign in downstairs ahead of time.
> Blue Cast meet in RPAC 3002 at 6:30 to check in with alternate. (sign in downstairs ahead of time).
>
> Tomorrow: Blue Cast and Turpin meet at 1:00 pm RPAC 3002 for warm-up 1:00-1:45 Sign in before coming to warm-up.
> Red Cast called at 1:30. Meet in RPAC 3002 to check in with alternate. Sign in before coming upstairs.
>
> **NO STRIKE ON SUNDAY**
>
> From Jeff Baldwin, "After careful consideration, I think we can dismiss the dancers from strike. With that said, post show we will need them to come back to the RPAC audience with the rest of cast and crew. Then I will dismiss them from there."
> Out of fairness to the other cast members please keep this information to yourselves.
>
> **EXCUSED FROM CLASSES AND REHEARSALS ON MONDAY**
>
> Director Bearden has requested that you be excused from your classes/rehearsals on Monday, September 23, if you feel you need to rest after a long run of late nights in the theater.

(Please note, this is optional, and it is just a request. It is the prerogative of each faculty member to decide if you can be excused.)

Wonderful job so far!
Toi, Toi, Toi for this weekend's performances.

All my best,

Christa[65]

I felt if I could lighten their workload, they would be better able to focus on the performances.

[65] Author email communication to dancers, "Warm-up and Dead Body Call (Also Strike and Monday), September 21, 2019.

Chapter IV: Analysis of OU's Production of *The Golden Cockerel*

The Use of Dance in Act I and Act II of *The Golden Cockerel*

The role of dance in Act I of *The Golden Cockerel* foreshadows the events that unfold in Act II. In the performance of the first act, the dancers appeared to King Dodon in his dreams. The introduction of dance during the King's altered state of consciousness may have allowed the audience to rectify the "reality" of the opera with the conventions of dance. Since the dancers did not appear until 30 minutes into Act I, the introduction of dance into the opera as a dream, helped the two artforms cohabitate on the stage without a jarring effect. Film Director and choreographer Bob Fosse used a similar technique when he translated his choreography for the Broadway show *Cabaret* into the film *Cabaret.* To rectify what Fosse perceived as the absurdity of characters breaking out into song and dance (which worked arguably well in the Broadway production), in the film version, Fosse used the cabaret as a natural setting for song and dance to occur and eliminated musical numbers that did not take place on the cabaret stage.[66] Fosse's use of a location in which one may expect the characters to sing and dance allowed him to combine the gritty reality of the film with the conventions of musical theatre. Music scholar Daniel Albright states, "Often in opera the dancing is quite unobtrusively integrated into the drama, as in the ballroom scenes in *La Traviata* and *Eugene Onegin."*[67] If dance occurs in a setting in which one might expect dance in real life, the conventions of dance within another artistic form may be more easily reconcilable. In the musical *Oklahoma!,* although dance is incorporated early in the production, Agnes de Mille uses a dream to introduce an extended ballet sequence. The depiction of an altered state of consciousness may facilitate audience members' acceptance of a

[66] Bob Fosse, "Turner Classic Movies: Cabaret ," Watch TCM, accessed September 23, 2020, https://www.tcm.com/watchtcm/titles/21780.

[67] Albright, "Golden Calves," 22.

change to the established conventions of the production. For example, in Marius Petipa's *La Bayadère,* the warrior Solor smokes a hookah which induces the hallucinatory kingdom of the shades. The use of dreams as a vehicle for dance in Act I of *The Golden Cockerel* was a way to incorporate one art form within another without incongruous, effect.

The choreography for the dream sequences unfolds as follows. The dancing role of the Queen's Mirror Image appears to the King, in both dream sequences, as the embodiment of Queen Shemaka (who does not appear until Act II). The first dream occurs following an afternoon of indolent gluttony. The King falls asleep atop his massive throne, and after some sonorous snoring, the Queen's Mirror Image materializes in coordination with Queen Shemaka's *leitmotif*.[68] The Mirror Image's seemingly disembodied leg wraps around the throne in a serpentine manner. She stands on the throne's arm and executes a *penché* until her hand is within an inch of the King's face. The Mirror Image's gaze fixes on the King, who is sound asleep but reaching longingly in her direction. Abruptly she shifts her gaze to the audience as if to say, "just you wait." During King Dodon's second dream, the Queen's Handmaidens perform a tantalizing dance. The Queen's Mirror Image reappears. She continues to seduce the King and establishes a connection with the Golden Cockerel who sits atop a tower overlooking the throne. The Golden Cockerel remains awake during both dream sequences; a hint to the audience that these are perhaps more than dreams. [69]

In order to construct the choreography of the first appearance of the Queen's Mirror Image, my penchant for advanced planning had to be cast aside. It was not until the gigantic throne was constructed that I was able to explore safe ways for the dancer to ascend the ladder at

[68] See *The Golden Cockerel,* start at minute 31:32 https://youtu.be/iR1LwQu73eE?t=1882

[69] See *The Golden Cockerel,* start at minute 37:53, https://youtu.be/iR1LwQu73eE?t=2273

the back of the throne and subsequently materialize as though out of thin air. The illusion required the dancer to hide behind Dodon's throne, positioned center stage, from the opening of the opera until her first appearance 30 minutes later. To remain out of view of the audience, the dancer had to stand as still as possible due to the small metal coins affixed to her costume, which made an audible sound with each movement. Although taxing for the dancer, her sudden appearance on the throne helped illustrate that she was from another realm and did not abide by the same reality as the King and his kingdom.

While there was an erotic nature to the dream sequences in the first act and throughout the dances in the second act, I opted for suggestiveness over overt sexuality primarily because I was working with students on a university campus. Finding right balance of eroticism proved a bit of a challenge. The suggestive nature of Dodon's second dream was not fully realized in performance. The scene would have benefited from more effective coaching of intent and expression. The choreography followed too closely with the musical phrasing making the dancing somewhat redundant to the music. Nonetheless, the appearance of dancers during Dodon's dreams in Act I helped make the dance sequences in Act II less of a departure from the conventions of the opera and more emblematic of the mysterious and magical (and perhaps sinister) nature of the Queen.

Creating movement for the famous "Hymn to the Sun" aria of Queen Shemaka was an exercise in choreographic restraint. For this scene, and throughout the opera, I sought for the choreography to highlight the singers (rather than the dancers) when the singers were meant to be the focus of the audience (a good rule to follow for any opera choreographer). The task of creating movement that was visually appealing, relevant to the scene, and yet not overpowering posed a bit of a challenge.

Per the recommendation of the Stage Director William Ferrara, I divided the staging structure into sections to match the three verses of the aria. The staging for the dancers unfolds as follows. When the Queen begins to sing, the movement is subtle, and the dancers remain upstage; during the second verse of the aria the dancers move slightly downstage, and the movements become freer and with greater diversity in levels. More expansive use of the stage and more dynamic movements complement the third verse. To guide the eyes of the audience to the Queen as the focal point, the dancers repeatedly gesture in her direction.

As stage rehearsals for the aria began, however, one of two sopranos alternating in the role of the Queen, did not always travel to the same areas of the stage throughout the aria, nor did she easily recall the pathways I outlined for her. My attempts for the dancers to counterbalance and then to frame the Queen's movement led to several near collisions on stage when the singer unexpectedly changed pathways mid-aria. To alleviate this issue, I recorded the organic pathways of the singer and constructed the choreography around her natural movement. Since the timing and pathways were her own, she was more easily able to recall them for subsequent rehearsals and performances. The other soprano, alternating in the role of the Queen, was more comfortable coordinating her movements with the dancers and adopted the timing and pathways of her alternate.

Much of the choreography for the "Hymn to the Sun" aria came into place after the style and staging were determined. My movement interpretation of Rimsky-Korsakov's music developed through experimentation with embodying and contrasting the vocal line. The choreography unfolds as follows. When the Queen, in *coloratura* style, reaches several ornamented high notes, the Handmaidens *combré* forward in an exaggerated bow to both highlight the Queen's status above theirs and to counterbalance the ascending register of the

vocal line. The choreography gradually builds in intensity throughout the aria. At the end, however, it suits the music and dramatic intent to contrast the vocal gymnastics of the highest notes in the soprano's upper register with the absence of movement.[70]

Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel* is rich in satirical content and reflective of the traditions of nationalist opera, greatly influenced by composer Mikhail Glinka. Keeping with operatic trends in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Russia, it is an orientalist fantasy, based on a tale by Pushkin, with folk elements, brilliantly colored with sophisticated orchestration. The balletic equivalent of some of the traditions of Russian opera is embodied in the exotic ballets of the Ballets Russes. While much of the choreography of Fokine's *The Golden Cockerel* is considered lost, his choreographic interpretation of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Schéhérazade* is well preserved. Prior to choreographing *The Golden Cockerel,* Fokine used re-orchestrated music from Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic suite *Schéhérazade* to create one of his most well-known ballets. Even though Rimsky-Korsakov did not compose *Schéhérazade* with ballet in mind, and much to the aggrievement of his widow who protested its use in the Ballets Russes production, the musical composition is ripe with balletic potential.[71] Rimsky-Korsakov's music lent itself so well to the balletic genre that Diaghilev included his compositions frequently in Ballets Russes productions. Diaghilev incorporated excerpts or new arrangements of Rimsky-Korsakov's music in the ballets *Le Festin, Ivan the Terrible* (from *The Maid of Pskov),* *Cléopâtre*, *The Underwater Kingdom* (from *Sadiko),* and *Le Soleil de Nuit* (from *The Snow Maiden*).[72]

---

[70]See *The Golden Cockerel,* https://youtu.be/0NCkqpV-olk, min 6:24-11:19.

[71] Oleg Minin, "Synthesizing Beauty: Rimsky-Korsakov's Music in the Context of Diaghilev's 'Russian Seasons' in Paris," August 6, 2018, https://blogs.bard.edu/bmf/2018/08/03/synthesizing-beauty-rimsky-korsakovs-music-in-the-context-of-diaghilevs-russian-seasons-in-paris/.

[72] Ibid.

Diaghilev studied composition with Rimsky-Korsakov at the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music (1890-1892); however, their time together did not end well after Korsakov told Diaghilev he had no talent for composition.[73] Perhaps Diaghilev did not hold a grudge against his former professor, since Diaghilev continued to incorporate Rimsky-Korsakov's music into ballets well after Korsakov's passing in 1908. Or, it is possible, since Diaghilev had a penchant for drama and scandal, he intentionally repurposed Rimsky-Korsakov's operatic and symphonic music for dance, knowing the composer would disapprove.

The movement in my choreography was inspired, in part, by Fokine's movement style for *Schéhérazade*. Similar to Fokine, who found inspiration in the style of Russian *lubok,* and at the suggestion of Stage Director William Ferrara, I sought inspiration from paintings of the goddess Isis which I found to be evocative of the otherworldly beauty I wished to encapsulate in movement.[74] Following the balletic traditions of translating musical exoticism to movement, in this production I took a more fantastical rather than literal approach to creating movement reflective of a specific culture. The use of extant cultural dance, of which I had little training or knowledge, is at best distasteful and at worst offensive, and the mysterious and magical quality of Rimsky-Korsakov's music allowed for movement inspired by fantasy and not tied to reality.

The relationship between dance and opera is complicated. Neither can do the other's job, yet both can accomplish the same goal. Fokine's and Diaghilev's decision to place the singers on the sides of the stage for the entire opera was a bold choice at the time. The origin of this decision was reported differently by Diaghilev, Fokine, and designer Benois. In his memoirs,

---

[73] Ibid.

[74] Fokine, 230.

Fokine states that he was initially interested in staging the suite arrangement of *The Golden Cockerel* and broached the idea with Diaghilev. Fokine writes, "He greeted my idea with enthusiasm and asked why not do the whole opera instead of just the suite? I immediately became much interested, but suggested staging the opera, not with singers, but with dancers, placing the singers in the orchestra pit."[75] They did not, however, end up placing the singers in the pit. Fokine continues, "Alexandre Benois suggested seating the singers and chorus not in the orchestra pit but on the stage. I at once agreed with this."[76] In a dance section of *The Golden Cockerel* between rehearsal number 150-158, the singer and dancer share a similar relationship to that of the 1914 production, albeit briefly.[77] Precedence for this type of role in which the dancer serves as a substitute body for the singer, however, exists throughout opera history. Opera and dance scholar Daniel Albright writes, "In later operas like Massenet's *Thaïs* (1894) and Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* (1877), prostitute heroines would be surrounded with dancers to act as their vicarious flesh. Sometimes, as in many performances of Strauss's *Salome* (1905), a dancer would literally take the role of the soprano and teasingly unveil the body that Isolde would have if she really were a sixteen-year-old girl."[78] Albright continues by asking, "But is all this carnality a good idea? The trick of opera—the displacement of the body into voice—is exposed as such whenever it has to compete with actual nakedness: there arises of necessity a moment of focal readjustment and unease when bacchanal or striptease stops and opera

[75] Ibid., 226.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov and Belʹskiĭ, Vladimir Ivanovich, *The Golden Cockerel: An Opera in Three Acts*, Vocal Score with Russian and English Text (Melville, N.Y: C. F. Peters, 1983), 113-118.

[78] Albright, 28.

resumes."[79] Initially, the dancer portraying the Queen's Mirror Image was to take off her dress and expose a more revealing costume. Just how revealing was a point of several discussions. Eventually, it was determined that the singer rather than the dancer would disrobe (although this was more a matter of practicality, due to the expense of creating a replica costume of the Queen's ornate gown for the Mirror Image to wear briefly, rather than an artistic choice).

For the mirror scene in Act II, I employed a more traditional approach, from a balletic perspective, because there was less reason to be sensitive to upstaging the singer. The choreography unfolds as follows. The dancer initially mirrors the singer's movements and then becomes the focus of the dramatic action while the singer stands to the side.[80] The Queen's Mirror Image remains in the center stage space, and the choreography tracks between Dodon on stage left, and the Queen on stage right. The dancer becomes a pawn in the plot for the seduction and destruction of the King. The choreography for the Queen's Mirror Image does not include exaggerated bows like the Handmaiden's dance to highlight the regality of her position; however, a similar choreographic motif of opening the legs from a crossed position to an open, turned-out position is used throughout her variation to tempt the King. To compete with the vocal dexterity of the soprano's highest notes, near the end of the dance, the Queen's Image demonstrates similar dexterity by executing a deep and comparably ornamented backbend.[81]

Rimsky-Korsakov, in what appears to be an effort to preempt overzealous choreographers, offers a stern warning at the front of the score. Rimsky-Korsakov states, "The dances performed by the King and Queen in the second act must be carried out so as not to

[79] Ibid.

[80] See *The Golden Cockerel, https://youtu.be/0NCkqpV-olk, min.15:08-19:33.*

[81] Ibid., min. 18:33-18:36.

interfere with the singers breathing by too sudden or too violent movement."[82] It appears Rimsky-Korsakov could sense movement potential in his music. In the article "Satire and Symbolism in *The Golden Cockerel*," author Gerald Abraham writes, "The greater part of the second act, with her seduction and humiliation of Dodon, was entirely Belsky's [librettist] invention and it was these additions that gave the greatest offense to the authorities."[83] Abraham asserts that it is unclear what drew Rimsky-Korsakov to Pushkin's poem but speculates the following, "But, while he must have been familiar with the poem all his life, it seems probable that his interest in Dodon as a political symbol was stimulated by a cartoon…The cartoon showed the King standing at a window and staring stupidly at the moon, and the caption indicated that 'the most illustrious Tsar Dodon, sovereign of the entire earth, his magnificent belly filled with foreign foods, was contemplating the idea of rounding off his dominions by annexing the moon."[84] Abraham continues, "It was an obvious attack on Tsarist 'expansionism'. The artist was Ivan Bilibin, one of the most delightful illustrators of Russian fairy-tales, and it can hardly have been pure coincidence that Bilibin was commissioned to design both the sets and costumes for the first production and the cover of the vocal score."[85] The choreography for the final dance of Act II with Dodon, the Queen, and the Handmaidens represents Dodon's subjugation to the Queen and take place as follows. The humiliation of the King is expressed first through dress (the dancers remove his armor, cover his beard with a silken scarf, and give

[82] Rimsky-Korsakov, 4.

[83] Gerald Abraham, "Satire and Symbolism in 'The Golden Cockerel.'" *Music and Letters*, LII no. 1 (January 1971), 52, https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/10.1093/ml/lii.1.46.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Abraham, 51.

him a peacock feather fan) and then through movement.[86] The Handmaiden dancers begin a slow dance as outlined in the score. The King, at the instruction of the Queen, tries to replicate the Queen's dancing. Between rehearsal number 197 and 198, Rimsky-Korsakov indicates musically that the King is dancing foolishly.[87] The King's indignity is furthered in the choreography through his awkward and ungraceful movements juxtaposed by the balletic grace of the Handmaidens. Though careful not to upstage the singers, the choreography for the dancers drives the action, and eventually the Handmaidens succeed in exhausting the King. Rimsky-Korsakov's music begins in a beautifully elegant, *andante* tempo and becomes progressively wilder as the dance continues. It builds with excitement until it all comes crashing down at the end, as does the King.

A basis of knowledge regarding the role dance serves in an opera can help tremendously to create unity between the art forms, and a good working relationship with the stage director, if there is one, is vital. In his final opera, Rimsky-Korsakov creates a mysterious, exotic, and satirical world in which dance can occur — translating such resplendent music to movement, rich with artistic possibilities. Whether it exists in opera, opera-ballet, or balletic form, Rimsky-Korsakov's mastery of compositional techniques is both reminiscent of opera in the nineteenth century but also forward-looking to a new era of twentieth-century opera. His most famous pupil, Igor Stravinsky, learned much from him about compositional techniques. Fokine's balletic interpretation was forward-thinking to the modern era of ballet but not entirely removed from the classicism that predominated ballet at the end of the nineteenth century. Through my choreography for *The Golden Cockerel,* I endeavored to translate Rimsky-Korsakov's music into

[86] See *The Golden Cockerel, https://youtu.be/0NCkqpV-olk,* min. 20:57-25:00.

[87] Ibid., approx. min. 23:37.

a choreographic style evocative of the exoticism and eroticism of many Ballets Russes ballets, yet also suited to the technical and maturity level of student dancers at a university. I sought to create choreography that would enhance, support, and, at times, drive the dramatic narrative of the opera.

Analysis of the Final Performances of *The Golden Cockerel*

In the textbook *Dance Composition*, Jacqueline Smith-Autard declares, "There is no objective formula for evaluation of a dance. It cannot be entirely processed by factual analysis, yet it is not merely judged on inner feelings or personal taste."[88] To Smith-Autard's point, regardless of objectivity it is necessary to the creative process to analyze one's choreographic work using a variety of criteria. It is perhaps the absence of neutrality that may make the choreographer the most well-informed judge of the result. Yet, evaluating one's work can be challenging; it requires the choreographer to admit failure and, perhaps more challenging, to acknowledge success.

The quality of the run of four performances was uneven for the dancers, singers, and orchestra. It seemed as though each cast had one solid performance and one less than solid performance. The orchestra seemed hesitant and uncoordinated for the first show, excelled in the subsequent two shows, and then sounded fatigued by the final performance. The singers and dancers followed a similar pattern. Overall, however, the production seemed to be well-received. The audience reacted especially well to the witty humor of Professor Ferrara's translations.

The dance served as *divertissement*. The dancers were beautiful and added an element of grace and glamour to the production. The lead dancer was alluring and evoked an air of mystery. And yet, they were nothing more than icing on a cake. The choreography served its purpose; it

[88] Jacqueline M. Smith-Autard, Dance Composition: A Practical Guide to Creative Success in Dance Making (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 218.

supported the singers when it needed to, it drove the narrative when required, and it enhanced the otherworldly quality of the land of Queen Shemaka. Yet, it was not particularly innovative, nor was it remarkably well-executed. In the textbook, *The Intimate Act of Choreography*, authors Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin Chaplin write, "All along the choreographic process should have an element of daring and risk-taking; otherwise, nothing new in movement or concept will be created."[89] While I enjoyed the challenge of creating quickly, I could have taken more risks throughout the creative process. The reflective nature of the choreography to the music led to inadequate dynamic quality in some of the dance sequences.

The most compelling piece of choreography was the Mirror Image's *variation* during which the use of levels and stage space was visually interesting. The Queen's "Hymn to the Sun" aria was effective in the sense that the dancers did not overpower or distract from the singer; yet there could have been more vivacity to the movement. One element that got lost in the fun of the final dance and, perhaps in the aria, was an element of evil from the Handmaidens. The Handmaidens were soft and, at times, somewhat seductive (they could have used more coaching). The addition of alluring malevolence (Professor Ferrara suggested vampires) would have added to the dancers' presence on stage. Lack of this element was due in part to time and the dancers' inexperience with narrative work, but it was primarily due to an error in coaching. I expected the dancers to contribute more artistry to the production and realized too late they needed to be given more tools to aid and refine their expressive qualities.

While the choreography served its purpose in the opera, the movement itself was reminiscent of similar works, and, at times, followed the melodic line too closely. The dancers had a stylized and engaging movement quality, yet not enough complexity and contrast. Often,

[89] Lynne Anne Blom and L. Tarin. Chaplin, *The Intimate Act of Choreography* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994), 205.

the Handmaids were unified in the tempo of the steps, rarely were there contrasting tempi or qualities. The use of space was often symmetrical. The principals were frequently on center stage with dancers framing them. At times this was necessary so the singers would be in an optional spot for sound quality and projection, however, there were moments in which this was not a consideration, and a more asymmetrical approach could have been used.

Once the choreography was set there was little time to make emendations. Upon reflection, however, I should have prioritized editing. In the book, *The Creative Habit,* Twyla Tharp discusses the editing process in her chapter regarding failure. Tharp states, "The more you fail in private, the less you fail in public. In many ways, the creative act is editing."[90] She explains that from a three-hour session with her dancers, during which she records the entire process, she may find 30 seconds of material worth using upon review of the footage. She calculates this to be a 99.7% rate of failure but claims it is absolutely necessary to her process.[91] Although my reality did not include seemingly limitless rehearsal time with dancers to create and revise, Tharp's point about the importance of editing is apt.

Tharp describes her experience reworking one of her biggest commercial successes, the Broadway show *Movin' Out.* Prior to its Broadway debut, Tharp made significant changes to the entire first act while the show was in previews in Chicago. She states, "…Changing the work and how we work is the unpleasant task of *dealing* with that which we have been *denying.* It is probably the biggest test of the creative process, demanding not only admission that you've made a mistake but that you know how to fix it."[92] Tharp analyzes what she deems as critical

[90] Twyla Tharp and Mark Reiter, *The Creative Habit Learn It and Use It for Life: A Practical Guide* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 213.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid., 218.

errors in constructing and staging the first Act of *Movin' Out.* She describes herself as being in denial about some of the decisions, and it was the response from critics and audiences after the first week of previews that confirmed her suspicions that the piece was in need of substantial revision. In the intervening time between the Chicago preview and the debut in New York, Tharp made major changes to the work. She dimmed the lighting on the band to allow the audience to focus on the dancers, she cut some dancers' roles and expanded others, cut secondary characters, took out some songs, refocused the plot on the principal characters, and then realized the opening number was part of the problem. Tharp proceeded to create a prologue based on her previous work, *Ocean's Motion,* and taught 24 dancers the entire opening piece in one three-hour rehearsal.[93] Since she was open to listening to those around her and stayed focused on the process of editing, Tharp was able to execute changes to the work that led to a successful Broadway premiere, much more favorable reviews in New York than Chicago, and a more effective production. For *The Golden Cockerel* I sought little input on my choreography outside of the discussions I had with Professor Ferrara. The ability to edit one's choreography is an essential element to the growth and development of successful dance composition. My choreographic work fell a bit short in this regard due primarily to a lack of emphasis on the editing phase of the creative process. While creation and analysis are two separate processes, it would have been of benefit to the dynamism of the choreography to have analyzed the work more thoroughly after its creation. Unlike musical theatre productions, which sometimes benefit from preview performances during which adjustments can be made, time for analysis and change once a work has reached the stage is rare. Given the timeframe in which I was working, significant changes to the choreography likely would not have been possible. Seeking input from

[93] Ibid., 225.

others in the early stages of the work, and a more frequent use of video recording in rehearsals, could have aided the creative process.

Chapter V: *The Pearl Fishers*: Historical Background

If French composer Georges Bizet had not achieved success with his opera *Carmen,* it is possible that his early opera, *The Pearl Fishers,* would be lost to obscurity today. *The Pearl Fishers* premiered in 1863 at the Théâtre-Lyrique in Paris, France. It was not typical for someone of Bizet's age (25 years old) and relative lack of experience to have the opportunity to compose and premiere a fully staged, three-act opera. Conditions in Paris made it particularly challenging for a young composer to gain notice in the city's highly structured and regulated system of opera production. Bizet, however, was the beneficiary of unique circumstances that led to his selection as a composer for *The Pearl Fishers*; winning the Prix de Rome, networking, and a bit of luck all played a role. The opera was not particularly well-received by critics, although it was performed 18 times, more than many other contemporaneous productions.[94] After the production closed, it was not revived during Bizet's lifetime. It is unlikely Bizet ever imagined *The Pearl Fishers* would gain significant popularity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[95] In 1875, Bizet died of a heart attack, at the age of 37, during the first run of his new opera *Carmen.* Bizet was dismayed at the critical reception of *Carmen* and only attended opening night.[96] He died unaware of the tremendous success *Carmen* would eventually achieve, and rumors circulated he committed suicide due to his disappointment with the reception of the opera.[97] Excerpts from

[94] Mina Kirstein Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977).145.

[95] Hugh Macdonald, *Bizet* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2014), 228.

[96] Ibid., 226.

[97] Ibid., 226.

The Pearl Fishers and *Carmen* were played at his funeral; a fitting tribute to one of the great composers of the nineteenth century.[98]

In the decades prior to the premiere of *The Pearl Fishers*, opera in France was divided primarily between two state-subsidized opera houses: the Opéra, and the Opéra-Comique. The Théâtre-Italian was another prominent opera house; however, as the name implies, it was devoted almost entirely to Italian repertoire.[99] The Opéra was dedicated to Grand Opera with an international register of composers; the Opéra-Comique offered lighter traditional French opera. In the book, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, music historian Hervé Lacombe states, "Far from being the result of a free creative flowering, nineteenth-century French opera, perhaps more than any other art form, was governed by a complex set of codes and practices, and by a system of production that intruded on every level of composition, preparation, and performance."[100] For a French composer to be considered successful in France, they had to have their work premiered at one of the two prominent opera houses in Paris. The competition was fierce and Parisian audiences were quite resistant to new ideas and approaches to opera, which made it difficult for new composers to gain notice at the major theatres. To this point, author of *Bizet and His World,* Mina Curtiss, states, "By the time the second empire reached its height, the Opéra was a kind of club of the upper classes, desiring no new members and requiring no new forms of entertainment."[101]

---

[98] Ibid., 228.

[99] Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 12.

[100] Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera*, 1.

[101] Mina Kirstein Curtiss, *Bizet and His World* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 125.

At the height of the Romantic era in ballet, 1830-1840 (which is reversed from the musical eras, in which the classical era precedes the romantic), ballet had in some ways broken away from opera and stood as an independent art form. Yet opera and ballet were still performed on the same evening, and the incorporation or insertion of ballet into opera was still commonplace and continued throughout the nineteenth century in France. The Opéra had a long history of including ballets in operas to appease Parisian tastes. Parisian audiences expected ballet in their operas. The practice of inserting ballets into operas, even if the opera was not originally crafted to include dance, was applauded by many, and yet criticized by some. To this point, according to Lacombe, when *Don Giovanni* (titled *Don Juan*) was performed at the Opéra, the director inserted an entire ballet comprised of bits of Mozart compositions. To this, contemporaneous composer and outspoken music critic Hector Berlioz states,

> Since you wanted a dance *no matter what*, it would have been better, more honest and fairer to have someone compose some genuine ballet pieces, and to admit that these have nothing to do with the composer of *Don Juan*, rather than using shreds violently torn here from an operatic duet, therefrom a piano concerto, all drawn out, truncated, dislocated – whose worst defect is that it is no good for dancing.[102]

Wagner faced rejection of his work at the Opéra a few years prior to Bizet's première due in part to his refusal to insert a ballet into the second act of his opera, *Tannhäuser*. Wagner's opera was only performed three times in Paris and faced harsh criticism before he withdrew it. In a letter to the director of the Opéra, Wagner states, "The opposition that has been expressed to *Tannhäuser* proves to me how right you were when at the outset of this business you commented to me on the lack of ballet and other stage conventions to which the Opéra subscribers are accustomed. I regret that the nature of my work prevented me from conforming to these requirements."[103] In his

[102] Hector Berlioz as cited in Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera*, 27.

[103] Wagner, as cited in Ibid., 40.

statement, Wagner makes clear an unwillingness to compromise his vision. While the lens of history has shown mostly kindly on Wagner for his musical ingenuity, at the time of Bizet's production of *The Pearl Fishers,* Wagner was not particularly well-liked in Paris. In fact, several disgruntled critics used Wagner's name as an epithet and accused Bizet of "Wagnerism." While Bizet's composition for *The Pearl Fishers* was fresh and forward-thinking in many ways, it also followed many French operatic traditions, most notably the inclusion of delightful dance scenes imbued with rich colorations and rhythms fitting for dance.

Competition to have works produced at the two government-subsidized opera houses in Paris was incredibly fierce. Hector Berlioz and others felt that there was little room in the highly structured and regimented system to promote new French composers and that this lack of progressiveness had caused opera in Paris to grow stagnant. The opening of a new theatre, the Théâtre-Lyrique, offered some respite and a unique opportunity to those weary of current operas. To this point music historian, T. J. Walsh writes,

> The Théâtre-Lyrique started out as another brave and short-lived attempt to make French opera commercially feasible in Paris outside the walls of those venerable institutions, the Opéra and the Opera-Comique - this was always an ambitious project considering that even at these two establishments opera was a decidedly unhealthy financial proposition. What made the effort seem almost suicidal was the fact that the Théâtre-Lyrique did not initially benefit from the government subsidy allotted to the other houses and was officially burdened with the responsibility of presenting a certain number of works each year by young unknown composers. It was quite remarkable, then, that the theater did manage to survive for an impressive nineteen years. With operas such as *Faust*, *Romeo et Juliette*, *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, and *Les Troyens*, it gave the premieres of more works that have endured than the Opéra and Opera-Comique combined during this period.[104]

Despite a central mission of the Théâtre-Lyrique to promote the work of young unknown composers, under the management of Léon Carvahlo, the government felt there were still not

[104] As cited in Steven Huebner, "Reviewed Work: Second Empire Opera: The Théatre Lyrique, Paris 1851-1870 by T. J. Walsh," The Musical Quarterly 68, no. 3 (1982): 416-19. Accessed November 1, 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/742011. 416.

enough performances devoted to the promotion of modern works. Therefore, in an effort to encourage new works, a decree was issued in 1863, allocating 100,000 francs toward the production of a new opera composed by prize winners or former prize winners of the French Academy.[105]

In 1857, Bizet had been awarded the *Prix de Rome* and spent three years studying in Italy before he returned to Paris in 1860 to tend to his ill mother.[106] Through a series of connections and the fortuitous 1863 decree and subvention, Carvalho accepted an opera at the Theatre-Lyrique titled *Leila*. Eugène Cormon and Michel Carré were engaged as the librettists, and Bizet was engaged as the composer. According to Bizet biographer Hugh McDonald, "the sequence in which librettists, composer, and subject of *Les Pêcheurs de perles* were selected and approved is unknown to us. Carvalho liked to be involved in every decision, and no doubt he was. The choice fell on an exotic setting, originally Mexico, an opéra-comique format with separate numbers interspersed with dialogue, and a story about two men's rivalry for the love of a native woman."[107] After its initial conception, the opera underwent many modifications before and after its premiere. The setting was changed to the island of Ceylon, and the spoken dialogue was replaced with recitative, which shifted the genre of *The Pearl Fishers* from an opera-comique to a grand opera format, with a few exceptions. *The Pearl Fishers* did not entirely align with the traditional structure of grand opera, and Bizet was criticized for the modified format.[108] Lacombe states, "Bizet's opera – with its lively plot, sung from start to finish, and with its employment of

[105] Brad Cohen in Georges Bizet, Michel Carre, and Eugene Cormon, *Pêcheurs de perles*, ed. Brad Cohen, trans. David Parry (London: Peters Edition Ltd, 2015). 15.

[106] Hugh Macdonald, *Bizet* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2014), 56.

[107] Macdonald, *Bizet*, 73.

[108] Lacombe, *Keys to French Opera, 226-228.*

the full power of the orchestra – can be compared only with the higher more grandiose form of lyric theatre, the *grand opera*."[109] Yet Lacombe asserts that, "the meager success of Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de perles* was at least in part because it did not meet the expectations of the audience in terms of genre."[110] Yet, the lack of a clearly identifiable genre was not the only element for which *The Pearl Fishers* was criticized. The opera's lackluster libretto has been a source of ire since the opera's premiere.

It is possible the elimination of spoken dialogue in favor of recitative led to critical plot elements remaining unexplained in the new version. According to Lacombe,

> Cormon and Carré's libretto was conceived as an opéra-comique, in which spoken sections, written in prose alternate with verse intended to be sung. It was subjected to major revisions even before it was circulated. The few remaining lines were put into verse and became the text for new recitatives. Revised in this way, the work became an opéra in the sense of a work containing no spoken dialogue. A chorus was added and three roles (two witches and a non-speaking character) were eliminated.[111]

Perhaps in its original form, the libretto of *The Pearl Fishers* was more comprehensible. The story of *The Pearl Fishers* has been widely criticized, even in contemporary productions. Lacombe asserts, "When Carvalho assigned Bizet the libretto of *Les Pêcheurs de perles,* which had obviously been written in haste and without enthusiasm and had, in the course of a few months, undergone repeated changes, the end result was far from an unalloyed success."[112] Despite the years of experience of the two librettists, and despite Bizet's relative inexperience as a composer, the music for *The Pearl Fishers* arguably far outshines the story with which Bizet had to work.

---

[109] Ibid., 226.

[110] Ibid., 228.

[111] Lacombe, The *Keys to French Opera,* 19.

[112] Ibid., 17.

Switching from one operatic genre to another after a production was conceived was not uncommon at the time, nor was the complex and bureaucratic process of producing opera. In order to meet the deadline for the designated performance date, Bizet's creative process was arguably rushed, and he revised and reworked several sections quite close to the opera's premiere. Bizet even repurposed music from some of his past compositions. It was perhaps a result of the numerous changes and the static and formulaic manner in which the libretto was produced that led to a perceived unsatisfying ending, both musically and narratively. Possibly owing to the fact that Carvalho took such a significant risk on a relatively unknown composer or due to the convoluted nature of the libretto itself, Hugh Macdonald reports in his biography, *Bizet*, "It is said that when the librettists could not think of how to end the opera, Carvalho said, 'Just thrown it on the fire,' planting the idea of Zurga's fire as the device by which to free the lovers. But Eugène Cormon, one of the librettists, later regretted they had saddled Bizet with such a "bear" of a libretto."[113] Furthermore, according to another Bizet biographer, Winton Dean, Cormon lamented that if he had known of Bizet's exceptional compositional talent, he would have put more effort into the writing of the libretto.[114]

The Pearl Fishers was performed 18 times in alternation with Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*; however, after the fifth performance it shared the program with another two-act opera and may have been condensed in musical and dramatic content.[115] It was not a substantial financial success; however, it did win the praise of Hector Berlioz, although many other critics

[113] Macdonald, Bizet, 81.

[114] Winton Dean, *Georges Bizet, His Life and Work*, (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1965), 170–71.

[115] Macdonald, *Bizet*, 82.

were quick to criticize Bizet's appearance on stage at the end of the opera at the night of the premiere.

Perhaps it was due to Bizet's youth, the byzantine nature of the libretto, feuds with the publishers, or the lack of financial success during its initial run of performances that *The Pearl Fishers* was never again performed in Bizet's lifetime. Although Bizet called it a failure, he still claimed to be grateful for such an opportunity at a young age and even named his black and white dog Zurga after one of the main characters.[116] Luckily, due in part to the success of *Carmen* and the publishers seizing the opportunity to capitalize on *Carmen's* success by promoting Bizet's earlier work, *The Pearl Fishers* has gained popularity and is one of relatively few operas by nineteenth-century French composers that is still being performed internationally.

[116] Mina Kirstein Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 153.

Chapter VI: OU's Production of *The Pearl Fishers*

Fall 2019

The University of Oklahoma's production of *The Pearl Fishers* encountered perhaps even more revisions and reconceptualizing than the original production. My involvement with *The Pearl Fishers* began during the run of performances for *The Golden Cockerel* in the fall of 2019. I mentioned to Professor Ferrara my enjoyment choreographing for the opera and inquired about upcoming plans to incorporate dance in opera production the subsequent academic year. At a later date, Professor Ferrara suggested *The Pearl Fishers.* He felt it might be an ideal opera to include a substantial amount of dance. He was clear, however, that the opera's season selection was decided by a larger committee and that other operas were being considered that did not include dance. Nonetheless, I was excited by the possibility of working on another opera production.

When it became more evident later in the semester that the production was likely to be approved and also likely to include a significant amount of dance, I continued discussions with the Director of the School of Dance, Michael Bearden, to determine if it would be possible to engage the Oklahoma Festival Ballet dancers for the opera. Director Bearden supported the collaboration, and Professor Ferrara broached the idea of crafting a unique staging in which the dancers would embody the chorus, and the singers would sing from the pit. In November 2019, he sent an email to Director Bearden and me.

> Opera Collaboration Next Fall
> 11/13/2019
>
> Hi Christa and Michael,
>
> We are proposing Bizet's *Les Pecheurs de Perles* for the fall, with four performances, opening in mid-October. I understand the fall semester is better for the School of Dance

to commit to a collaboration. We hope you and the School of Dance are still enthusiastic about working on a project together!
Pearl Fishers includes several important dance scenes. In addition, we are considering placing the chorus in the pit, with the dancers dancing and using balletic mime to portray the villagers, warriors and priestesses on stage. I'm excited to think that this concept could lead a very creative, stylish, and exciting production. I anticipate you would need a large number of dancers, and quite a lot of rehearsal time. The musical style of the opera is 19th century French romanticism -- very rhythmic and lyrical. The story is set in an imaginary Ceylon, but we are thinking of this as more of an exotic fantasy rather than a specific Asian culture.
This will be a large commitment for the School of Dance. Let's meet as soon as possible to discuss the scope of the project, so you can decide if this collaboration will be practical and beneficial for you and your students. I have a recording, libretto and score if you wish to borrow them.

We are being asked to commit to this proposal very soon.
Thank you!
Bill[117]

Shortly after sending the email, Professor Ferrara came to my office to enquire about my interest in the project. He lent me a score and recording for reference. Later in the day, I attended an orchestra rehearsal for *The Nutcracker,* after which, orchestral conductor, Jonathan Shames, expressed excitement about the potential collaboration. After the orchestra rehearsal, Director Bearden remarked his interest in seeing the collaboration come to fruition; however, with measured enthusiasm, he mentioned he needed time to look over the calendar. The evening was consumed with stage rehearsals for *The Nutcracker* children's cast and the Oklahoma Festival Ballet Company, preventing Director Bearden and me from further discussing the matter. The following morning while I was updating paperwork for *The Nutcracker* production, Director Bearden and I had another opportunity to discuss the project. We viewed dance excerpts from productions of the opera and identified potential scheduling conflicts regarding the use of dancers (especially men who would likely dance in Contemporary Dance Oklahoma's

[117] William Ferrara, email to Michael Bearden and author, November 13, 2019.

production in the fall). We were able to identify a time to meet later in the day to discuss the production.

At 4:00 pm on November 14, 2019, Professor Ferrara, Associate Producer Kasey Allee-Foreman, Director Bearden, and I met to discuss the potential for the collaboration and address concerns. Director Bearden enquired about the production's size and scope and asked Professor Ferrara to approximate the number of dancers on stage. Professor Ferrara suggested 12 dancers, but as we began identifying roles, it appeared 15 might be a more fitting number. Professor Ferrara expressed a desire to have men portray warriors and guards and embody violent thematic material in the opera. We discussed having a limited number of men and concluded casting one or two men may be possible. Director Bearden also asked about the number of dance scenes and the length of each scene in which the dancers would be involved. Professor Ferrara identified dances on stage for the following:

Act I: Scene 1 (10 min), Scene 3 (6 min), Scene 5 (8 min)
Act II: Scene 6 (7 min), Scene 10 (6 min)
Act III: Scene 13 (2 min), Scene 14 (3 ½ min), Scene 16 (2 ½ min)

We estimated 40 minutes total for the dancers on stage. Allee-Foreman mentioned we could consider using a painted backdrop due to the talent of the scenic design artist and suggested a rehearsal assistant would be helpful for the project. We decided it was likely necessary to have design meetings early on for the project due to the nature of the production.

Considering issues with colonialism embedded in *The Pearl Fishers*, a point of discussion centered on the degree of historically accuracy to depict on stage. I expressed no desire for the production to be a historical recreation of the original opera and felt it could be historically informed but not historically accurate, which would allow more freedom for artistic expression. Allee-Foreman added that it would help alleviate the issue of colonialism in the

piece. To that point, I felt the more we moved away from tying the sets, costumes, and movement to a specific culture, and the more fantasy elements included, the less colonialism would be an issue.

After the meeting, Director Bearden and I discussed some complexities regarding rehearsal scheduling. We both did not wish to repeat the same scheduling overlaps which had occurred when *The Golden Cockerel* and *The Nutcracker* productions were in rehearsal simultaneously earlier that semester. Contemporary Dance Oklahoma (CDO), the resident modern dance company, was scheduled for a mainstage show in the spring and fall semesters. We decided it would be best for me to cast dancers who were not planning to dance in CDO in the fall so that opera rehearsals would not conflict with another University Theatre production.

After I had more time to listen to the recording and read through the libretto, Professor Ferrara reached out to me to initiate a meeting to discuss our conceptual approach to the opera. See email below:

> Collaboration
> 11/21/2019
>
> Hi Christa,
> I'm looking forward to our meeting Tuesday. I'm beginning to have initial conceptual thoughts, but one scene in particular is puzzling me. Would you please look at the finale of Act II, #10 in the score (First CD track 18 and Second CD track 1)? How do you imagine this scene? The lovers are discovered, and threatened with death. Meanwhile, there is a storm rolling in from the sea. The finale of Act III, #16 (Second CD track 16) also contains the threat of mob violence. I think if we focus on these two finales, the rest of the show will fall into place.
> Bill[118]

I concurred with Professor Ferrara's statement that both finales were pivotal to determining the tenor of the opera. I also felt the finale of Act I was a bit perplexing. Bizet seemingly forgot

[118] Ferrara, email to author, November 21, 2019.

about the exotic locale in which the opera was set and wrote beautiful but incongruous European waltz music for the scene.

During our meeting, we attempted to rectify how the violent action of the chorus would be portrayed. I suggested the idea of including evil spirits. The inclusion of spirits danced by women *en pointe* was certainly a ballet convention fitting with the time and place in which the opera was composed. Some of the gaps in the libretto left room to explore the more fantastical, supernatural elements in the opera. The evil spirits could represent violence and anger and not be linked to a particular time, place, or religion. Professor Ferrara appeared intrigued by the idea. It also would solve our problem of needing a large number of men.

We discussed the need to create convincing ritualistic and ceremonial acts as well as the need to determine how much interaction would occur between the singers and dancers. Professor Ferrara suggested having four men dance the Fishermen's quartet in the beginning of Act I, so they would not be involved throughout the opera. He also suggested there could be a male dancer as the ringleader alter ego of Nourabad.

I felt the music for Nadir's Act I aria *Récit et Romance* seemed to call for a romantic *pas de deux*. Professor Ferrara was receptive to the idea, however, expressed concern about upstaging the singer. We decided it could be performed with the dancers upstage in silhouette or behind a scrim.

From our initial conceptual meeting, we determined the cast for the dancers as follows:

- Fishermen/Guards: 2-4 Men
- Evil Spirits: 4-6 Women
- Leila's Attendants: 2-4 Women
- Villagers: 8-10: Men/Women
- *Pas de Deux* couple: 1 Man, 1 Woman

In December of 2019, Dr. Shames selected the edition of the score we would use, and Professor Ferrara reached out with a few thoughts.

> Working on the score
> 12/20/2019
>
> Hi Christa and Jonathan,
> I think the new Peters score will work well for us. Jonathan, I much prefer the #2 duet in the appendix--it is shorter, and it is the one we all love. That is the only change I see. I prefer the Peters ending. Christa, all the dance scenes remain pretty much the same. Jonathan found a better recording that exactly matches the Peters score. I'll lend it to you and Jonathan has a score for you when we get together in January.
> Now, in terms of the space and the stage:
> All of Act I: the stage is completely open, dance floor, with some rocks ante proscenium as we discussed. A drop far upstage.
> Intermission.
> Act II: a temple downstage. Background dances are partially obscured -- behind the temple and a scrim or cut drop.
> For the Finale of Act II, #10, the temple will "disappear"-- move far upstage or to the sides for the Storm dance. This happens at the "gunshots" (maybe a thunder sheet instead?)
> Brief pause for scene change
> Act III sc. 1 is Zurga's tent--some kind of partial drop downstage.-No dance.
> A brief pause as tent flies out revealing stake and pyre center stage. Drunken fire dance.
> Act III sc. 2 is around the pyre. The choreography for #13 needs to be in the shape of a doughnut, OK? the dancers exit and are not on for the final number.
> Christa, is the following character breakdown what you have in mind?
> The pas de deux (#4 Nadir aria) should be a young village couple, not doubles of Nadir and Leila because we have body type issues. Similarly, the vision of Leila (#2 duet) will need to be the soprano, not a dancer. The villagers are comprised of the entire dance corps and could be divided into subgroups as follows: Leila's Attendants, Temple Guards (men), Zealots (we were calling them Evil Spirits) Do you have numbers in mind? I think they could have a generic costume, then add pieces for the different characters.
> Let's meet when you get back in town. Let me know if you need any info before then.
> Bill[119]

Spring 2020

The winter semester began with a flurry of activity. Within the first two weeks of the semester, we were already in production for a student choreographic concert called *Young*

[119] Ferrara, email to Jonathan Shames and author, December 20, 2019.

Choreographers' Showcase. By January 6, 2020, I had a new score and a new recording from Dr. Shames. Much to my delight, the orchestral recording, with few exceptions, aligned well with the piano reduction of the score. The recording proved to be a tremendous asset throughout the rehearsal process and had none of the complications and incongruity I experienced with *The Golden Cockerel* production.

Professor Ferrara and I met in mid-January to determine the best way to avoid overloading an understaffed costume shop. Professor Ferrara suggested that the villagers would be comprised of different groups of dancers (e.g., the chorus, Leila's Attendants, and Spirits) costumed similarly but adorned with accents indicative of their character. We discussed changing the Evil Spirits to zealots to facilitate this idea. The zealots would be an angry, radical subsect of the villagers, so the costumes shop did not have to design and build Evil Spirit costumes.

I met with costume designer Lloyd Cracknell on January 27, 2020, to discuss costumes. Professor Cracknell appeared in favor of having Evil Spirits. We discussed our desire not to tie the opera to a specific locale, culture, or religion. He suggested pulling design ideas from a variety of sources and creating our own culture. Professor Cracknell noted, however, that we needed to determine a climate for the fictitious culture and identify a color pallet (he gave the example of Indian spices) from which to work. After our meeting, I reached out to Professor Ferrara.

> Re: Update?
> 1/28/2020
>
> Dear Bill,

Yesterday, I met with Lloyd, and we discussed the costume needs for the dancers - numbers/various parts. He seemed interested in the Evil Spirit idea, so I am looking to move in that direction (a little more fantasy). Thoughts?

I requested 10 villagers (ideally 4 male and 6 female). Of the 10, 2 will be Leila's Attendants, 2 will be guards, and 2 will be the pas de deux couple (provided I have enough guys) with various adornments to their base costume to depict the different characters.
I also asked for 4-5 Evil Spirits (all female)
So, 14-15 dancers total.

Lloyd would like to know a few more specifics about the location/time period. Since we are trying to avoid anything too specific from one culture, we discussed the possibility of pulling various items from different cultures/parts of the world to create our own fictional culture/geographic location. This approach could avoid being too generic without representing one specific setting/group of people. Any thoughts on this? I imagine we will need to wait until we have design meetings this semester to make any final determinations.

All my best,
Christa[120]

Re: Update?
1/28/2020

Hi Lloyd,
Concerning Pearl Fishers:
All this sounds great to me.
Yes we should wait for design meetings, but I have in mind a generic setting of Equatorial poverty. Since we have a complete fantasy, it is OK with me if the audience can't tell if we are in Guatemala, Brazil, or the Caribbean, or Asia, or Africa. A pre-modern society. The ruined temple and seacoast could be equally generic.
Do you feel we need to be more specific?

Bill[121]

Professor Cracknell did not appear to need more specific information and began designing the costumes. Meanwhile, I reached out to Director Bearden to update him on the progress. He and I

[120] Author email to William Ferrara and Llyod Cracknell, January 28, 2020.

[121] Ferrara email to Cracknell and author, January 28, 2020.

determined rehearsals would begin mid-February. Since it was too soon in the semester for the students to know if they intended to perform with CDO in the fall, we decided I could work with all Oklahoma Festival Ballet dancers who were currently not engaged to perform in the spring CDO production.

As meetings and plans for the opera progressed in January 2020, a sequence of events was unfolding, unknown to us at the time, which would radically change not only the production but dramatically alter our daily lives. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), on December 31, 2019, "WHO's Country Office in the People's Republic of China picked up a media statement by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission from their website on cases of 'viral pneumonia' in Wuhan, People's Republic of China."[122] Over a week later, on January 9, 2020, the WHO reported that, "…Chinese authorities have determined that the outbreak is caused by a novel coronavirus."[123] The first death was recorded on January 11, 2020. In the United States, national news sources began covering the emerging outbreak of the novel Coronavirus, but it was unclear how it spread, and misinformation and confusion abounded. By January 16, 2020, however, there was a confirmed case in Japan and the WHO declared, "considering global travel patterns, additional cases in other countries were likely."[124] By January 19, 2020, the WHO reported evidence of transmission from person to person, and on January 21, 2020, the first case of the novel Coronavirus was reported in the United States.[125] In

[122] "Timeline: WHO's COVID-19 Response," World Health Organization (World Health Organization), accessed November 4, 2020, https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/interactive-timeline?gclid=CjwKCAiAnIT9BRAmEiwANaoE1ZP50SyJtomVPVGQatj6ekxUXERdjHd3HFREKXp7KEd8hMc8K7FKqRoCc-wQAvD_BwE.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid.

a letter emailed on January 27, 2020, to all OU Faculty, Staff, and Students, the University of Oklahoma Interim President wrote,

> Letter from Interim President Harroz – Coronavirus
> 01/27/2020
>
> All Norman Faculty, Staff, and Students:
>
> In response to the ongoing outbreak of a serious respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) Coronavirus (2019-nCor) that can be spread from person to person, both the Department of State and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have issued travel advisories for travel to parts or all of China. Chinese authorities have imposed strict travel restrictions, and China announced it will suspend all tour groups and the sale of flight and hotel packages for its citizens headed overseas.
>
> Based on information from the CDC and public health and infectious disease experts about this Coronavirus, the University of Oklahoma is implementing a range of travel guidelines and restrictions to China. These guidelines and parameters vary based on campus; however, all individuals who have traveled to any part of China are required to undergo a medical screening before return to campus is permitted. Please read on for campus-specific information….The Norman campus strongly discourages faculty, staff, and students to engage in official and/or personal travel to China…
>
> Sincerely,
> Joseph Harroz, Jr.
> Interim President [126]

Several days later, the Interim President sent out another email,

> Update from Interim President Harroz - Coronavirus
> 01/31/2020
>
> All Norman Faculty, Staff, and Students:
> The following message contains an important update to the University's travel guidance and restrictions for the OU Norman campus as it relates to the evolving novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak that is centered in China.
> To date, there are no confirmed cases in Oklahoma, and health officials stress that the risk of infection for the general public remains low. However, the situation continues to evolve.
>
> Last night, the U.S. Department of State issued a "Level 4: Do Not Travel" warning for China. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has classified China as "Level 3: Avoid Nonessential Travel." In order to protect the health and safety of our

[126] Joseph Harroz, Jr. email to all University of Oklahoma Faculty, Staff, and Students, January 27, 2020.

> campus and the community, and in accordance with the CDC and State Department guidance, the University is aligning its parameters for the Norman campus with the travel guidelines and restrictions previously issued for the Health Sciences Center and OU-Tulsa campuses. Please read on for more information.
>
> OU Travel Guidance and Restrictions (All Campuses)
>
> In alignment with OUHSC and OU-Tulsa campuses, the Norman campus has now determined to suspend all student, faculty, and staff travel for University business or academic purposes to China.
>
> 1. OU students, faculty, and staff MAY NOT TRAVEL for University business or academic purposes, including but not limited to study abroad, research or grant activity, internships, to perform academic work for credit, service, conferences or presentations, teaching or training, performances, recruiting, or athletic competitions in China…
>
> Sincerely,
> Joseph Harroz, Jr.
> Interim President[127]

By the start of February 2020, very little changed in daily activities on campus. By mid-February 2020, I had drafted staging charts for the entire three-act opera.[128] On February 24, 2020, I held my first opera workshop which twenty-two women and four men attended. While creating choreography without knowing who would dance specific roles was not necessarily ideal for my creative process, or running efficient rehearsals, I was happy to have the time, space, and dancers to begin working through movement material. Professor Ferrara had a production schedule for the fall drafted by February 25, 2020, and we were well on our way moving forward with the production. I began working on the opening dance in Act I. I choreographed a dance for the chorus women, a fishermen quartet, a reprise with the men and women with partnering, a short dance for Leila's Attendants, then a section in which everyone

[127] Ibid., January 31, 2020.

[128] See appendix A.

danced together. I also focused my attention on the Act I *pas de deux* during Nadir's aria. Despite working with so many dancers, I was making good progress.

After a few weeks, working with a large number of dancers without casting them in specific spots proved inefficient and somewhat confusing for the dancers. Since I had twenty-two dancers learning eight chorus roles, I separated the dancers into several groups. By the time each group had a chance to run a section, a significant portion of rehearsal time had vanished. For subsequent rehearsals, I called small groups of dancers to learn the roles of the *pas de deux* couple, Leila's Attendants, and Evil Spirits which proved more efficient. By the end of February, a good portion of Act I was complete and set, and the choreography for Act II and III was evolving.

On February 26, 2020, OU reported a "concerning increase in the number of transmissions of the CoVID-19 Coronavirus"[129] The University added Italy, Iran, Japan, and South Korea to the list of countries faculty, staff, students, and residents could not travel to for academic or business purposes.[130]

By the start of March, opera rehearsals were well underway, and I had decided to cut a few dancers from the cast in an effort to run rehearsals more expediently and because their movement style or work ethic were incongruous with the needs of the opera.

On March 10, 2020, OU's Interim President sent an email to faculty explaining there was a possibility of temporarily suspending in-person classes following spring break.[131] The next day the leadership at the WHO reported the following, "Deeply concerned both by the alarming

[129] Unsigned email to All Norman, HSC, and Tulsa Faculty, Staff, Students, and Residents, *University Update on Coronavirus Travel Guidelines,* February 26, 2020.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Harroz email to Faculty and Staff, *Update from Interim President Harroz – COVID-19,* March 10, 2020.

levels of spread and severity, and by the alarming levels of inaction, WHO made the assessment that COVID-19 could be characterized as a pandemic."[132]

We had our first design meeting on March 11, 2020. Professor Ferrara sent some paintings to our scenic designer and me for discussion. During the design meeting, unease grew regarding COVID-19 and what it could mean in the near future. We persisted, however, not knowing that would be our last in-person design meeting. By March 12, 2020, the University announced all classes would be moved online for two weeks following Spring Break.[133] I had an opera rehearsal scheduled the evening of the announcement, but canceled rehearsal due to the rapidly evolving events. I did not know that would be the last time I would see the dancers in-person until August. I sent the following email to the dancers on March 12, 2020:

> Tonight's opera rehearsal canceled
> 03/12/2020
>
> Dear Dancers,
>
> I know many of you are experiencing some stress making preparations for an extended break and finishing up midterm/projects. To help alleviate (hopefully) some of the stress, we will not rehearse for the opera this evening. After the break, I will be calling select smaller groups to rehearsals, so you can begin to learn the actual part you will be dancing in the fall. It has been wonderful working with you so far- stay safe and enjoy your spring break!
>
> All my best,
> Christa[134]

[132] "Timeline: WHO's COVID-19 Response," World Health Organization (World Health Organization), March 11, 2020.

[133] Harroz email to all students, faculty, staff, and parents, *Norman Campus Classes Temporarily Transitioning Online Starting March 23,* March 12, 2020.

[134] Author email to opera cast, *Tonight's Opera rehearsal Canceled,* March 12, 2020.

By March 13, 2020, Europe had become the epicenter of the outbreak.[135] On the same day, prior to leaving for Spring Break, we met as a School of Dance for what would be the last time in the spring 2020 semester. We have not been able to gather again in-person, as an entire school, as of this writing in the spring semester of 2021. By March 15, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed at OU.[136] On March 18, 2020, the university announced classes would remain online for the rest of the semester.

> March 18, 2020
> Dear OU community,
>
> I write with important announcements across a range of issues related to COVID-19 and OU. The safety of our community and our fellow citizens is our first obligation, which is why we are taking the necessary measures noted below. We must do our part to help confront this public health crisis.
>
> Fortunately, in making our decisions, we have the benefit of our subject matter experts at the OU Health Sciences Center. It is noteworthy, that well beyond advising us on our campus plans, our healthcare leadership is helping lead the state and nation through this crisis, including by performing important research that could lead to a medical breakthrough in the global treatment of COVID-19.
>
> **ADJUSTMENTS TO CLASSES, RESEARCH, AND EVENTS**
>
> **OU Norman Campus Classes.** Norman campus will remain online for the remainder of the semester. Students are encouraged to visit ou.edu/learnanywhere for further information and resources on attending classes online. Faculty may visit ou.edu/teachanywhere for instructional resources.
>
> **OU Health Sciences Center Classes.** Students enrolled in Health Sciences Center programs have received direct communications from their colleges about online instruction and modifications to clinical and community-based instruction. Students in these programs with questions should contact their colleges directly. Additional information is available at students.ouhsc.edu/coronavirus.
>
> **OU-Tulsa Classes.** Norman-based programs will remain online for the remainder of the semester. HSC programs will receive direct communications from their colleges regarding both classes and clinical rotations.

[135] "Timeline: WHO's COVID-19 Response," World Health Organization (World Health Organization).

[136] Harroz email to OU Community, *A COVID-19 Update from Interim President Harroz*, March 15, 2020.

Research Enterprise. We are committed to continuing our research mission while making sure we take steps to keep members of our community safe. We will provide guidance on this in the coming days.

Graduation Ceremonies. The ceremonies are postponed, and we are working to modify them. We are actively exploring ways we can honor our graduates and their achievements at an appropriate time. This will likely look very different, perhaps even virtual, with an opportunity to participate in an in-person ceremony when it is safe to do so. We hope to reschedule these events for later in the summer, and we will communicate updates as we have them.

University-related Events. All in-person events with greater than 10 attendees on all three campuses are suspended until at least May 11. Our decision is based on recommendations from the CDC and our state and national leaders. This restriction includes events that are not University-sponsored as well, including conferences, symposia, and social gatherings. This does not preclude small internal meetings, where social distancing should be the touchstone. The OU Athletics Department has suspended all athletics competitions, as well as all out-of-season practices and workouts, until further notice. More information on athletics events may be found at soonersports.com.

GUIDELINES FOR ON-CAMPUS HOUSING

Norman Campus Residential Housing. We will have a reduced occupancy model for on-campus housing for the remainder of the spring semester with the exception of Kraettli and Traditions apartments. Certainly, students who have no other housing option will remain in on-campus housing, and we are committed to assisting all residents, including our international student community, in every possible way. On-campus housing residents can expect to receive specific information from OU Housing in the coming days. Regrettably, the rapid pace of this unfolding crisis does not allow us to have the answers for all questions at this time. We will, however, address all questions as quickly as is possible.

GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYEES

Telecommuting. Telecommuting is strongly encouraged across all three campuses. Visit HR's Coronavirus and the Workplace guidelines for more information. Employees from all three campuses should consult supervisors for position-specific details.

On the Norman campus, the five-day closure that started on March 15 comes to a close Friday, March 20. Wherever compatible with continuing operations, all supervisors should institute telecommuting plans for staff through the end of the spring semester. Any Norman campus faculty, staff, and students who return to campus are urged to use caution and practice social distancing and proper hygiene.

> **Student Employees.** Managers are also encouraged to develop and implement telework plans for student employees and graduate assistants where the telework plan supports University operations.
>
> **Counseling Services.** The counseling center will remain open during the semester and can provide services by phone or ZOOM. OU counselors can be reached at (405) 325-2911 to make an appointment.
>
> COVID-19 presents an unprecedented challenge, but I'm confident as ever in the OU community's ability to navigate the coming days with care, wisdom, and a collective resolve. My profound thanks go to all our students, faculty, staff, and residents for your patience and understanding.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Joseph Harroz, Jr.
> Interim President[137]

The rapid shift to online learning for the remainder of the semester meant that opera rehearsals could not be conducted in-person. Students scattered across the country to return to their homes, and those remaining in Oklahoma were not allowed access to the studio space. Many states began issuing lockdown measures and stay-at-home mandates and advisories. March was a tumultuous time. According to BBC News, "Mr. Trump urged citizens to limit travel on 16 March, five days after the World Health Organization declared the Coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic. Individual states then began lockdown measures at different times, with California and New York state going into lockdown on 19 March and 22 March respectively, while Georgia became one of the last to implement such measures on 3 April."[138] Measures such as "stay-at-home" and "shelter-in-place" meant different things in different states. Many lockdown measures included all or some of the following: closing universities and schools to in-person learning,

[137] Harroz, email to OU community "Update from Interim President Harroz," March 18, 2020.

[138] "Earlier Coronavirus Lockdown 'Could Have Saved 36,000 Lives'," May 22, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52757150.

closing daycares, encouraging persons not to leave their homes unless getting supplies or considered an "essential worker," restricting out-of-state travel by mandating or suggesting quarantine for those entering from other states, closing bars and sit-down restaurants to in-person dining, closing non-essential retail, suggesting social distancing measures of staying six feet apart, encouraging hand washing, and banning gatherings of 10 or more persons. There was not a uniform approach. Each state enacted lockdown measures or stay-at-home advisories at different times, although the majority of orders were issued in late March and early April.[139]

Despite the increasing number of cases, many were hopeful that lockdown measures would be enough to curtail the spread of the virus, and many were optimistic that by summer the spread of the disease would be under control. I discussed with Director Bearden a plan to continue working on the opera remotely. I had never heard of the video conferencing platform "Zoom" prior to March 2020; however, Zoom proved to be pivotal to the continuation of opera rehearsals.

Due to my limited experience working with Zoom, I thought it best to work with a small number of dancers first and then gradually include more dancers. I was concerned the dancers would not be interested in continuing rehearsals in a remote learning environment, especially under such stressful conditions, but I found them to be hungry for the challenge. I selected two of the stronger dancers from the cast who typically picked up choreography quickly. They had very different movement styles. I theorized that if the choreography was aesthetically pleasing on both

[139] "U.S. State and Local Government Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic," Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, November 14, 2020), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._state_and_local_government_responses_to_the_COVID-19_pandemic.

of them, it would likely work well for the rest of the cast. I sent the dancers the following email to engage them in the rehearsal process.

> Continuation of Opera Rehearsals this Spring for OFB
> 03/31/2020
>
> Dear Allison and Alison,
>
> I hope you both are safe and healthy and had at least a little time to relax over spring break. I am in the process of exploring ways to continue to make progress on the opera for the fall. I spoke with Director Bearden yesterday (he is copied to this email) and plan to move forward with sharing videos of the choreography and holding zoom rehearsals with a few select cast members as part of the OFB class this spring. I wanted to reach out to you both to see if you would be open to participating in some zoom rehearsals in the near future (I know we will all be working with limited space, but I think we can manage). I would like to begin by working on the role of Leila's Attendants with both of you. Please let me know if you are available to participate, and we can determine a time/date for our first zoom rehearsal.
>
> Very best regards,
> Christa[140]

Our first Zoom rehearsal revealed two challenges. The dancers found it difficult to determine if I was using my right or left hand or foot because my image appeared mirrored to one of them and did not appear mirrored to the other. I attempted to remedy this by announcing "right" or "left" in the first sessions. A solution that proved useful was to wear a different colored sock on each foot and a glove on one of my hands. The different colors allowed the dancers to distinguish my right from my left visually without auditory disruption. A second challenge we faced was the audio quality through the streaming platform. They could hear the music well enough on its own, but the music would drop out when I tried to speak. After some research, I determined the default audio on Zoom was set to suppress background noise. The Zoom platform treated the music as background noise whenever I tried to speak. To remedy this, I disabled the background noise suppression function. At first, I attempted to conduct rehearsals

[140] Author email to dancers, "Continuation of Opera Rehearsals this Spring for OFB," March 31, 2020.

from my home; however, the increase in overall areal web traffic due to the rise in the number of persons working from home rendered my Wi-Fi to be unstable. Thanks to my husband, who is the orchestral conductor at Western Kentucky University, I was able to use the Instrumental Rehearsal Hall to conduct my rehearsals through a wired connection which led to considerably more stable internet use.

I found rehearsing via Zoom to be effective for clarifying details and unifying arm positions in choreography that was taught in previous, in-person rehearsals. It was challenging, however, to evaluate and coach musicality. The video feed did not always align with the audio. Additionally, determining timing and spacing was challenging, since both dancers only had access to small rooms in which to rehearse. The limited space left little room to dance with a full range of emotion and physicality. While rehearsing existing choreography was possible, choreographing new sequences and setting them on the dancers proved challenging since the video and audio were often out of sync, and we were confined to relatively small spaces.

The method I found to be most effective to set new choreography was to record myself performing the choreography in WKU's Music Rehearsal Hall (which provided plenty of space) without the dancers present. After video recording, I sent the dancers video of the new choreography. Once they had time to learn the choreography and rehearse on their own, we met for a Zoom session to rehearse as a group. While this system helped solve some musicality and space challenges, it did not convey to the dancers their spacing in relation to one another on stage. For that, I drew diagrams of pathways and staging. I had to wait until we met in-person the ensuing fall semester to set this aspect of the choreography.

On April 2, 2020, Interim OU President Harroz announced that all summer classes at OU would be held online only.[141] By April 4, 2020, the WHO reported, "… over 1 million cases of COVID-19 had been confirmed worldwide, a more than tenfold increase in less than a month."[142] With the hope of returning to in-person classes in the fall and a few Zoom sessions completed, I reached out to the rest of the opera cast on April 3, 2020, to resume rehearsals with the full cast.

> Opera Rehearsal Update
> 04/03/2020
>
> Dear Dancers,
>
> I hope you are doing okay during these crazy times. I miss seeing you and getting to work with all of you. I am in process of exploring ways to continue to make progress on the opera for the fall. I spoke with Director Bearden and plan to move forward with sharing videos of the choreography and holding zoom rehearsals with a few select cast members as part of the OFB class this spring. I've already reached out to a couple of you to schedule a zoom rehearsal and just wanted to let the rest of you know that I will be reaching out to you soon either to schedule a rehearsal for a specific part or to share video footage for you to learn. We will all be working with limited space, but this could provide an opportunity for some creative collaboration. Please let me know if you have any questions or if you have any ideas about sharing choreography.
>
> I will be reaching back out soon.
> Stay safe!
>
> All my best,
> Christa[143]

By the middle of April 2020, Professor Ferrara and I had several discussions regarding the production. Professor Ferrara suggested the Spirits should come from nature. I decided to use four dancers in the role of Evil Spirits because of Bizet's use of four chords that conclude several scenes involving the Spirits. I suggested having the Spirits portray the elements: earth, air, fire,

---

[141] Harroz email to OU Community, "Update on Summer Classes, Events, and Housing," April 02, 2020.

[142] "Timeline: WHO's COVID-19 Response," World Health Organization (World Health Organization).

[143] Author email to dancers, "Opera Rehearsal Update," April 3, 2020.

and water since several references to elemental spirits can be found in the libretto; notably by the chorus during the Act I finale in which the chorus sings, "*Spirits of earth! Spirits of water! Spirits of air!.*"[144] The character of Nourabad, described in the score as "high priest of Brahma," makes repeated references to fire and lightning.[145] Professor Ferrara approved of this idea. We also discussed the use of asymmetry with Scenic Designer Josh Moran and University Theatre Producer and Dean of the College of Fine Arts Mary Margaret Holt.

> Symmetry?
> April 16, 2020
>
> Hi Josh,
> The music and style seem asymmetrical to me. Do you know what I mean? Like Mozart or something in the classical style calls out for visual symmetry, but these Romantic artists usually created balance in other ways. What do you think?
> -Bill
>
> Hi Bill,
>
> I agree with you about implementing some asymmetry into the design. I'll work on reflecting that in the design of the columns, tent, and temple and then also look into shifting where they are placed on the line sets. I think this could definitely create some more dynamic scenic elements!
> I'll start working on those changes and have some stuff to you soon!
> -Josh
>
> Hi Christa,
> Do you agree? Is your choreography more often asymmetrical?
> -Bill
>
> Hi Bill and Josh,
>
> I agree that incorporating more asymmetry into the design could have an interesting effect. While there is some symmetry in the choreography, particularly with Leila's Attendants, the majority is asymmetrical in terms of groupings of dancers, shape, and use of space.
> -Christa

[144] Georges Bizet, Michel Carre, and Eugene Cormon, *Pêcheurs de perles*, ed. Brad Cohen, trans. David Parry (London: Peters Edition Ltd, 2015), 88-89.

[145] Ibid.

> Great conversation! I agree that incorporating asymmetry in the scenic and choreographic design can be really effective in reflecting the period and nuance of the music. Sounds like Josh and Christa have some interesting ideas to explore in terms of making it happen.
>
> Many thanks,
> MMH[146]

In April, we had three design meetings to discuss the production. Professor Cracknell shared several designs for both the Chorus, Spirits, and Leila's Attendants. Rather than being a modified version of the chorus costume, the Attendants' costumes resembled Leila's costume, making clear the Attendants should be more closely tied to Leila choreographically rather than the chorus. I was quite taken with the design of the Spirit costumes.[147] There was discussion of black light and adding glow-in-the dark-elements to the Spirits. While an exciting prospect, there were budgetary concerns.

For the many of the production meetings, we were unsure if the university would be able to return to in-person instruction in the fall. On April 24, 2020, President (formerly Interim President) Harroz stated in an email to the OU community, "After careful deliberation, our intention is to return to in-person educational operations on all three campuses by this fall, offering traditional instruction and residential life."[148]

We finished the remainder of the semester online with opera rehearsals conducted via Zoom. Due to the slow process of learning choreography remotely, I asked if any of the dancers were interested in continuing our work on the opera over the summer. They all responded favorably.

---

[146] Ferrara et al., email exchange, "Symmetry?", April 16, 2020.

[147] See appendix D.

[148] Harroz, email to OU Community, "Letter from Interim President Harroz - Fall Semester Plans," April 24, 2020.

Summer 2020

I had been hopeful that the virus would abate during the summer months. Some states reported a drop in cases, and states began exploring how and when to reopen. According to CNN, many states' stay-at-home orders and advisories expired in May and states began phased reopening plans commencing in June.[149]

On May 15, Associate Producer Kasey Allee-Foreman sent an email to the production team requesting a meeting to discuss *The Pearl Fishers.* On May 27, Allee Forman sent the following email.

> Pearl Fishers Meeting
> 05/27/2020
>
> Good afternoon. As a reminder, we have a meeting to discuss Pearl Fishers tomorrow at 2pm. In this meeting we will be discussing solutions to keep our students, faculty and staff safe and healthy while best serving their educational needs. Here is the general agenda of topics we hope to discuss.

1. Dean Holt, General updates on what we know re: University policies/procedures and shop status
2. Class schedules impact on rehearsal times
3. Social distancing/safety concerns in rehearsals, performance, and backstage
4. Production Studios' capacity and design impact

a. Scenic
b. Costumes
c. Lighting
d. Audio

5. Orchestra safety and options
6. Unknowns and contingency plans (audiences, streaming, what do we need more information about, etc.)[150]

At the start of the Zoom production meeting Dean Holt stated that there was not yet guidance from the university regarding persons coming to campus as audience members, but

[149] "This Is Where All 50 States Stand on Reopening," CNN (Cable News Network, April 26, 2020), https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/us/states-reopen-coronavirus-trnd/.

[150] Kasey Allee Forman email to author et. al, *Pearl Fishers Meeting,* May 27, 2020.

there would likely be a greatly reduced seating capacity. Dean Holt explained that the College of Fine Arts received approval for scenic, costume, lighting to return to campus around June 1, 2020, although not all at once, and faculty and staff could return around July 6, 2020.[151] The meeting transitioned into a discussion of social distancing and safety concerns. Dr. Shames reported that they had an opera area meeting earlier that morning. Dr. Shames stated, "In terms of *The Pearl Fishers* and the operas we've announced, I think we are quite concerned how we can certainly undertake anything in the fall and what we might move to the spring and the circumstances under which it might be doable in the spring. […] In term of orchestra involvement, I don't see any orchestral activity next year involving more than 10-12 players at a time."[152] Professor Ferrara added, "In the fall, we are thinking of not doing a show; we are thinking of doing an aria concert with a piano and one singer at a time."[153] Dr. Shames continued, "To do something like *The Pearl Fishers* in the Spring, we would need to do it in a very different way. We would have an orchestral complement of 10-12 players situated upstage of the singers and maybe behind a scrim. For the large choral scenes, we would pre-record the chorus and use a reduced balletic component."[154] Dr. Shames explained,

> I have to tell you everything we are talking about right now are ideas. We have an idea of what this might look like, and it could be tremendously interesting and exciting. But it is also really new, and there will be a lot of experimenting. We think it is kind of future-directed, because it has to do with live streaming and bringing in elements beyond live performance. Our ideas stem from how we produce something that looks sort of like *The Pearl Fishers* and communicates the artistic intension of *The Pearl Fishers* but does it in

[151] Mary Margaret Holt, "The Pearl Fishers Production Meeting," University Theatre, May 28, 2020, Zoom recording.

[152] Jonathan Shames, "The Pearl Fishers Production Meeting," University Theatre, May 28, 2020, Zoom recording.

[153] William Ferrara, "The Pearl Fishers Production Meeting," University Theatre, May 28, 2020, Zoom recording.

[154] Shames, "The Pearl Fishers Production Meeting," May 28, 2020.

> a responsible way that keeps the health and safety of our students and faculty and staff in mind.[155]

Professor Ferrara added, "We think that with *Pearl Fishers*, there is a certain quality about how that piece is written that allows us to separate the choruses, and then we are left with minimal characters onstage."[156] I suggested there could be interesting possibilities with dance and video projection and that the dancers would not actually be there during the live performance. Other members of the production team expressed concerns about projecting the dancers since it could cause confusion with the orchestra and the singers and that it could be problematic to project video onto the scrim. It was suggested we move away from the idea of projection, so we decided to move forward with the dancers performing live, downstage from the orchestra.

These changes necessitated a reduction in the number of dancers. Each dancer would need at least 36 square feet to honor social distancing and the dancing space would be compressed to allow room for the orchestra. Consequently, many scenes would require re-choreographing to keep the dancers at an appropriate distance from one another, to reduce the interaction with the singers, and to eliminate physical contact between cast members. Professor Ferrara explained that singing requires at least four meters of distance (43 square feet). Although I would need to re-conceptualize and re-choreograph a majority of the opera, I left the meeting feeling hopeful that we had a plan to move forward with the production. The delay until March 2021 would allow time to make necessary changes.

The state of uncertainty about the final form of the opera precluded the need or usefulness of summertime rehearsals. I sent an email to the dancers on June 3, 2020, explaining

---

[155] Ibid.

[156] Ferrara, "The Pearl Fishers Production Meeting," May 28, 2020.

the current state of production challenges. Once it appeared certain that the opera performance would not take place until March 2021, I sent this email to the dancers:

> Opera Production Delayed
> 07/01/2020
>
> Dear Dancers,
>
> I hope you are enjoying your summer break and that this message finds you safe and healthy. I wanted to reach out with some news in case it affects your planning for the fall.
>
> **The University Theatre has determined that due to the scope and nature of the opera, the production of *The Pearl Fishers* will be delayed until March 2021.** There is still a lot that is uncertain, and the production team feels, due to unique challenges of bringing together musicians, dancers, and singers, it will be in everyone's best interest to move the performances to the spring.
>
> We will have rehearsals in the fall as part of OFB. While I was looking forward to seeing this production to fruition in the fall, the new timeline will allow us more time to adapt to our ever-changing environment. Thanks again for your hard work, and I look forward to seeing everyone in the fall. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.
>
> All my best,
> Christa[157]

During the summer of 2020, the general easing of lockdown restrictions and lifting of stay-at-home orders led to a prodigious spread of the COVID-19 virus. Conflicting statements about the effectiveness of wearing masks abounded, but eventually, many states issued mask mandates for persons in public. The issue of wearing masks was politicized and there were ongoing issues with Americans refusing to follow basic safety measures such as wearing a mask in public and remaining six feet apart. Nonetheless, plans to move forward with in-person instruction at OU in the fall continued.

[157] Author email to dancers, "Opera Production Delayed," July 1, 2020.

Fall 2020

The fall 2020 semester began with significant uncertainty. While the administration at OU made clear their intent to prioritize in-person instruction, it was unclear what metric would be used to determine if, and under what circumstances, courses would be moved back to an online only delivery method.

The university at large and the OU School of Dance initiated protocols to attempt to curtail the spread of the virus. Specific entrances and exits to the dance facilities were designated to decrease cross traffic. The university allotted 30-40 minute breaks between classes to allow the air to dissipate (this schedule adjustment necessitated an overhaul of the traditional university schedule). Air filtration systems were added or updated in some buildings. Hand sanitizers, sanitary wipes, and masks were readily available (a marked difference from the start of the pandemic when those items were in short supply). Everyone was to remain six feet apart and wear a mask at all times. If anyone on campus traveled out of the state, came in contact with someone who might have COVID-19, or began experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they were encouraged to self-isolate and fill out a university sponsored COVID screening and reporting tool. A two-week quarantine period was instituted for suspected COVID exposure.

For the dancers, warm-up areas were restricted, cardio equipment was off limits, and dressing room occupancy was reduced. Aside from participating in classes, the dancers were encouraged to spend as little time as possible in the dance facilities. Enhanced cleaning procedures (wiping down the barres, floors, stereo equipment, etc.) were incorporated before, during, and after each dance class. All physical contact between the dancers and instructors was prohibited.

To comply with COVID-19 safety protocols, I re-choreographed the entire opera to limit the number of dancers in the cast, eliminate physical contact, ensure the dancers remained six feet apart, and to minimize singer and dancer interaction. Since I did not know how long I would be able to hold in-person rehearsals, each opera rehearsal became urgent.

As the fall semester approached, plans for the second version of the opera began to crystalize. Since I needed to limit the number of dancers in the cast to accommodate social distancing, I decided on six chorus women instead of 10 and eliminated the quartet of male dancers. It became clear it would be almost impossible to include the men in the opera due to scheduling conflicts. Dr. Shames announced that he was going to reduce the full orchestra score to a small complement of a chamber orchestra with piano. The musicians would perform upstage from the singers and the dancers and would perform behind a scrim to limit the spread of respiratory droplets. Professor Ferrara and I planned to have the dancers and singers share the stage only in a limited number of scenes with the dancers always upstage from the singers.

A week prior to the fall semester, I met with Dr. Shames to discuss the orchestral reduction. Dr. Shames decided a string quintet, a few wind instruments, a harp, and some percussion would add a nice color to the piano reduction. I, however, only had a full-orchestral recording with which to rehearse the dancers. I had to be mindful of choreographing too specifically to one instrument because of the sonic disparity between a chamber group and full orchestra.

After my discussion with Dr. Shames, I drafted an outline of the new version of the opera's dance scenes and sent it to Professor Ferrara on August 23, 2020.[158] Professor Ferrara

[158] See appendix D

sent back the following scenario, and we proceeded to brainstorm ideas for the new version of the opera via emailing back and forth the following Microsoft Word document.

WF = William Ferrara comments
CSJ= Christa St. John comments

Pearl Fishers notes on Dancers On and OFF and Recording/Live
Act I
Live: Prelude [*WF: Dance? CSJ: Yes- Elemental Spirits- subject to change*]
Record: Introduction (cut [11]-[18]) (Dance enter top pg. 3)
Live: recit at [23]
Record: 2 before [24] to [28]. (Zurga is recorded at 26) (Dance exit at [28] p 21)
Live: starting at [28]. Zurga sings chorus part: "Mais qui vient…le coureur des bois" (no chorus) at 34, Nadir and Zurga sing the chorus parts (no chorus)
Recorded: at [38] (Dance enter)
No. 2: Live. (Dance exit p 33 before No. 2)
Recit No. 3: Live
At [66]: Recorded (Enter Dance p 59) [*CSJ: Starting at 66 do we still want Leila to enter behind a sheet/something obscuring her from view of the audience held by the Attendants? WF: Yes*]
At [75]: Live (Exit Dance p 63 before [75]) [*CSJ: Would you like Leila's two attendants to stay onstage here or should they exit with the rest of the chorus? WF: They may exit*]
At [81]: only Nourabad sings "Malheur à toi!" (no chorus)
At 87: Recorded (Enter Dance at [87]. At [90] ceremony with Leila and Dancers. Exit before No. 4))
No. 4: Live
No. 5: Live. Instruments only for "Le ciel et bleu" (no chorus) [*WF: Dancers in background? CSJ: I have choreography for the Elemental Spirits in the background– they could stay upstage of Nourabad and exit before Nadir's line "Farewell sweet memory." Does this sound okay to you? WF: Sounds great. Dancers will always need to stay in front of the scrim-orchestra is behind it. I think there is enough room. I'll keep the singers as far downstage as possible—out of the way*]
At [100]: Live. Instruments play chorus part under aria "O Dieu Brahma" (no chorus) *[CSJ: No dance correct? WF: Without the chorus on stage, I think we DO need background dance here. Again, Leila will be far downstage.*]
(Dance tableau at Act curtain) *[CSJ: Which Dancers do you envision for the tableau at the Act curtain? WF: Perhaps the villagers are the background dancers for her aria? Perhaps the Spirits see the love between Nadir and Leila and are lurking or foreshadowing?]*

Act II
At [2]: Recorded (Dance on p 99)
At [6]: Live (Dance exit)
Cut [19] to No. 7
No. 7, 8, 9, 10: Live

At [62]: Recorded (Enter Dance p 140)
At [73]: Live *[CSJ: Do the dancers exit here? WF: Yes.]*
At [76] no chorus and [78] Only Nourabad sings "Ah, Nadir! O trahison!"
Cut [79] to [93]
At [93]: Live
Only Nourabad sings at m302 "La mort" and at [95] "Qu'il partent donc?" (no chorus)
At [100]: Recorded to end of Act. At m382, Nourabad mime the line "Ah! La foudre…"
(Enter Dance p 176, at [100], to Tableau at Act curtain)

Act III
No. 11 and 12: Live (Attendants, but no Dance)
No. 13: Recorded. Cut [68] to [78] (Dance enter p 221)
No. 14: Live. Instruments only at m15, and [85] to end. (no chorus) (Dance remain in tableau upstage)
No. 15: Live, no chorus (Dance exit p 252 at [94]. Spirits reenter for final threatening tableau p 258 at [100])

CSJ: Bill- this looks great! Thank you for all of your hard work. I've asked a few questions throughout the document and just have a couple more regarding Act III.
On page 221 do we still plan to have Nadir in the center of the stage with the dancers dancing in a circle around him? If so, I can plan the choreography to make sure the dancers stay at least 6 ft from him at all times. WF: No, I think this is too risky. Nadir, Nourabad, and Leila enter 238.
CSJ: What method do you envision using to restrain Nadir and Leila? I mentioned the Spirits restraining Nadir via long rope starting on pg. 221. I am wondering if it would be better to have them bound a different way that does not involve something the dancers touch. Thoughts? Ideas for another method of restraint? WF: Agreed. They can simply have wrists bound.
CSJ: What are your thoughts on the ending of the opera? Zurga's suicide? Zurga taking the elements into his own hands by burning down the village angers the Spirits? WF: Not sure. Right now, I think we will simply have a tableau of Zurga alone, with menacing Spirits. Ideas?[159]

Opera rehearsals resumed on September 1, 2020. I assigned each dancer two roles to learn in hopes that there would be enough cast members to continue with rehearsals in the event dancers had to quarantine.

After I posted the provisional casting for the new version of the opera, a dancer, who was not cast, reached out to understand why she was not assigned a role. I had not considered the

[159] William Ferrara and author exchange, "Pearl Fisher Notes on Dance On and Off and recording/live," word document, August 23 – September 7, 2020.

dancer for a part due to a rehearsal scheduling issue. A recent COVID related policy change eliminated the conflict, however. It was an oversight that I did not re-cast her. Since I did not have a role for her, I invited her to be an understudy. It was fortuitous that she reached out; eventually, when the opera went through another revision, I was able to reincorporate her into the production.

Since the first version was conceived to have the dancers portray the vocal lines sung by the chorus, Professor Ferrara and I had planned for significant interaction between the dancers and singers throughout the opera. For the second version, we decided to remove the dancers from several scenes to minimize interaction. After the outline for the opera was solidified, I began to reimagine the dance scenes. Every scene required revision in order to follow COVID protocols.[160]

Due to the uncertainty of how long we would remain in person at OU, we worked at a rapid pace. For the first five weeks of the semester the opera was allotted two hours per week (rehearsing during weekdays with an occasional Saturday session). Despite the limited time frame, we made good progress. Each rehearsal I taught the dancers new choreography. Since there was no time to review the work from the previous rehearsal, I video recorded the new material each day, so the dancers and I would have a visual record. I worked in chronological order, alternating between reworking existing choreography and setting new choreography. Luckily, although there were several cases of COVID-19 within the School of Dance, the opera cast was largely spared (at least for the first few weeks of the semester).

The return of students to campus in late August led to a significant increase in local COVID cases. I went from knowing only a few persons who had contracted the virus to having

[160] See appendix B.

numerous students test positive or come in contact with a COVID-19 positive individual each week. By August 30, 2020, the United States recorded its six millionth case of COVID-19. By September 18, 2020, 30 million cases were reported worldwide.[161] As cases continued to increase it became unclear if it was sustainable to remain in person at OU. One week in September, approximately 16 of the 55 students I taught regularly in-person tested positive or were in isolation due to close contact with someone who tested positive. On October 2, 2020, US President Donald Trump announced he tested positive for the virus. He was admitted to Walter Reed Medical Center on October 3 and was hospitalized for several days. On October 6, 2020 OU President Harroz sent the following email.

> A Message from President Harroz - Calendar Updates to Fall, Spring Semesters
> 10/06/2020
>
> Dear OU Norman Community,
>
> Through your extraordinary effort, we are approaching the halfway mark of the fall semester. I am grateful for the collective efforts to limit the spread of the virus while ensuring that our academic purpose and our unique traditions continue to flourish. Although we are still very much in the midst of uncharted territory, your enduring spirit and generous goodwill remind me each day why OU is so special.
>
> As we look to the future, our success in containing the virus relies on our continued best efforts and responsible planning. In keeping with our robust mitigation efforts, under the guidance of Chief COVID Officer Dr. Dale Bratzler, we are making several modifications to the Norman campus academic calendar to maximize our opportunity to continue our in-person education while protecting the health and safety of our community.
>
> **Fall Instruction Following Thanksgiving**
>
> Instruction for Norman campus-based programs will move entirely online following Thanksgiving break through the end of the fall 2020 semester, with lectures and final exams to be offered online. This covers the week of regular instruction following the holiday, the finals preparation week that follows, and the week of final exams. Norman campus programs that are delivered at OU-Tulsa are also included in this calendar

[161] Robin Muccari, Denise Chow, and Joe Murphy, "Coronavirus Timeline: Tracking the Critical Moments of Covid-19," NBCNews.com (NBCUniversal News Group, December 2, 2020), https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/coronavirus-timeline-tracking-critical-moments-covid-19-n1154341.

change. All university facilities, including housing and library services, as well as research operations, will remain open.

We know a large portion of our residential students will return home for the Thanksgiving holiday – many to locations that do not have strict masking regulations like we do in Norman and at OU. By moving instruction online and providing the option for students to return home and stay there after Thanksgiving, we will reduce the infection risks associated with travel and subsequently, bringing it back to campus.

End-of-semester instruction and the final exam period are extremely important to students and require maximum stability, minimal disruptions, as well as very clear expectations. Students and instructors can now plan for the rest of the fall, and we can ensure that the semester ends with more certainty.

Furthermore, as the seasons change, the risk of co-infection with influenza will increase – a combined impact that could be detrimental to the surrounding community. By taking these steps, we can help protect the overall health of the greater Norman area from potential issues that could be exacerbated by the traditional flu season.

Students who choose not to remain in OU Housing for the remainder of the semester may make arrangements accordingly. Information on this process is forthcoming from OU Housing.

Residential students who plan to travel home for Thanksgiving are encouraged to test through OU's voluntary surveillance testing before returning home to their families. Those returning to OU following the Thanksgiving holiday will also be encouraged to test upon their arrival to campus.

Spring 2021 Semester and Spring Break

The Norman campus, including Norman campus programs in Tulsa, will extend winter break by one week, with classes now beginning Monday, January 25, 2021. We will not offer a traditional Spring Break in 2021. With these changes, we will stay on track to end the spring semester as planned on May 14. Additionally, we are exploring the possibility of offering an instructional break day during the semester.

We understand the change in the spring schedule may be disappointing and disruptive for many, and this decision is not made lightly. In the face of the pandemic, we are forced to take all steps that maximize our ability to continue to provide in-person education and that minimize the health risks to our community. Based upon the best expertise available, this step is necessary to do so. Ultimately, these changes provide us with instructional and operational certainty. It is important that our teams and our instructors know what to expect for the coming months and how best to prepare.

Adding an extra week before the spring 2021 semester allows more time for operational readiness. Our spring semester courses will be structured in much the same way as we have the current semester.

OU Health Sciences Center Programs

At this time, the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters are continuing as planned for our OU Health Sciences Center programs in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. The unique characteristics of these programs – the generally non-residential environments, small class sizes, and health care instruction components – do not require schedule modifications at this time. Should the circumstances necessitate a change, the university will keep all students, faculty, and staff in these programs informed of any new developments.

From the very beginning, our community has stood together with remarkable strength and purpose. The great strides we have taken together have helped us get this far, but our work continues. Practicing healthy behaviors, not letting down our guard, and graciously supporting each other have never been more important. As in everything we do, we will make it through this extraordinary challenge together.

Live On, University,

Joseph Harroz, Jr.
President[162]

The shift to remote learning after Thanksgiving was not surprising. Luckily, we were making good progress in rehearsals and by October 11, 2020, the dancers had learned the choreography for the entire opera. On October 13, 2020, I received the following email from Professor Ferrara.

Plan B?
10/13/2020

Hi Christa,
What would happen if we needed to postpone Pearl Fishers until next fall? What would be the consequences? Will you still be here in the fall?
Bill[163]

[162] Joseph Harroz Jr. email to OU Community, "A Message from President Harroz - Calendar Updates to Fall, Spring Semesters," October 6, 2020.

[163] Ferrara email to author, "Plan B?," October 13, 2020.

Professor Ferrara's email was understandable. The virus was proliferating, people were dying at alarming rates, and opera and ballet companies worldwide were canceling or postponing performances. We were in the middle of a pandemic trying to produce an opera; it was reasonable to consider cancelling or postponing. And yet, it was not really feasible to postpone the production until the fall of 2021. I was set to graduate in May of 2021, the dancers had put in countless hours both in and outside of the studio and had been working on the opera since Spring of 2019, the costumes were designed, and the sets were built. I expressed my concerns to Professor Ferrara and Dr. Shames. Hopeful that we would be able to find a way to move forward with the production, I continued opera rehearsals as planned. I received the following email on October 25, 2020.

> Re: Link to Footage
> 10/25/2020
>
> Thank you, Christa. We are having a lot of safety concerns from both faculty and students. One idea is to perform highlights of Pearl Fishers: the arias and duets with the 3 principals and piano (static concert style) for the first half of the evening, then intermission, then the ballets without singers for the second half with recorded music. I know this will require some adjustments and reworking of the dancers, but we are trying to find a way to preserve your work and the students' performance opportunities.
>
> Bill[164]

Although it would require yet another reworking of the opera, I was delighted at the prospect of moving forward with the production. Professor Ferrara sent an outline of which arias and duets would be included for the new version. After speaking with Professor Ferrara and Dr. Shames, I began working on an outline for the second half of the production for dance and recorded music.

[164] Ferrara email to author, "Re: Link to Footage," October 25, 2020.

The new version posed several challenges. The arias and duets performed on the first half of the concert would span the entire narrative of the opera. It would be challenging to find a storyline for the dance in the second act. The choreography was conceived specifically to support the narrative, taken out of context of the opera, the dance scenes made little sense. After some brainstorming, University Theatre Producer Mary Margaret Holt and Associate Producer Kasey Allee-Foreman offered the idea of video recording the dancers and projecting them onstage during the live performance. The new version would allow us to tell the story without the dancers and singers coming into contact both onstage and backstage. I drafted an outline for this new version by merging the outline of arias and duets with an outline of the dance scenes I conceived when we planned have the dance scenes serve as the second act. We pitched the idea to Professor Ferrara and Dr. Shames on November 13, 2020. They seemed open to the idea of recording the dance scenes in advance. We would need approval from the rest of the production team, however. Recording the dance scenes meant the costumes and lighting design had to be completed earlier than planned and we were already working with a compressed timeline due to the move to remote learning after Thanksgiving and the ensuing delay to the start of the spring semester. On November 18, 2020, we received approval from the rest of the team to move forward with new version of the opera.

We determined the third version of the opera would be a hybrid of arias and duets sung live with a piano, prerecorded narration to fill in the plot, and video of the dance scenes projected on a large screen with recorded orchestral music. In post-production, the video footage of the dance scenes would be interwoven with the live concert footage to make it appear as though they were performed in the same evening. This new format significantly reduced the number of

persons backstage, eliminated the issue of singers coming into contact with dancers, and enabled us to tell the narrative in its original order.

It became clear as I began reworking the dance scenes for the third version of the opera that there would need to be a dancer avatar of Leila. Also, since the singing role of Nourabad was eliminated from the live concert version, I needed a dancer in the role of Nourabad. Additionally, Professor Ferrara suggested the dancer Leila could appear as a vision during Nadir's Act I aria (which was originally choreographed as a *pas de deux* in the first version and cut in the second version) and during the famous duet, "Au fond du temple saint." I decided to cast the dancer who volunteered to understudy the opera in the role of Leila's dance avatar and engaged two Freshmen male dancers to begin learning the role of Nourabad.

Rehearsals resumed at the start of November 2020, after a three-day hiatus due to an ice storm that shut down the university. The ice storm provided a nice reprieve for me to, again, reimagine the opera. By November 18, 2020, I had re-choreographed or reworked almost every scene for a third time and choreographed two new dances for Leila.[165] In our final rehearsal of the fall semester on November 19, 2020, we ran through all the dance scenes in order for the first time.

On November 20, 2020, Professor Ferrara sent Dr. Shames and me an outline of the narration for *The Pearl Fishers,* which prompted a meeting to discuss the script. There was disagreement regarding some of the pre-recorded narration overlapping with the orchestral recording and dance. Dr. Shames expressed reservations about overlaying narration during the opera's prelude and concern that some of the narration was too lengthy. Professor Ferrara felt the length and placement of the narration was necessary to help explain the opera's narrative. The

[165] See appendix A-C for revisions.

use of narration over dance is not usually my aesthetic preference, however. To some, it may appear that the choreographer cannot adequately express the plot through movement and needs verbal assistance. Yet, under these circumstances, the use of narration overlayed during some of the choreography could add clarity and cohesion between the sung portions of the show and the dance scenes. Knowing that the original version of the opera included spoken dialogue (although it was never performed in that format) helped to justify the use of spoken dialogue and narration in our version of the opera. We found compromise by having the prelude bifurcate the opening narration, and Professor Ferrara adjusted the placement and length of some of the narration later in the opera.[166]

On December 7, 2020, we had our final production meeting of the semester. Professor Ferrara and the scenic designer determined that the use of rear projection on a screen would be the best method to display the dance scenes. In a previous meeting, it was noted that the piano may obscure the dancers' feet using this method during live performances. My choreography included a significant amount of floor work, so rear projection would obscure not only the dancers' feet, but the dancers' entire bodies in some instances. I was assured there would be a method employed to alleviate issues with sightlines caused by the placement of a piano.

Costume designer Lloyd Cracknell brought to my attention that the choreography for the dancer in the role of Nourabad did not support the original costume design. I had interpreted the role of Nourabad with the physicality of a much younger person rather than the elderly priest Professor Ferrara intended. As the role evolved in rehearsals, I should have communicated with the production team. Professor Ferrara suggested it was easier to change the narration from "old" priest to "high" priest than to change the choreography. I was grateful for this adjustment. The

[166] See appendix C.

young dancer in the role of Nourabad struggled to pick up choreography quickly, and a significant adjustment to the character, while not impossible, would take some time. I left the meeting grateful to have such a collaborative creative team.

While excited about the evolving possibilities of the production, I was becoming increasingly concerned that we would be unable to perform *The Pearl Fishers* in the spring of 2021. Cases of COVID-19 across the United States increased dramatically during November and December of 2020. As of December 13, 2020, the World Health Organization states, "In the past week, the number of new COVID-19 cases and deaths continued to rise with 70 million cumulative cases and 1.6 million deaths globally since the start of the pandemic. The regions of the Americas and Europe continue to shoulder the burden of the pandemic, accounting for 85% of new cases and 86% of new deaths globally."[167] As of December 22, 2020, over 318,500 persons were reported to have died of COVID in the United States (although the actual number may be significantly higher).[168] Many hospitals were operating at or over capacity before the Thanksgiving holiday, yet people continued to travel and participated in holiday gatherings despite warnings. Cases of COVID-19 surged across the US.

Despite the bleakness of the start of December, there was some hope that a vaccine would be available shortly. According to the New York Times, "Britain gave emergency authorization on Wednesday [December 2, 2020] to Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine, leaping ahead of the United States to become the first Western country to allow mass inoculations against a disease that has

[167] "Weekly Epidemiological Update - 15 December 2020," World Health Organization (World Health Organization), accessed December 21, 2020, https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/weekly-epidemiological-update---15-december-2020.

[168] "CDC COVID Data Tracker," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), accessed December 21, 2020, https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/.

killed more than 1.4 million people worldwide."[169] According to the US FDA, "On December 11, 2020, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued the first emergency use authorization (E.U.A.) for a vaccine for the prevention of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) in individuals 16 years of age and older. The emergency use authorization allows the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to be distributed in the U.S."[170] As vaccinations commenced in the U.S. for frontline healthcare workers, staff, and residents of long-term care facilities, there was news of an even more contagious strain of the virus in the United Kingdom. Health Secretary Matt Hancock reported to the B.B.C. on December 14, 2020 a new variant of COVID-19 was found that could be as much as 70% more contagious.[171] Meanwhile, on December 18, 2020, the F.D.A. approved the emergency use of the Moderna Vaccine to be used against COVID-19.[172] It was unknown if the Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines would be effective against the new strain of the virus.

While the commencement of vaccination of persons in the US was promising, the number of vaccinations administered fell significantly short of government projections which made it unlikely that many of the faculty and students involved in the opera would receive a vaccine

[169] Benjamin Mueller, "U.K. Approves Pfizer Coronavirus Vaccine, a First in the West," The New York Times (The New York Times, December 2, 2020), https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/02/world/europe/pfizer-coronavirus-vaccine-approved-uk.html.

[170] Office of the Commissioner, "Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine," U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), accessed December 21, 2020, https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccine.

[171] COG-UK 14 Dec 2020, "Update on New SARS-CoV-2 Variant and How COG-UK Tracks Emerging Mutations - COG-UK Consortium," Covid-19 Genomics UK (COG-UK) Consortium, accessed December 21, 2020, https://www.cogconsortium.uk/news_item/update-on-new-sars-cov-2-variant-and-how-cog-uk-tracks-emerging-mutations/.

[172] Denise Grady, Abby Goodnough, and Noah Weiland, "F.D.A. OKs the Moderna Covid Vaccine, Adding Millions More Doses to the U.S. Supply," The New York Times (The New York Times, December 19, 2020), https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/18/health/covid-vaccine-fda-moderna.html.

before the performance dates of the opera in March. The new variant strain of COVID-19 in the U.K. resulted in an increase in lockdown measures. Due to their tier four status, the Royal Ballet was forced to cancel their live stream performances of *The Nutcracker* in the middle of their performance run.[173] As of December 22, 2020, the C.D.C. stated that the variant of the virus was not present in the US. The CDC website states, "The VUI 202012/01 variant has not been identified through sequencing efforts in the United States, although viruses have only been sequenced from about 51,000 of the 17 million US cases. Ongoing travel between the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the high prevalence of this variant among current UK infections, increase the likelihood of importation. Given the small fraction of US infections that have been sequenced, the variant could already be in the United States without having been detected."[174] With the continuation of travel from the UK and the rest of Europe, if the virus variant had not made it way to the U.S. already, it appeared it was just a matter of time. The variant was first identified in the US in Colorado on December 30, 2020.[175] Since its discovery in Colorado, the variant strain has appeared in more states.

As the fall 2020 semester concluded, despite uncontrolled spread of the virus across the U.S. and the likeliness of increased spread due to holiday travel and gatherings, OU did not appear to revise the plan to prioritize in-person instruction during the spring 2021 semester. With no immediate indication that classes at OU would not be held in-person, planning continued for

[173] "Stream The Nutcracker Reworked," Royal Opera House, accessed December 22, 2020, https://www.roh.org.uk/tickets-and-events/stream-the-nutcracker-reworked-details.

[174] "Implications of the Emerging SARS-CoV-2 Variant VUI 202012/01," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), accessed December 22, 2020, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/scientific-brief-emerging-variant.html.

[175] Richard Harris, "1st Known U.S. Case Of U.K. Coronavirus Variant Found In Colorado." NPR. NPR, December 30, 2020. https://www.npr.org/2020/12/30/951363590/1st-known-u-s-case-of-u-k-coronavirus-variant-found-in-colorado.

the production of *The Pearl Fishers,* with tech rehearsals for the dance scenes planned for the week of March 1, video recording March 5 and 6, and performance dates scheduled for March 18-21, 2021.

Spring 2021

The Pearl Fishers: Studio Rehearsals

The spring 2021 semester began with high hopes. The University Theatre season officially announced that *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined),* our new title, was set to premiere March 18-21, 2021. Having publicity attached to the upcoming program created a spirit of encouragement and anticipation amongst the dancers. Although there was no indication the majority of faculty, staff, and students involved in the show would be vaccinated by the opera's premiere, vaccinations were beginning to be distributed across Oklahoma. COVID-19 safety precautions were still in place from the semester prior with little emendation. Safety protocols prohibited the sharing of costumes, therefore I reduced two casts of dancers to one cast with understudies. After the reduction in cast, it came to my attention that several of the dancers lived together. Since there was a possibility several dancers might need to quarantine, I engaged an additional dancer to understudy the production. I developed a quarantine contingency plan outlining which dancer would cover each role in case an entire household had to quarantine during rehearsals or video recording sessions.

Over the winter break, after viewing footage of the finale of the opera from the fall 2020 semester, I grew increasingly dissatisfied with my choreographic choices. Bizet's music at the end of the opera was particularly anticlimactic and my choreography did not create a sense of finality. After brainstorming ideas with the Director of the School of Dance, Michael Bearden, I reached out to Professor Ferrara.

Pearl Fishers Ending?
01/21/2021

Dear Bill,

Would you be open to chatting sometime soon about the ending *Pearl Fishers?* I feel like we really need something to tie the live singer and projected dance together to create a stronger ending. I've been envisioning a few things choreographically, but they are not really working. Perhaps we could revisit your idea of having Zurga appear onscreen with the dancers? Or, have the Spirits appear onscreen and then vanish and appear in-person as Zurga falls to his knees and the dancers surround him (socially distanced of course). It could be really interesting to break the boundary between the projection and the in-person aspect. Thoughts, ideas?

All my best,
Christa[176]

Professor Ferrara was receptive to the idea and we determined it would be interesting to break through the boundary of the digital world and have the singer Zurga absorbed into the video with the dancers at the end. Director Bearden suggested having the Spirits appear in person during the live performances at the very end. Although I preferred this suggestion, logistically it would be best not to have extra persons backstage due to physical distancing best practices.

As rehearsals progressed, however, even with Zurga bridging the gap between the live, in-person world and the digital world, I still found the ending unsatisfying. My husband suggested ending the opera by having the whole cast on stage. Initially, I was unsure how this concept could work in the context of the narrative but decided I had already taken a number of artistic liberties with the opera and it was worth trying. I began conceptualizing the ending with the entire cast on stage and the singer in the role of Zurga appearing on screen with the dancers.

Rehearsals for the opera resumed on January 26, 2021. Many of the dancers were involved in another production, causing the number of opera rehearsals to be limited. It did not prove especially problematic, however, because the choreography (aside from the finale) was set

[176] Author email to William Ferrara, *Pearl Fishers Ending?*, January 21, 2021.

and the dancers knew their roles. Despite numerous revisions and reconceptualization of each scene, throughout the run of rehearsals the dancers were rarely confused about which version we were executing or had lost track of the numerous alterations to the choreography. It is easy to imagine rehearsals could become quite confusing and yet, I rarely had to stop rehearsal to clarify or reiterate a change. Perhaps it was due to video recording each rehearsal or because I had been working with these dancers for over a year. It was also possible that the dancers sensed the urgency of each rehearsal and reviewed their choreography in advance. Whatever the reason, it was tremendously helpful to the process both in saving time and energy.

Professor Ferrara and I met with the lighting designer on January 27, 2021, to discuss lighting concepts. The designer pitched the idea of unifying the live, in-person aria and duet scenes with the projected dance scenes by delineating the time of day. The first scene of the opera would begin at sunrise and the events would unfold over a few days. Both Professor Ferrara and I agreed seeing the passage of time in both the dance and singing scenes could be effective. We discussed specific lighting concepts regarding the Act II finale (the storm scene) and the use of haze in several instances. The lighting designer did not appear to be particularly interested in listening to specific concepts, especially as they pertained to the choreography. Of greatest importance to me was the storm scene. I intentionally left room in the choreography for rain effects, swirling lights, and flashes of lightning (especially at three specific moments in coordination with the fire spirit acting as a conduit to flashes of lighting). Although we discussed these ideas, I was not confident they would be incorporated.

On January 28, 2021, I received an email from the dancer understudying the role of Nourabad that he was advised due to ongoing issues with injuries not to participate in the production. I considered leaving the role without an understudy but decided against it. I reached

out to Oklahoma Festival Ballet Director, Boyko Dossev, and Contemporary Dance Oklahoma Director, Roxanne Lyst, and copied School of Dance Director, Michael Bearden,

> Nourabad Understudy
> 01/28/2021
>
> Dear Boyko and Roxanne,
>
> Christian informed me this morning that he is no longer able to understudy Finn's role of Nourabad in the upcoming opera production due to an ongoing back injury.
>
> Any ideas for a male dancer, who learns quickly, who could fill in - in case Finn is unable to perform (Boyko, Michael you interested? ;)) . The dancer would not need to be at every opera rehearsal. I could identify a few specific rehearsals for him to attend that would not conflict with OFB or CDO rehearsals. I can also provide video footage from which the dancer could learn the role. It is not a lot of dancing, but it is an important role.
>
> Roxanne - I was wondering about Hunter.[177] Thoughts? I know this would go beyond his CDO requirement.
> Thanks to you both for your help.
>
> All my best,
> Christa[178]

Professor Dossev replied later that day.

> Re: Nourabad Understudy
> 01/28/2021
>
> Hello Christa,
>
> The only men I can think of from OFB are Isaac, Diego, Kel, and Noah.
> I am sorry to hear about, Christian.
> Please, let me know how I can further help with that, besides learning the role myself. ;)
>
> Best,
> Boyko[179]

[178] Author email to Roxanne Lyst and Boyko Dossev, *Nourabad Understudy*, January 28, 2021.

[179] Boyko Dossev email to author, *Re: Nourabad Understudy*, January 28, 2021.

Although Professor Dossev mentioned several OFB men, after a series of emails it became clear that their schedules for the upcoming OFB production would prohibit their participation in opera rehearsals and the video recording sessions. Professor Lyst was open to enlisting Hunter, a freshman modern dance major, whose schedule was more conducive to participating in the production. Professor Lyst reached out to Hunter the next day and engaged him to begin opera rehearsals the following Saturday. I informed the costume shop of the change immediately and sent videos of the choreography to Nourabad's new understudy.

The first week of opera rehearsals went smoothly, and I was happy to have some time to clean the existing choreography and rework the end of the opera.

On February 1, 2021, Professor Dossev asked me to review the upcoming rehearsal schedule since there would be some overlap with opera rehearsals as OFB began rehearsing for their upcoming show in April. It was challenging to circumnavigate any potential scheduling overlaps since casting for several pieces in the OFB production was still being determined. I had several conversations with Professor Dossev the semester prior and at the start of the spring semester, so we would be on the same page regarding the staging and technical rehearsal schedule in the theatre. On February 2, 2021, I was included on the following email.

> Casting OFB'2021
> 02/02/2021
>
> Dear all,
>
> Please, could you look at your proposed casting here and let me know if I got it right? I want to finalize these and send them to the production team.
>
> Mariana, I gave you all our available boys plus our senior ladies. Also, I gave you some understudies as well. Michael, feel free to let me know your thoughts.
>
> Cheers,
> Boyko[180]

[180] Dossev email to OFB faculty*, Casting OFB'2021,* February 2, 2021.

The guest artist, Mariana Oliveira, was scheduled to lead her virtual residency the week of the opera staging and the week of the opera technical rehearsals and video recording sessions. It caught my eye that all of the men were going to be included in her work. I had intentionally cast Finn in the role of Nourabad because he was a freshman and Director Bearden, who was choreographing a work for the freshmen, would allow him to miss rehearsals to attend opera rehearsals. I was not aware that Finn was under consideration for the guest artist's work.

I met with Professor Dossev and Professor Jan Fugit (also in charge of scheduling) the next day, February 3, 2021, to determine the best course of action. The two most crucial weeks for the opera coincided with the two weeks of the guest artist residency. It became clear that the dancer in the role of Nourabad would need to be replaced with his understudy.

Later that day I attended the production meeting for the opera. We identified a scheduling challenge. Friday, March 5, 2021, one of the days of the opera video recording, was announced as an instructional holiday. The announcement was sent out in mid-January and was a result of the OU’s decision not to hold spring break due to concern about spreading the virus and travel. It was on the production team's minds that this may alter our recording timeline. University Theatre Producer Kasey Allee-Foreman confirmed in the meeting that the instructional holiday did mean we could not video record the opera on March 5, 2021. The production team proposed we move the two video recording sessions to Wednesday, March 3, and Thursday, March 4. Although it would reduce the amount of time to prepare the costumes and lighting design, the production team seemed to agree that this was the best course of action. Later that day in rehearsal, I informed the dancers of this change but advised them not to plan to leave town over that weekend just in case recording was delayed. Professor Dossev contacted me later that evening confirming that replacing Finn with his understudy was our best option. Knowing that the

scheduling conflict necessitated replacing Finn in the role of Nourabad and knowing we were losing a few days of technical rehearsals in the theatre, I sent the following email on February 4, 2021, to Professors Dossev and Fugit.

> Opera Overlap
> 02/04/2021
>
> Hi Boyko and Jan,
>
> Here are the steps that need to be taken before we can move forward.
>
> 1. We need to run this by Roxanne to ensure that Hunter is available for opera rehearsals (especially staging and tech/filming). I do not know what his schedule is like for CDO and if he is dancing the role it will necessitate him being at more rehearsals.
> 2. After this is cleared with Roxanne, we need to contact costumes. Since they have already built Finn's costume they will need to know of this change ASAP.
> 3. Hunter has not been to an opera rehearsal yet since he was just recently engaged in the production and has been involved in the Jiří Kylián workshop. I will go back through the rehearsal schedule knowing I will need time to teach Hunter the role and will come to our meeting with any necessary changes.
>
> I've copied Michael to keep him in the loop.
> See you both at 9:30 am.
>
> All my best,
> Christa[181]

During the scheduling meeting on February 5, 2021, Professor Lyst happened to be in the office, and we discussed the possibility of Hunter stepping into the role of Nourabad. She reported that he was excited about understudying the opera and was on board to help facilitate him being available for rehearsals to step into the role. After the meeting concluded, I sent an email to Professor Cracknell in the costume shop inquiring about the possibility of Hunter fitting into the Nourabad costume.

> Nourabad Casting
> 02/04/2021
>
> Dear Lloyd,

[181] Author email to Jan Fugit and Boyko Dossev, *Opera Overlap*, February 4, 2021.

A scheduling challenge with Finn (Nourabad), has arisen between the opera staging rehearsals and opera tech/filming week and a guest choreographer residency for OFB's production that overlaps with those two weeks. I would appreciate your thought and input to take into a meeting with OFB faculty later today.

A consideration is to replace Finn with his understudy Hunter. Do you think this is a possibility? Could Finn's costume be adjusted to fit Hunter, and if so, do you think there is time to make such adjustments?

I really appreciate your thought and input. I am available to chat if you would like. Boyko would like to post casting tomorrow, if possible.

All my best,
Christa[182]

Re: Nourabad Casting
02/04/2021

Dear Christa,
I am so sorry that things are in constant flux for you and your colleagues. We had Hunter in for a fitting and his Nourabad costume and it fits great. so, that means for me there no problem at all with the change of casting. Hunter was so excited to get the chance to try on a costume. I think he'll be fine.

Regards,
Lloyd[183]

Relieved by everyone's flexibility, I moved forward with casting Hunter in the opera. He appeared excited about the opportunity.

Saturday, February 6, 2021, was the first rehearsal with the new Nourabad. The majority of the two-hour, 45-minute rehearsal was comprised of teaching the student the role. We had almost three weeks before we were set to be onstage, I thought that surely that would be enough time.

[182] Author email to Lloyd Cracknell, *Nourabad Casting,* February 4, 2021.

[183] Cracknell email to author, *Re: Nourabad Casting,* February 4, 2021.

The following week I met with Kasey Allee-Foreman, who was severing as Director of Photography, to determine a shot list for the production. While it would be a two-camera shoot, Allee-Foreman explained that the two cameras could not shoot simultaneously. If we wanted to shoot from multiple angles, we would need to record each scene several times. Based on the equipment and timeframe in which we were working it seemed best to streamline our approach. We viewed rehearsal recordings of each scene and created a shooting outline by identifying scenes that could be shot at different angles and designating specific points in the choreography conducive to wide-angle, medium, and close-up shots.

Opera rehearsals were scheduled for Tuesday and Thursday of the week of February 8, 2021. Mid-day on Tuesday, February 9, 2021, I received an email from the new dancer in the role of Nourabad informing me he was not feeling well (not with COVID-19 symptoms) and he would not be at rehearsal. He assured me he would attend the next rehearsal. On Thursday, February 11 at 4:30 pm the student requested to attend the 6:00 pm rehearsal via zoom because he was still not feeling well. It was perhaps a case of unfortunate timing and certainly, in the middle of a pandemic, it was not acceptable to insist he attend rehearsal when he was not feeling well.

The following week, the week of February 15, 2021, was one of record cold and significant snow for Oklahoma. In-person classes were canceled for the entire week due to a combination of subzero temperatures, rolling blackouts, and hazardous driving conditions. I held an opera rehearsal via Zoom on February 18, during which the dancers and I viewed past rehearsal footage and clarified and cleaned discrepancies in execution. Afterward I met, via Zoom, with the dancer in the role of Nourabad for a more targeted rehearsal to review the choreography. Although I was not convinced he knew the role, he appeared healthy and in good

spirits. We were both aware I would only have one in-person studio rehearsal the following Tuesday, February 23, 2021, to coach him in the role, prior to moving to staging rehearsals in the theatre the next day. I encouraged him to review the video and let him know that the other dancers and I were available if he had any questions.

The cancellation of a week of in-person instruction and the edict from local officials to conserve power meant that we also did not have an opera production meeting the week prior to the first staging rehearsal. The stage manager, however, was able to send a tech/recording schedule and informed me that, due to losing a week in the shop, the costumes would not be ready until the first day of video recording.

The week of inclement weather necessitated the cancellation of the first weekend of shows for the School of Musical Theatre's production of *Spring Awakening* and delayed their technical rehearsals until the week of February 22, 2021. Many of the same members of the production team were involved in both the musical theatre production and the opera. On Monday, February 22, 2021, in our opera production meeting, two challenges were discussed regarding the dance scenes. The crew would be unable to install the dance floor by our Wednesday staging rehearsal. I felt it would still be beneficial for the dancers to mark through the dance scenes and everyone was amenable to us using the space without the dance floor. The other challenge required more adjustment. Professor Cracknell reported that costumes would likely not be ready in time for video recording due to the loss of a week, and they requested moving the recording dates later. Per the Provost's dedicated instructional day off, we could not move the recording to March 5, and the stage needed to be prepared for the singers on Monday, March 8. It was suggested we limit recording to just one day and record on Thursday, March 4, or Saturday, March 6. I gently argued against the idea of recording only one day. I felt strongly

that, for the health of the dancers, limiting video recording to just one day did not provide a lot of options if something went wrong or we needed multiple takes, nor would there be time to review the footage and reshoot as needed. It was suggested that we move the video recording to Saturday, March 6 and Sunday, March 7. Having just spent several meetings with Dossev and Fugit planning the OFB schedule, I was unsure if they would be open to yet another change. I sent Professor Dossev and an email during the production meeting informing him of a potential shift in video recording days and asking if he had time to meet. Moving the recording would affect Dean Holt's rehearsals with the dancers for the upcoming OFB production. She graciously said she would be willing for her rehearsal to be rescheduled. After the production meeting I met with Professor Dossev. He was open to shifting the OFB schedule to accommodate the change. Then I reached out to the dancers.

> Opera rehearsal this week
> 02/22/21
>
> Dear all,
>
> I just finished the opera production meeting. **Significant delay with the snowstorm has necessitated moving the opera filming to Saturday, March 6, and Sunday, March 7.** I will be sending an updated tech schedule tomorrow and Boyko will be posting a new OFB schedule for the week of March 1 as soon as we can solidify the tech schedule.
>
> Boyko, the production team, and I thank you in advance for your flexibility in this matter!
>
> Please let me know ASAP (by 10:00 pm today) if the shift in filming days presents a significant schedule challenge, so we can devise a plan.
>
> All my best,
> Christa[184]

Only one dancer responded with a challenge. One of the understudies was scheduled to receive her second COVID-19 vaccine in Texas and was driving to receive her dose that

[184] Author email to dancers, *Opera Rehearsals this Week*, February 22, 2021.

weekend. She was no longer able to understudy the production. With no other challenges brought to my attention, I sent word to the production team that we could move forward with the opera recording on the later dates.

The plan for rehearsal on Tuesday, February 23, 2021, was to focus on Nourabad's scenes. The student in the role of Nourabad arrived late and it became apparent that he did not know the role including the scenes he had already learned in the previous rehearsal and the scenes we reviewed via Zoom. He also did not appear to feel well. When asked, he informed me his knees were bothering him and that he had a headache.

The Pearl Fishers: Stage Rehearsals

On Wednesday, February 24, 2021, before the 6:00 pm staging rehearsal in the theatre, I received an email from the student in the role of Nourabad stating that he did not feel well and may need to observe or not attend rehearsal. The numerous absences were cause for concern. I forwarded the email from the student to Professors Dossev and Lyst and copied Professor Cracknell with the following note,

> Re: Not Feeling Well
> 02/24/2021
>
> Dear Roxanne and Boyko,
>
> I just wanted to let you know what has been going on with Hunter in opera rehearsals. I am concerned about his well-being. He came to one opera rehearsal on Saturday, Feb 6th - then missed a week of rehearsal because he was feeling ill. Then of course we lost a week because of the snowstorm. Last night he came to his second opera rehearsal (not really knowing the choreography). He said he had a miserable headache and his knees were bothering him. Then I received this email from him today.
>
> I am concerned that the opera may be too much for him and I certainly don't want to put him in a position that causes undue stress. Roxanne, do you have any thoughts? Boyko, do you think we could consider putting Finn back in the opera, if needed? I could work around not having him for this week and the two tech rehearsals next week and then I could arrange to run his scenes first during the dress rehearsals on Wednesday and

> Thursday and then to arrange the opera filming not to interfere with Oliveira's rehearsal on March 6.
>
> I've copied Lloyd since whatever we decide may affect Nourabad's costume. I really appreciate your input.
>
> All my best,
> Christa[185]

Almost immediately, I received an email from Professor Lyst stating that she would check in with Hunter and the email below from Professor Dossev who included Director Bearden in the email chain.

> Re: Not Feeling Well
> 02/24/2021
>
> Thank you, Christa.
>
> I'm so sorry to hear Hunter hasn't been feeling well.
>
> I had Finn today in class and he mentioned he fell yesterday. He went to the doctor today. I have not heard back yet from him. I will check on him tonight during class and the rehearsal as he will be taking notes.
>
> Best,
> Boyko[186]

The first staging rehearsal in the theatre was without a dancer in the role of Nourabad. Both singers alternating in the role of Zurga attended rehearsal, so I could incorporate them into the choreography for the finale of the opera. Their interaction with Nourabad was minimal, and I was able to have one of the other dancers fill in for Nourabad's spot. Knowing I had limited time to work with the singers, I designed the choreography to be learned quickly and made it adaptable to someone with no dance training. Nourabad's choreography was designed to cue the singer when and where to move, and the opera ended with the singer facing away from the

[185] Author email exchange, *Not Feeling Well*, February 24, 2021.

[186] Dossev email exchange, *Not Feeling Well*, February 24, 2021.

audience. By having the singer's back to the audience, he was able to follow the timing and movements of the dancers who were executing the same choreography upstage. Despite having his back to the audience, his placement downstage center highlighted him as the focus of the scene. The singers in the role of Zurga learned quickly, and I was able to dedicate the rest of the rehearsal to spacing other scenes.

It was a pleasure to see the scenic design by Josh Moran for the first time in-person. The stage was framed by two painted portals depicting trees, leaves, and vines. One portal was downstage and the other was upstage but both portals left room for the dancers to enter and exit behind or in front, giving the appearance that they were emerging from or exiting into a jungle. The choreography needed to be altered slightly to accommodate the portals, but Moran had communicated dimensions well in advance and there was nothing that required radical alteration. Having the option of dancers entering and exiting from behind the leaves added another dimension to the choreography.

Later that evening, after some light banter with the faculty about recruiting them to play Nourabad, Professor Cracknell sent the following email:

> Re: Not Feeling Well
> 2/24/2021
>
> I could do it if you want Nourafat. Seriously we will work with you guys however we need. Christa, everyone's really appreciating your hard work on this.
>
> Regards
> Lloyd[187]

To which Professor Lyst responded,

> Re: Not Feeling Well,
> 2/24/2021

[187] Ibid.

Thank you Lloyd,

I spoke briefly with Hunter today. He is dealing with some challenges.
I really do not know the best way to move forward, other than to have a plan in place if he cannot continue.
As a choreographer I know that is the last thing you want to hear so close to an opening, but I think a plan should be put together without him.
I will check in on him again tomorrow and relay any pertinent information I receive.

Thank you all for your patience and hard work,
Roxanne[188]

I replied,

Re: Not Feeling Well,
2/24/2021

Dear all,

First of all, thanks so much for your input (Lloyd - I may take you up on your offer!)
Boyko, please keep me updated on how Finn is doing.
Charlotte (stage manager) and I will draft an amended tech/filming schedule that would minimize overlap between Oliveira's rehearsals and the opera if we needed to move in that direction. I will brainstorm an idea for a plan C if both Finn and Hunter are not able to dance the role.

All my best,
Christa[189]

After sounding out the situation with my husband on my drive home from rehearsal it became clear the uncertainty of the situation was untenable and I needed to take action. I sent a follow-up email and included University Theatre Producer Mary Margaret Holt and Associate Producer Kasey Allee-Foreman.

Re: Not Feeling Well,
2/24/2021

[188] Ibid.

[189] Ibid.

Hello everyone,

Seeing as we are now very close to the filming and we have an uncertain situation regarding the principal male role, I am proposing a solution. I would like to hire a professional male dancer to come in for the role of Nourabad. I will pay for this person myself- I do not expect OU to cover this expense. Do you have a recommendation - maybe an OKC ballet dancer who could learn the role quickly (and could fit into Nourabad's costumes without major alterations)?

Thanks so much, and I appreciate your support of this production. I've included Kasey and MM on this email chain to keep everyone in the loop.

All my best,
Christa[190]

The rest of the OFB men were engaged in the guest artist residency and thus not an option, and I felt we were too close to the video recording sessions for me to try to teach another student the role. At least a professional dancer would be able to learn the role quickly with minimal coaching. I fully intended to cover the guest artist's expense because it was my idea, and it appeared to be the most efficient way to solve this particular issue. Early the next morning Director Bearden sent me an email informing me that Finn had suffered an injury serious enough to prevent him from dancing for some time. He also sent the following email to the group.

Re: Not Feeling Well,
2/25/2021

Thank you, Christa

I am open to this possibility and would be happy to assist in reaching out to OKC Ballet if needed.
If we go this route, I would like for this expense to not come out of your pocket.
I can take a look and see if there is anything the school can do to support this production in this way.

Warmly,
Michael[191]

[190] Ibid.

[191] Ibid.

Director Bearden and I met later that day to discuss the situation and brainstorm ideas. It was fortuitous to begin setting in motion a plan to replace the student in the role of Nourabad because the student emailed me later that day to inform me that he was feeling a little better but not be able to attend rehearsal due to COVID-19 protocols.

I sent the following email to the student,

> Re: Not Feeling Well
> 2/25/2021
>
> Dear Hunter,
>
> I am glad you are feeling at least a little better today. I've decided to pursue hiring a guest artist for the role of Nourabad. As I stated in my previous email, I am concerned about your well-being and it is my hope that this will alleviate any stress performing in the production may be causing. Get some rest and don't worry about rehearsal today.
>
> All my best,
> Christa[192]

Later that evening, we had our first full-out run in the theatre with the dance floor in place. Two of the Village Maiden dancers were nursing slight injuries and we had yet to find a dancer for the role of Nourabad. One of the dancers needed a few days to rest and her understudy filled in. The other was able to participate in the run but without executing any jumps. Dancing full out in the space made clear additional spacing adjustments were required.

On Friday, February 26, 2021, Director Bearden, Dean Holt, and I continued our search to find an available, professional dancer. Director Bearden secured a dancer for the role on Saturday, February 27, 2021, and the dancer arrived in Oklahoma on March 1, 2021.

> Re: Not Feeling Well,
> 2/27/2021

---

[192] Author email to Hunter, *Not Feeling Well,* February 25, 2021.

> Hello everyone,
>
> We have secured Ballet Arkansas dancer, **Aldrin Vendt** to come perform in the Opera. Lloyd, I have asked him to send us any of his measurements that he has. He will be in Norman by Monday afternoon and be here through the end of filming on Sunday if needed.
>
> Michael[193]

The School of Dance covered the expense of the guest artist and Director Bearden handled the contract with Mr. Vendt which facilitated me focusing on the artistic aspect of the production. I responded,

> Re: Not Feeling Well,
> 2/27/2021
>
> A huge thank you to Michael for your assistance with this! Stephanie, Lloyd, and Kasey, I will reach out to your shortly. Boyko, I will reach out to you as well about the schedule. Thanks so much to everyone for your support of this production.
>
> Very best regards,
> Christa[194]

It was a great relief that we would be able to begin the week of technical rehearsals with a dancer in the role.

The first week of March, the week of technical rehearsals for the dance scenes, was punctuated with rays hope in the fight against COVID-19. Although the initial rollout of vaccinations was sluggish, by March of 2021 vaccine distribution was gaining momentum and the number of persons vaccinated was growing more rapidly. The CDC reported the following regarding the week of March 1, 2021,

---

[193] Bearden email exchange with production team, *Re Not Feeling Well*, February 27, 2021.

[194] Author email exchange with production team.

> Vaccination has continued to increase this week with 16.3% of the total population vaccinated with at least one dose (including 21.2% 18 years of age and older) as of March 4, 2021. Beginning on January 11, the 7-day average of newly reported cases declined for 43 consecutive days. There was a brief increase between February 27 and March 1, 2021; and as of March 2, the 7-day average of new cases began to decline again. There has been an overall decline of 74.9% of the 7-day moving average since the highest 7-day average of 249,360 on January 11, 2021. On March 3, there was a 5.7% decrease in the 7-day average number of daily cases reported compared with the prior week, which provides an encouraging sign of continued progress. Even with these declines, the 65,424 cases reported on March 3 remains much higher than what was seen during the first peak in the pandemic on April 6, 2020 of 42,597 cases.[195]

The University of Oklahoma President sent the following email to the OU community,

> Fall Semester Update President Harroz
> March 2, 2021
>
> Dear OU Community,
>
> It's hard to believe that we have passed the one-year threshold since the COVID-19 pandemic turned our world upside down. The collective difficulties we have experienced are undeniable. All of us have made sacrifices, and some of us have endured unimaginable losses. This defining year has revealed the spectrum of humanity, from its best to its most excruciating. COVID-19 will be engrained in our university story and in our collective memory for generations to come.
>
> As challenging as it's been, the OU spirit has inspired our community to remain steadfast and strong. Together, you have remained vigilant and flexible, graciously supporting one another, doing your part to make our campuses as safe as possible, and ensuring that our academic mission continues uninterrupted. You have shown the world why the University of Oklahoma is a place like no other, and I have never been prouder.
>
> Today, I write to provide guidance on our fall 2021 semester planning. **Because of your efforts, along with the promise of multiple vaccines and widespread inoculation against the COVID-19 virus, I'm pleased to share that we are planning for a resumption of in-person classes at regular capacity university-wide for the fall 2021 semester with necessary safety precautions in place.** Classes designed for in-person delivery are expected to be held face-to-face on campus this fall semester.
>
> As with all of our planning, our decisions are being guided by our Chief COVID Officer, Dr. Dale Bratzler, and our priority remains focused on the health and welfare of the OU community. We will continue to closely monitor the situation in the coming months, ensuring that all appropriate health and safety measures are in place.

[195] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html#:~:text=Reported%20Cases&text=There%20was%20a%20brief%20increase,249%2C360%20on%20January%2011%2C%202021.

> Although we remain hopeful, we acknowledge that the pandemic has taught us to be nimble in our response. To help us keep making strides forward, we urge you to continue practicing healthy behaviors, including masking, frequent hand washing, and social distancing; to get vaccinated when you are eligible; and to keep supporting one another through this challenge.
>
> We know that this will be an adjustment for many, and many of our return efforts remain a work in progress. We will communicate additional updates for our summer and fall operations in the coming weeks and months.
>
> From the beginning, our community has demonstrated the values that define the OU spirit: generosity, courage, compassion, and resilience. Our optimism swells with each passing day, and we are ever grateful for your role in helping us grow closer to a rewarding experience on campus later this year.
>
> Live On, University,
>
> Joseph Harroz, Jr.
> President[196]

Although a hopeful sign of a return to normalcy in the fall, several states began implementing a return to normal even sooner. States began lifting their mask mandates during the first weeks of March.[197] Without a majority of the population vaccinated and with various strains of the virus in circulation, it is unknown what effect lifting COVID-19 restriction in the spring of 2021 will have on the trajectory of the virus.

The afternoon of March 1, 2021, I met with the guest artist to review the role. The evening's rehearsal in the theatre was allotted to the lighting designer to program cues and make lighting adjustments. Although it would have been ideal to have used this time to work with the dancer on the role Nourabad, the work in the cue-to-cue rehearsal took precedence.

---

[196] Harroz email to OU Community, *Fall Semester Update,* March 2, 2021.

[197] "COVID Data Tracker Weekly Review," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), accessed March 5, 2021, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html.

The lighting designer was working on a compressed timeline after losing a week due to the snowstorm. He did not have a significant number of cues ready for the cue-to-cue rehearsal which necessitated a portion of the following evening's rehearsal be dedicated to working through cues as well.

Tuesday March 2, 2021, in preparation for the technical rehearsal later that evening in the theatre, Allee-Foreman had set up cameras to facilitate viewing the choreography through a monitor. Allee-Foreman created an overlay of the portals to place on the monitor as an approximation of how much the screen would be obscured by the portals when the footage was projected. She also made plans to record with extra space at the bottom of the footage since the piano would block a portion of the screen as well. Having this information in advance was tremendously helpful because it did necessitate additional alterations to some of the spacing of the choreography; something easily accomplished prior to video recording and would have been quite challenging to remedy after the piece was already recorded.

The Pearl Fishers: Lighting

The lighting designer had the complex task of creating and executing a lighting concept that would work not only for live performances but also for the video-on-demand digital release of the production. The lighting for the dance scenes had to read well on camera and had to align with the lighting design for live, sung portions of the show, as well as work with the transitions between the projected dance scenes, narration, and arias and duets. The student lighting designer assigned the relatively large undertaking was also behind schedule leading up to the week of technical rehearsals due to his involvement with the musical theatre production which was delayed from the snowstorm. I did not see what the lighting designer intended for several scenes until the final dress rehearsal.

The lighting design for the dance scenes was well done and there were many moments in which the lighting was truly exquisite. I particularly enjoyed the appearance of rays of light shining through the trees at the first entrance of the Village Maidens in the first scene after the prelude. I also appreciated the subtle changes in atmosphere throughout the opera. For most scenes, the lighting truly enhanced and supported the choreography.

Knowing the strain under which the lighting designer appeared, and keeping in mind he was an undergraduate student, I picked my battles regarding lighting and tried to only interject when necessary. During the two solos of Leila's dance avatar, the designer attempted to create a moonlit, night effect. For both of these scenes the entire stage was dark and the dancer was in a pool of light. While the dramatic effect of the lighting would have been effective for a live performance, the stark contrast of darkness and light during several close-up shots caused the dancer's eyes to appear sunken and dark. It was especially problematic during the duet in which the two singers were reminiscing about Leila's beauty and radiance. The effect of the lighting design was not as evident through the monitor when we recorded the scene. It came to my attention when I reviewed the footage on my computer after the first day of video recording. We were able to remedy the color saturation by reshooting the scene in its entirety during the final day of recording. The lighting was also a bit dark during Leila's second solo, something we were not able to remedy due to the incongruity of shots between the first and second day of recording.

The Act II finale (the storm scene) was challenging. I choreographed the scene with significant attention to how lighting could play a role. Throughout the week of technical rehearsals, the designer made note that he was still layering cues for this scene. I had imagined this scene would spark imagination and creativity since there was ample opportunity for dramatic effect. Effective lighting for dance often goes unnoticed and yet this was an instance I intended

for the lighting to be a focus of the scene. Yet as we approached the final dress there was no movement, no rain, and only minimal flashing lights. We spent our final moments of the final dress rehearsal trying to get the flashing lights to the right effect. The intensity of the storm did not come across in the way I had hoped. To his credit, however, for the video recording, the designer made significant adjustments to his design to help capture my vision.

The Pearl Fishers: Costumes

The costumes for *The Pearl Fishers* were stunning. Professor Cracknell and the costume shop outdid themselves. The Village Maidens' skirts added some beautiful movement to the choreography and were richly colored in earthy tones. To prevent any replication of the challenge that occurred with *The Golden Cockerel* costumes in which the dancers did not adequately test to be certain they had full range of motion of their arms, I encouraged the dancers to try as much of the choreography as they could during their fittings. By the time we reached our first dress rehearsal, the skirts for the Village Maiden dancers were at an excellent length to allow them to fully execute the choreography without entanglement. We received Nourabad's cape early during the week of technical rehearsals, and it provided an opportunity to include choreographic embellishments which added a bit more drama to the role. Leila's dance avatar and her Attendants were dressed in beautiful red chiffon dresses, and the Spirits were costumed in unitards painted to reflect their respective element with elaborate headpieces and fabric draped from their wrists to their back. I was especially pleased with the beautiful draping that was added to the costume of Leila's dance avatar that had an exquisite shape in motion.

There were only a few challenges the arose during dress rehearsals. I had envisioned Leila's veil as something that would cover her face, akin to a wedding veil. In actuality the veil swept across the nose and mouth and fastened to the side. It was a much better design than I

imagined because it meant the dancer did not have to dance with fabric covering her eyes. Choreographically, however, dancer was supposed to lift the veil from her face partway through the dance and then cover her face at the end. The veil was designed in such a way that the portion that swept across her face blended beautifully into the rest of the veil when unfasten. While it looked tremendous when she removed the veil, it was nearly impossible for her to find the tiny snap to refasten it. Through a bit of video editing, however, she was able to properly secure it between takes.

Another challenge, that was remedied through editing the footage, was the Spirits' large elaborate headpieces which on occasion got entangled in the fabric attached from the dancers' wrists to their backs. We were able to reshoot sections when this occurred. Prior to the video recording sessions, some of the headpieces underwent adjustments to decrease the size and weight to ensure they could be fastened to the dancers' heads more securely. The unique quality of each headpiece helped tremendously to differentiate between the elements, and the great visual effect superseded any difficulties the headpieces caused.

One of the most successful aspects of Professor Cracknell's designs was the costumes worked in such a way as to make clear each of the characters were a part of the same fictitious world but were not specific to any extant culture. In my choreographic design, I endeavored for a similar effect and felt it was effective when the two elements came together on stage. The addition of sequins and sparkle to the Elemental Spirits' costumes helped highlight the more mystical and magical elements of the story and distinguished the realm of the Spirits from that of the Village Maidens.

The Pearl Fishers: Video Recording

The production had faced many challenges not only since the outbreak of the pandemic but in the weeks leading up to the video recording sessions. By the first day of recording, March 6, 2021, the dancers had been in rehearsal (though discontinuous) for over a year. The morning of March 6, I repeatedly checked my email waiting for a dancer to inform me they had to quarantine, were sick, or injured. And yet, no such email arrived, and video recording went surprisingly smoothly. The dancers were all present and healthy. Allee-Foreman's shooting schedule allowed for adequate time and multiple takes and we remained on schedule throughout both days. I imagine the recording process, for the dancers, may not have been entirely rewarding, however. There was no applause after each take, nor did they have the energy of the audience from which to feed. They ran scenes several times in a row with little break, and the video recording days lasted longer than a traditional performance day. Yet the recording process occurred without notable incident.

I found trying to view the choreography through the monitor rather than the stage to be a challenge. It was harder to identify small mistakes on the screen. In many ways, however, approaching the work in this manner was more forgiving than live performance; if an element (dancing, lighting, costumes, or props) did not go as planned, we were able to reshoot the scene.

After the first day of video recording, I was relieved to have requested another full day to record. We used every minute allotted on the second day of recording. The dancers worked hard to be consistent between takes and to adjust as needed during the process. Throughout the video recording process I had a sense of relief that the dancers finally, despite being amidst a global pandemic, had the opportunity to dance their roles on stage, in costume, under the lights.

The second phase of the video recording process required looking through hours of footage and selecting the best takes. Allee-Foreman requested I create a guide for her to use as

she worked on editing by indicating which footage was desirable, useable, or should not be used. Since I was still making adjustments to the choreography during recording, it was not until the video recording process had concluded that I was able to dedicate more attention to the cleanliness and accuracy of the movement. In many ways, I was not as effective a ballet master for my work as I might have been for someone else's choreography. While viewing the footage I was struck by the number of things I had not noticed (e.g., dancers executing the choreography incorrectly, discrepancy in arm placement and leg placement).

The process of sifting through the footage took many hours spread over two days and resulted in a nearly 10-page document I gave to Allee-Foreman. It was an unfamiliar feeling to leave the choreography in the hands of someone else. While I offered input, she was the one in charge of the final result.

Allee-Foreman and I met several times throughout the week following the recording sessions. The footage had to be edited and ready to be incorporated into the singers' rehearsals before Sunday, March 14, 2021. During our meetings, Allee-Foreman and I viewed her edited version of each scene and I offered feedback. Given the complexity of the task, there were relatively few occasions during which the audio and video did not align, or the editing required some adjustment. Allee-Foreman was quite accommodating to my requests to edit around dancers' mistakes as well as spacing and timing errors that occurred during video recording.

The most monumental task for Allee-Foreman was editing the Act II finale (the storm scene). We conceived the footage as having multiple shifting angles to give the scene a sense of movement. In order to achieve this effect, we recorded the scene four times from different angles. I identified the strongest footage from each take, and then Allee-Foreman selected footage from my suggestions that aligned well visually when edited together. Although the

process was time consuming, it was well worth the effort. I had chills the first time I viewed the edited version. I was very much impressed with Allee-Foreman's eye for movement throughout the process. On Friday, March 12, 2021, Allee-Foreman completed the video editing of the dance scenes.

The Pearl Fishers: Technical Rehearsals with the Singers

Stage rehearsals for the singers began on March 9, 2021. Professor Ferrara, who continued to work remotely during the spring 2021 semester, suggested I attend the technical and dress rehearsals later that week to help ensure the singers followed the blocking outline he created and to set the bows (which needed to be performed in coordination with pre-recorded projection of the dancers bowing). Modifications to Professor Ferrara's original staging plan had been implemented, prior to my involvement in rehearsals, by Dean Holt, to increase the physical distance between singers. The singers were placed in three locations on stage to help ensure they were in an acoustically appropriate position and at a distance from the pianist and each other to lessen the likelihood of virus transmission since the singers were unmasked.

The first technical rehearsal with the singers occurred on Sunday, March 14, 2021. During the rehearsal, we combined the pianist and singers with pre-recorded narration, projected videos, and recorded orchestral music for the first time. I received my first COVID-19 vaccination the evening prior and experienced some mild side-effects throughout the rehearsal. Combining the projection with the narration, recorded music, and live singing was not a particularly smooth endeavor.

A few challenges arose during the week of technical and dress rehearsals. Some of the projected videos were too dark; at times it was difficult to see the dancers. Despite using the audio recording, provided by Dr. Shames, to choreograph the solos for Leila's dance avatar, the

tempi for the scenes during which projected video and live singing occurred simultaneously did not align with the recorded footage. “Au fond du temple saint duet” and Nadir’s Act I aria were significantly faster than the recorded music. A combination of speeding up the projected video and the singers and pianist adopting a slower tempo helped the duet align. In hindsight, speeding up the dance footage for Nadir’s aria would have helped as well (Allee-Foreman was suffering ill effects from the second COVID-19 vaccination; I decided against asking for the adjustment.). The stage manager, Dr. Shames, and I experimented with starting the projection sooner which seemed to help the projection end at the same time as the singer. Although this remedied the end of the aria, the aural accompaniment was often a few measures ahead or behind the projected choreography (something I knew was a possibility early in the process). The challenge arose possibly from the number of *fermatas* (a musical notation signifying a note or a rest is held for an unspecified duration) in the Act I aria that made aligning Nadir’s aria with the projected dance scene more difficult than the duet.

Challenges with the audio volume, timing of the narration, and transitions between the live portions and pre-recorded portions of the show arose as well. After sorting through the technical aspects of the show (in conjunction with the singers) on Sunday, Monday, and a portion of Tuesday’s rehearsal, it was not until the final dress rehearsals that each cast of singers was able to run through the complete opera uninterrupted. We spent our final moments of the final dress rehearsal working on transitions and audio volume. Despite challenges, and although the dancers were not present with the singers, the collaborative and innovative nature of the production was evident in the number of artistic forms coming together.

The production was planned to be presented in two ways: live, in-person performances during which the singers and pianist were live and the dance was projected, and through video-

on-demand during which the sung portions of the live show were recorded and edited together with pre-recorded dance footage to appear as though the singers and dancers performed during the same evening. The editing together of footage from different evenings in many ways created an entirely new experience in viewing the performance.[198]

[198] See the video-on-demand version of the performance, *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)* Full Production: https://youtu.be/r7Te1QD4Rcc.

Chapter VII: Analysis and Reflection

Analysis of OU's Production of *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)*

The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined): Live Performances

The live performances of *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)* occurred March 18-21, 2021. The performances were lightly attended. Per university COVID-19 protocols, seating was strictly limited. It would have been imprudent to hope for a larger audience during a pandemic.

Occasionally the audience appeared confused as to when to applaud. Some of the projections ended abruptly, and there were times when the audience was applauding as the cue for the next piece had been called, resulting in applause over recorded music, narration, and projection**.** It is possible that if we had more persons in the theatre prior to opening night, we would have gained a better sense of when applause would naturally occur. Due to COVID safety measures, however, only essential personnel were allowed at rehearsals, and it is likely the challenges with timing may have been unavoidable since the moments during which the audience applauded changed from performance to performance. The projection quality, however, had been improved significantly since the first technical rehearsal, and while there were still times in which the projection lacked clarity, it was far easier to see. Some of the dancers attended the live performances and reported a surreal feeling sitting in the audience watching themselves dance on stage via projection.

The first cast of singers, on Thursday evening, appeared to have opening night nerves but performed commendably. Collectively, fatigue or nerves were evident in the Saturday evening performance during which the same singers struggled with pitch and stamina. The singers, however, faced many other challenges during the production as well. The majority of their rehearsals were conducted over the computer application Zoom. The singers were instructed to

act and emote yet stay only on one designated spot on the stage. Additionally, they could only sing out to the audience rather than to each other to limit the risk of exposure to respiratory droplets as they were not wearing masks.

The second cast, especially the principal soprano, gave meritorious performances on Friday evening and Sunday afternoon. The principal soprano's diction was clean, clear, and understandable from a distance with spot-on intonation in her lower register and a natural-sounding coloratura. Her pitch-center was accurate, and her high register seemed to require less effort than the other soprano. Although the Friday evening performance was solid, the Sunday matinee performance was far smoother from a singing, emotive, and technical perspective.

Throughout the run of performances, the pianist did a tremendous job navigating a number of variables during the show. The stage manager, who had the complex task of calling a multitude of cues, did a commendable job as well.

Upon reflection, I wish we would have recorded more close-up shots of the dancers, had a greater diversity of angles, and included more camera movement for some of the dance scenes. Additionally, there were some sections I would have liked to record one more time. I missed some of the dancers' errors during the video recording sessions, yet the errors were readily apparent when viewing the footage. From a projection standpoint, Leila's solos during the Act I duet and Act I aria were more effective because the choreography was conceived specifically for the camera. I also felt the Act II finale (storm scene) translated well to projection due to the beautiful editing by Allee-Forman.

In retrospect, some of the projections could have ended less abruptly and audio levels of the pre-recorded music could have been presented at an even level. When the volume of the recorded tracks was raised (per Dr. Shames and my request) the audio system in the theatre did

not handle some of the recordings without distortion. We opted for occasionally distorted music over music that did not fill the theatre.

Despite challenges, I was tremendously grateful to have a team whose creativity and insight helped bring the production to fruition during a global pandemic; luckily without significant incident or virus outbreak.

The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined): Analysis of the Use of Dance in Act I

Prelude:[199]

The decision to have the Elemental Spirits dance during the prelude of *The Pearl Fishers* came about during the second version of the opera after Professor Ferrara and I eliminated several dance scenes. Professor Ferrara suggested a romantic *pas de deux.* Since music from the prelude returns throughout the opera as Leila's theme music, he wanted something that represented love. Although it would have been an interesting choreographic challenge to devise a romantic *pas de deux* during which the dancers could not touch, I was unsure I would have the needed personnel. In an effort to introduce the Elemental Spirits earlier in the opera, I suggested they dance during the prelude. The music of the prelude was not composed with dance in mind, however, like much of Bizet's music, it lent itself well to movement. Although the prelude was not musically reflective of the different elements, I hoped to make clear which spirit represented which element through choreography, costumes, and lighting (e.g., flames for the fire spirit, crashing waves for the water spirit). The lighting designer, however, was convinced moving lights would not play well on camera. Although I tried to give the Spirits more interaction and

[199]"Prelude" from *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined),* Choreographer Christa St. John, Director of photography Kasey Allee-Foreman, University of Oklahoma, YouTube video, March 2021, https://youtu.be/DlMn6KRazcg

more dynamic choreography, I felt in its final version the scene fell a bit flat perhaps because I was attempting to evoke something from the music that was not there.

Scene One:[200]

The dance of the Village Maidens, after the prelude, was part of the original conception of the opera. The original iteration included far more dancers, a quartet of male/male-identifying dancers, and a significant amount of partnering and physical contact. During the second version of the opera, the fishermen's quartet was cut, the number of dancers reduced, and the physical contact and partnering eliminated. I restored the fishermen's quartet in the third version of the opera because I did not care for the musical transition between sections when it was removed and felt the quartet could be portrayed by female/female identifying dancers. Throughout the opera I used female/female-identifying dancers to embody the tenor and bass parts of the chorus without incongruous effect. I sought to imbue the choreography for the quartet of fishermen with diving and swimming imagery and references to pearl fishing (which despite the name of the opera is not a significant focus of the production). Overall, this scene was more cohesive in its final version and musically one of the more effective scenes in the opera in which Bizet's music is rich in exotic tones and rhythms. Zurga's arrival and election as leader, which followed the first scene, was choreographed twice and eliminated from the final iteration of the opera due to the amount of singer and chorus interaction.

Scene Two:[201]

[200] "No. 1" *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)*, Choreographer Christa St. John, Director of photography Kasey Allee-Foreman, University of Oklahoma, YouTube video, March 2021, https://youtu.be/_7uBTp9pz9Y

[201] "No. 2" *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)*, Choreographer Christa St. John, Director of photography Kasey Allee-Foreman, University of Oklahoma, YouTube video, March 2021, https://youtu.be/uWY7tnjyRHQ (video of dance only), https://youtu.be/r7Te1QD4Rcc?t=452 , (video of dancer with singers).

The duet, "Au fond du temple saint," did not include dance in the first two versions of the production. The solo for the dance avatar of Leila was not conceived or choreographed until the final week of the Fall 2020 (in-person) semester. Although somewhat hastily conceived, it was one of the more congruous projected dance sequences, in part, because it was created specifically for the camera.

Scene Three:[202]

Leila's arrival, the dance of the Attendants, and the ceremony were conceived for the first version of the opera and subsequently reconceived twice. For the final version, I revised the existing choreography to add the dance avatars of Leila and Nourabad into the scene. The dance of the Village Maidens and Leila's Attendants was initially staged on a long diagonal, but it had to be altered due to social distancing and the addition of the dancer in the role of Leila.

I had been using a six-foot-long shower rod during rehearsals to help ensure the choreography maintained six feet of distance between the dancers. I incorporated the rod into this scene. In its final version, a similar length rod (though much more aesthetically pleasing) was affixed with a long white piece of fabric that opened in the center. It was carried by the Attendants to obscure Leila from view as she entered. The rod was also used at the end of the scene to suggest a separate chamber through which the Village Maidens traversed to receive a blessing from Leila. It was through the creation of the end of this scene that I developed a gestural vocabulary to correspond with each of the Elemental Spirits. The four gestures (inspired

[202] "No. 3" *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)*, Choreographer Christa St. John, Director of photography Kasey Allee-Foreman, University of Oklahoma, YouTube video , March 2021, https://youtu.be/LV2dDwIiU-o & https://youtu.be/Gw4mXypqbGw (videos of dance scenes only), https://youtu.be/r7Te1QD4Rcc?t=923, (video of full scene15:23-27:29).

by the elements: water, earth, air, and fire) were akin to the catholic sign of the cross and were repeated throughout the opera.

Bizet inserted music from the last third of this scene almost note for note during the Act II finale.[203] Therefore, I repeated the choreography for the Village Maiden dancers and Leila almost exactly for the Act II finale as well.[204] During the Act II finale, however, I replaced some of the gestures with more violent imagery, the dancers executed the movement at a faster tempo, and Nourabad replaced Leila in the scene.

Scene Four:[205]

Nadir's Act I aria was choreographed as a *pas de deux* in the first version, eliminated in the second version, and reimagined as a solo for Leila's dance avatar (to be projected on stage in conjunction with the live singer) in the third. By the time we conceived of adding a dancer into the role of Leila, we had less than two weeks left of in-person classes. When Professor Ferrara suggested adding the dance avatar Leila into this aria (to which I enthusiastically agreed), we had less than a week left before in-person classes concluded for the semester. Luckily, the dancers were given an evening off from rehearsal to attend a virtual event for the School of Dance. Since the studios were unoccupied for an evening (a rare occurrence), it allowed time for me to choreograph the solo and set the choreography on the dancer. I met with the dancer for one hour and taught her the entire solo just before the event began. The music is so hauntingly beautiful, I

[203] See Georges Bizet, *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, vocal score, Peters Edition: 2015, Reh. 87 pg. 72 and Reh. 104 pg. 183.

[204] See min. 0:00-1:21 https://youtu.be/Gw4mXypqbGw and see min. 4:41-6:00 https://youtu.be/CCSAH1-vIsQ?t=281 for comparison.

[205] "No. 4" *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)*, Choreographer Christa St. John, Director of photography Kasey Allee-Foreman, University of Oklahoma, YouTube video, March 2021, https://youtu.be/rBGY7up1kTs (dance only), https://youtu.be/r7Te1QD4Rcc?t=1650 (dancer and singers together).

felt it was an ideal way to feature the dancer in the role of Leila's dance avatar and enjoyed the challenge of quickly conceiving and staging the choreography.

Scene Five:[206]

The scene in which Nourabad leads Leila to the cliff to watch over the fishermen was in the initial version of the opera. The scene was rechoreographed for the second version to eliminate physical contact and to delineate which element each Spirit portrayed (a concept conceived for the second version). It was restaged to add Nourabad, Leila's dance avatar, and the Attendants into the existing choreography in the third version. This scene was short and not particularly noteworthy. It included tricky choreography for the Spirits but was not particularly dynamic in musicality and use of space. The scene became a bit cluttered in its final version because of the numerous characters onstage and number of scenic elements.

I had a challenging time understanding what Bizet was trying to achieve musically during the Act I finale. I choreographed the finale for the first version of the opera and reconceived it for the second but was not satisfied with my choices. When we eliminated the dancers from this scene in the third version, I was relieved. Despite my reservations about the finale, I repurposed a large section of the choreography and used it for the Village Maiden's dance in the opening of Act II. Surprisingly, the choreography was better supported by the music in the opening of Act II than by the music for which it was conceived.

The role of dance in Act I was significant. The prelude served as *divertissement*, several scenes propelled the narrative, and Leila's two solos helped support the singers. Dance opened the opera and was involved in each of the five scenes.

---

[206] "No. 5" *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)*, Choreographer Christa St. John, Director of photography Kasey Allee-Foreman, University of Oklahoma, YouTube video, March 2021, https://youtu.be/yTvtpOrEnmE

The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined): Analysis of the Use of Dance in Act II & Act III

Scene Six:[207]

The opening of Act II began with a short duet of Leila's two Attendants. It was choreographed for the third version of the opera once I knew we would be using recorded music. Bizet begins Act II with *entr'acte* music that is so interesting that I found myself reluctant to edit it out of the recording. I also sought to give the Attendants (whose stage time was cut significantly since we eliminated dance from Act I finale) more dancing. The two dancers in the role of the Attendants had lovely chemistry and their duet turned out to be charming. The Village Maiden dance that followed consisted of rearranged choreography from the Act I finale.

Scenes seven through nine were comprised of arias and duets and focused on the relationship of Leila and Nadir. Since the focus of the narrative was on the growing relationship of the two of the principal characters (which occurred in secret), the scenes did not include dance.

Scene 10:[208]

The Act II finale (the storm scene) was choreographed as part of the original version of the opera, but I did not have a chance to teach the original version to the dancers due to the initial COVID-19 lockdown. For the second version, I reconceived the scene to eliminate physical contact and reduced the amount of interaction between singers and dancers (the dancers were only minimally involved in the scene). In the third version, Professor Ferrara and I removed the singers from the scene. I added a dancer in the role of Nourabad, inserted him into preexisting

[207] "No. 6" *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)*, Choreographer Christa St. John, Director of photography Kasey Allee-Foreman, University of Oklahoma, YouTube video, March 2021, https://youtu.be/5T4YRQCylTU

[208] "No. 10" *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)*, Choreographer Christa St. John, Director of photography Kasey Allee-Foreman, University of Oklahoma, YouTube video, March 2021, https://youtu.be/CCSAH1-vIsQ

choreography at the beginning of the scene and end of the scene, and then added a middle section with the Village Maidens and Nourabad to tie the two sections of existing choreography together. I took some liberties with splicing together the audio recording to eliminate sections in which Leila and Nadir sang alone. Overall, even without the singers to help drive the narrative, I felt this finale was effective, and in many ways, more effective musically and choreographically than the end of the opera.

Scenes 11-12 did not include dance.

Scene 13:[209]

The dance of the Village Maidens in Act III (I referred to as "the drunken dance") was originally choreographed for the first version of the opera in a circular shape around Nadir who was to be tied to a pyre center stage. It was reconceived for the second version of the opera when we decided it would be safer for Nadir to enter after the dance concluded and only altered slightly for the third version of the opera. A few ideas that may have made this dance more effective on camera would have been to video record the dance at strange angles (e.g., with the camera tilted or filmed from high above the dancers' heads), include more fast cuts from one angle to another, and to use more camera movement to portray even more of a sense of inebriation.

I choreographed this dance in retort to a critique of the original choreography of *The Pearl Fishers* in which the critic essentially asked, how can graceful ballerinas convincingly act as an angry violent mob?[210] It was also choreographed in slight rebellion to Bizet and the

[209] "No. 13" *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)*, Choreographer Christa St. John, Director of photography Kasey Allee-Foreman, University of Oklahoma, YouTube video, March 2021, https://youtu.be/ySh5uwY4OMI

[210] As cited in Lacombe, 188.

librettists' lack of humor throughout entire opera as well as in response to Bizet's musical choices which were more reminiscent of a European pub than the exotic location in which the opera was supposed to be set.

Scene 14 did not include dance.

Scene 15:[211]

The finale of Act III was originally choreographed to have the Village Maidens and Spirits onstage with the singers. The Village Maidens were to flee mid-scene after Zurga torched their village. In the second version, I reimagined the scene for social distancing and added the Spirits at the end to menace Zurga. Dr. Shames, Professor Ferrara, and I had many conversations about how to end this opera throughout our various versions. For the final version, I added the entire cast of dancers on stage (with the exception of the Leila's dance avatar, since Leila was represented by the singer). To create a surreal feeling at the end of the opera, I gave the Spirits especially brisk choreography to execute while the Village Maidens entered in slow motion. I intended for it to appear as though Zurga was having an out of body experience after he lost the love of his life and his best friend and burned down the village of which he was the leader. It was my intent to provide a visual conclusion to the opera even if there was not a strong musical conclusion.

The combination of pre-recorded dance and live singing in this production helped break up the visual and aural monotony that may have occurred if there were only pre-recorded dance scenes or only aria and duets. While this reimagined version of *The Pearl Fishers* may not have made the already complex narrative any clearer, it was a unique way to approach producing an

[211] "No. 15" *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)*, Choreographer Christa St. John, Director of photography Kasey Allee-Foreman, University of Oklahoma, YouTube video , March 2021, https://youtu.be/_7N-PRRIOJc & https://youtu.be/sZZ0bgK30mc

opera during a pandemic. Even in fully staged versions of *The Pearl Fishers* the libretto is challenging to comprehend due to the librettists relying on a number of events which occur prior to the start of the opera or off stage, and the convoluted nature of the plot in which a number of implausible events occur. Due to the numerous artistic components of the production and different modalities through which the performance was delivered, and although there was only interaction with singers and dancers through the screen, in many ways this was a more collaborative process than some of the other operas on which I have worked.

Comparative Analysis of *The Golden Cockerel* and *The Pearl Fishers*

The creative process of choreographing both University Theatre opera productions, *The Golden Cockerel* and *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)* was vastly different. Aside from creating *The Pearl Fishers* during a pandemic and *The Golden Cockerel* under more ideal circumstances, the two operas were significantly dissimilar to work on due to the compositional style of the composers, narratives, and the role of dance in each production.

At the time Rimsky-Korsakov composed *The Golden Cockerel,* the was at the end of a substantial career and in old age, nearing the end of his life. *The Golden Cockerel* was Rimsky-Korsakov's final opera whereas *The Pearl Fishers* was Bizet's first full-length opera production. Bizet's relative inexperience is apparent at times in the number of conflicting musical ideas, lack of motivic development, and unevenness of overall quality. Rimsky-Korsakov's music is imbued with rich orchestration, exoticism, and satirical humor, and Bizet's work, despite truly brilliant moments, lacks consistency of exotic orchestration that made it challenging to keep the same stylistic qualities throughout the choreography. Rimsky-Korsakov was an expert regarding orchestration; he wrote a widely used book on the topic that is still in print today. Bizet, while

talented, appeared to compose based more on instinct. That could have led to the inconsistent quality of his opera.

Whereas Rimsky-Korsakov, at the time he composed *The Golden Cockerel,* was already well established and well-funded, Bizet had much to prove. *The Pearl Fishers* feels a bit like a presentation of interesting (and at times gorgeous) musical ideas rather than a cohesive opera.

The narrative of *The Golden Cockerel* was far more comprehensible and engaging than the narrative of *The Pearl Fishers* which was somewhat impenetrable. I thoroughly enjoy choreographing narrative work and was inspired by the satirical nature of the plot of *The Golden Cockerel*. In contrast, much of Bizet's brilliance as a composer appeared despite the limitations of the libretto. From a choreographic perspective, however, I enjoyed the violence and theatricality of *The Pearl Fishers*. Aside from the finale of Act I and the finale of Act III, Bizet's musical ideas inspired a choreographic lexicon unique to my choreographic voice. I think I was too fond of Fokine's treatment of Rimsky-Korsakov's music in *Schéhérazade* to create a choreographic vocabulary for *The Golden Cockerel* distinct from Fokine's aesthetic influence.

The role of dance in both productions was decidedly different aside from the fact that one was a fully stage grand opera with a live orchestra and large chorus. In *The Golden Cockerel* production at OU, dance was not meant to be a primary focus of the opera. The dancers were minimally involved in Act I, heavily involved in Act II to lend some mystery and exoticism to the land of Queen Shamaka, and not used in Act III. When Professor Ferrara and I conceived of *The Pearl Fishers* production at OU, we did so with the aim to expand the role of dance (likely far beyond what Bizet intended). In our final version of the opera, Act I of *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)* involved dance in every scene. Dance scenes open and closed Act II and we ended the opera with a full cast of dancers in Act III.

Due to the amount of dance within *The Pearl Fishers* production, I found myself more heavily involved in artistic decisions regarding the scenic, lighting, and costume design as well as decisions regarding the aesthetic outcome of the video recording and editing and the content and flow of the production.

Whether or not *The Pearl Fishers* was a successful production overall depends how one defines success. Bringing an operatic production to fruition in the COVID-19 era makes an apt argument for success. The production team's ingenuity and willingness to proceed with the production despite numerous challenges helped make it the best version possible under the circumstances. I am tremendously proud of what everyone accomplished.

When viewed removed from the circumstances under which it was created, however, I do not believe this production was entirely successful. Much of the impact of the choreography was lost on screen. Several persons who were able to see the dancers in the theatre live, and then subsequently via video projection, corroborated this sentiment. One audience member was so distraught that the dancers were not live that he complained publicly on Facebook. Furthermore, an audio recording of an orchestra is not a substitute for the power of a live orchestra. Watching a singer sing an aria standing in one place with minimal movement is not as aesthetically pleasing as a fully staged opera during which a singer moves freely about the stage as needed by the narrative. The final version of *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)* was a creative way to produce an opera during a pandemic, but I would not replicate this production without alteration in a post COVID-19 era.

The first version of *The Pearl Fishers* would have been the most cogent artistic product of the multiple iterations of the opera due to the inventiveness of the initial staging concept and the use of live dancers and musicians. Even the proposed second version of the opera, with

reduced orchestra and limited dancer and singer interaction, likely would have been more effective. Although the first version of the opera may have been the most artistically sound, the movement lexicon I established for the second and third versions of the opera was more dynamic than the initial choreography. The complexity of creating three different versions of the same opera and choreographing socially distanced work without the use of physical contact and with multiple restrictions challenged my creative process and helped inspire choreographic growth. That stated, given the same times frame and fewer restrictions even more dynamism in the choreography may have been possible. While *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)* may not have been the most successful production in some ways, the benefits the members of the cast and crew likely gained through persevering during a difficult time far outweigh the shortcomings of the final artistic product.

Reflection

Choreographing opera offers an array of opportunities and challenges. Yet, for the right choreographer, the complexities of choreographing opera are artistically stimulating. While relatively few choreographers are primarily well-known for their work in opera, it can be a rewarding pursuit. Opera is an exemplar of the collaborative spirit combining music, dance, singing, acting, and visual art in one artistic product. It takes a significant amount of coordination to ensure each element works cohesively for the greater good of the production. The role of the choreographer can vary in influence, contribution, and recognition for their efforts. Yet, if the choreographer understands their role in the larger picture, dance can be an incredibly effective element of an opera.

As a result of my experiences choregraphing opera, I devised several points to consider when choreographing an opera production. I have also provided some additional considerations for choreographing opera during a pandemic.

20 Points to Consider when Choreographing Opera

1. In lieu of access to a pianist, a good orchestral recording is key to an easier transition from studio to stage. Enlist a rehearsal pianist early in the process, if possible.

2. Be flexible; sometimes what works in the dance studio does not work as part of the production as a whole.

3. Enlist dancers who are musical. The more intuitive or musically trained, the better their ability to adapt to musical difference between the recording, the piano reduction, and the orchestra.

4. Enlist dancers who retain choreography and staging quickly. The latter is imperative if the dancers interact with the singers outside of dance sequences.

5. Make time, when possible, for the editing process.

6. Accurately assess the singer's ability to coordinate music with movement. For some, this is especially challenging. When in doubt, simplify or use the singer's natural movement tendencies as a foundation.

7. Enlist dancers who can act. Technical prowess is of little benefit if the dancer cannot aid the narrative.

8. It is beneficial to be able to read music.

9. If the choreographer is unable to read music, enlist someone to help.

10. Watch out for discrepancies in the score and recording. Make note of cuts if and when they occur.

11. Communicate with the stage director regularly.

12. Do not be afraid to ask for feedback from artistic collaborators or seek input from a trusted colleague early in the process. Be mindful, however, having too many contrasting opinions may not be helpful to the creative process. Asking for feedback without adequate time to implement change will be counterproductive.

13. NEVER upstage or distract from the singer unless dance is the focal point.

14. Make sure to communicate the choreographic demands to the costume designers early in the process.

15. Be familiar with the opera as a whole, not just the sections in which there is dance.

16. Be aware of the role dance is supposed to play in the opera.

17. Choreography should never interfere with the singers' breathing.

18. The ego must be checked at the door. Choreography is there to add another element to the production. Regardless of choreographic merit, the choreography does not operate independently of the production and thus should be changed or removed as needed.

19. Be able to take direction.

20. There will never be enough time.

Additional Points to Consider: Choreographing Opera During a Pandemic

1. Be flexible and keep an open mind.

2. Have a backup plan for your backup plan.

3. Be creative with different modalities (video, audio, etc.).

4. Communicate with artistic collaborators even more frequently than may be typical, especially if aspects of the opera are being created independently in an effort to minimize contact.

5. Embrace change.

6. Follow safety protocols no matter what (masks, quarantine periods, social distancing, sanitizing, etc.) The virus is not suddenly less infectious because a person is on stage.
7. Minimize in-person interactions both in duration and frequency - on-stage and off.
8. Keep safety at the forefront even if it conflicts with aesthetic preference or hinders the aesthetic outcome.

Areas for Further Study

This account is from the perspective of one choreographer. Additional research into the creative process of choreographing opera is needed for broader insight. Currently, the study of dance in opera does not appear to be a frequent focus of research. Although both dance and opera can stand alone as artistic forms, much can be learned about the two artforms when studied together. Furthermore, since the events which unfolded in this document were recorded in real-time, some of the sources and information about COVID-19 may now prove to be inaccurate. Viewing this document after some time has passed, may reveal how much the public did not know about COVID-19 and the trajectory of the pandemic during the initial outbreak and throughout the fourteen months following the first known human to human transmission.

A Note About the Future of Dance in Opera

At the time this document was completed, Spring 2021, the COVID-19 global pandemic had devastated the performing arts industry. Although, as of March 2021, vaccines were being distributed and more persons were getting vaccinated daily, an alarming upwards spike in cases occurred in some states. Furthermore, we did not yet know the long-term efficacy of COVID-19 vaccinations. In one year from the completion of this document, March 2022, life may have returned to a semblance of normalcy, meaning activities pre-pandemic. I hope opera and dance companies that have weathered the economic downturn will be back to their pre-pandemic state

or return even stronger. It is also possible by March 2022 we will still be wearing masks and social distancing and indoor theatres will remain empty or only partially occupied.

Currently (March 2021), throughout the United States there are packed airplanes and beaches and bars full of persons celebrating spring break hoping for a respite from what has been a difficult year. Yet many theatres remain closed and those that have reopened are operating at limited capacity. The University of Oklahoma was one of a handful of university opera programs able to produce an opera of this scale since the outbreak of COVID-19. OU's production of *The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined)* was likely one of the only university opera productions to include a significant amount of dance since the pandemic began.

As of March 2021, numerous variants of the COVID-19 virus are in circulation, and the majority of the population has not received a vaccine. People continue to die of COVID-19 every day, and the long-term mental and physical consequences of those who have been infected is not widely understood. I hold no doubt that opera, and thus dance in opera, will continue – albeit in a slightly altered format for the time being until we can return to pre-pandemic practices. While not all change is progress, and changes to the fields of dance and opera have been radical, I imagine great art and innovation will emerge from this era.

Bibliography

Abraham, Gerald. "Satire and Symbolism in 'The Golden Cockerel.'" *Music and Letters*, LII no. 1, January 1971, pages 46–54, https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/10.1093/ml/lii.1.46.

Albright, D. "Golden Calves: The Role of Dance in Opera." *The Opera Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2006): 22–37. https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/kbi104.

Albright, Daniel. *Music Speaks: on the Language of Opera, Dance and Song*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009.

Anderson, Jack. "Opera Into Dance? Not as Simple as It Sounds," March 3, 2002. https://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/03/arts/dance-opera-into-dance-not-as-simple-as-it-sounds.html.

Blom, Lynne Anne, and L. Tarin. Chaplin. *The Intimate Act of Choreography*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994.

Connery, Majel, and James Steichen. "A Note from the Guest Editors: Between Opera and Dance." *Opera Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 151–54. doi:10.1093/oq/kbv010.

Croce, Arlene. "Balanchine Said." The New Yorker, January 19, 2009. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/01/26/balanchine-said.

Curtiss, Mina Kirstein. *Bizet and His World*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977.

Dean, Winton. *Georges Bizet, His Life, and Work.* London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1965.

"Earlier Coronavirus Lockdown 'Could Have Saved 36,000 Lives'," May 22, 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52757150.

Ferrara, William. "The Golden Cockerel." Unpublished libretto. March 2019, pdf.

Fokine, Michel. *Fokine: Memoirs of a Ballet Master*. Edited by Anatole Chujoy. Translated by Vitale Fokine. Boston: Little, Brown, 1961.

Fosse, Bob. "Turner Classic Movies: Cabaret." Watch TCM. Accessed September 23, 2020. https://www.tcm.com/watchtcm/titles/21780.

Gelb, Peter. "2020–21 Season Update." Metropolitan Opera | 2020–21 Season Update, March 2020. https://www.metopera.org/user-information/2020-21-season-update/.

Gillespie, Claire. "A New Coronavirus Strain Has Been Discovered in the UK-How Worried Should You Be?" Health.com, December 15, 2020. https://www.health.com/condition/infectious-diseases/coronavirus/new-coronavirus-variant.

Golden Cockerel, The. Music by Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, Libretto by Vladimir Ivanovich

Grady, Denise, Abby Goodnough, and Noah Weiland. “F.D.A. OKs the Moderna Covid Vaccine, Adding Millions More Doses to the U.S. Supply.” The New York Times. The New York Times, December 19, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/18/health/covid-vaccine-fda-moderna.html.

Guest, Ivor. “Foreword.” Foreword. In *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, edited by Marion Kant, xi-xiii. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Hamm, Charles. *Opera*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1966.

Hamner L, Dubbel P, Capron I, et al. High SARS-CoV-2 Attack Rate Following Exposure at a Choir Practice — Skagit County, Washington, March 2020. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020;69:606–610. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6919e6.

Harris, Richard. “1st Known U.S. Case Of U.K. Coronavirus Variant Found In Colorado.” NPR. NPR, December 30, 2020. https://www.npr.org/2020/12/30/951363590/1st-known-u-s-case-of-u-k-coronavirus-variant-found-in-colorado.

Harris-Warrick, Rebecca. *Dance and Drama in French Baroque Opera: A History*. Series Editor Arthur Groos. Cambridge Studies in Opera. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

“ID Data Tracker.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed December 21, 2020. https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/.

Implications of the Emerging SARS-CoV-2 Variant VUI 202012/01.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed December 22, 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/scientific-brief-emerging-variant.html.

Kozinn, Allan. "Nixon in China." Grove Music Online. 2002; Accessed 31 Dec. 2020. https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000903478.

Kramer, Jonathan D. "Postmodern Concepts of Musical Time." *Indiana Theory Review* 17, no. 2 (1996): 21-61. Accessed December 31, 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24044674.

Lacombe Hervé. *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Edward Schneider. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001.

Lee, Alicia. “Broadway Will Remain Dark for the Rest of the Year.” CNN. Cable News Network, June 29, 2020. https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/29/entertainment/broadway-shows-canceled-2020-coronavirus-trnd/index.html.

Levin, David. “Choreographing Opera: How Ballet ReThinks Operatic Performance.” Essay presented at the international conference How Performance Thinks. Kingston University, London, April 13-14, 2012. http://elenacologni.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/conference-performance-thinks-proceedings.pdf#page=137 137-142.

Macaulay, Alastair. "An Eye-Popping Fairy Tale Still Honors its Origins." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 08, 2016. https://search-proquestcom.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/docview/2310039994?accountid=12964.

Macdonald, Hugh. *Bizet*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Minin, Oleg. “Synthesizing Beauty: Rimsky-Korsakov's Music in the Context of Diaghilev's ‘Russian Seasons’ in Paris,” August 6, 2018. https://blogs.bard.edu/bmf/2018/08/03/synthesizing-beauty-rimsky-korsakovs-music-in-the-context-of-diaghilevs-russian-seasons-in-paris/.

Muccari, Robin, Denise Chow, and Joe Murphy. “Coronavirus Timeline: Tracking the Critical Moments of Covid-19.” NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, December 2, 2020. https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/coronavirus-timeline-tracking-critical-moments-covid-19-n1154341.

Mueller, Benjamin. “U.K. Approves Pfizer Coronavirus Vaccine, a First in the West.” The New York Times. The New York Times, December 2, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/02/world/europe/pfizer-coronavirus-vaccine-approved-uk.html.

Naunheim, Matthew R., Jonathan Bock, Philip A. Doucette, Matthew Hoch, Ian Howell, Michael M. Johns, Aaron M. Johnson, et al. “Safer Singing During the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic: What We Know and What We Don't.” *Journal of Voice*, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvoice.2020.06.028.

Office of the Commissioner. “Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine.” U.S. Food and Drug Administration. FDA. Accessed December 21, 2020. https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/pfizer-biontech-covid-19-vaccine.

Parker, Rodger. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Rimsky-Korsakov, Nikolay and Vladimir Ivanovich Bel′skiĭ. “The Golden Cockerel.” Translated by William Ferrara, Choreography Christa St. John. Reynolds Performing Arts Center, Norman OK, September 2019. Live Performance Recorded Sept. 21, 2019. https://youtu.be/0NCkqpV-olk

Rimsky-Korsakov, Nikolay, and Bel′skiĭ, Vladimir Ivanovich, *The Golden Cockerel: An Opera in Three Acts*, Vocal Score with Russian and English Text. Melville, N.Y: C. F. Peters, 1983.

Rimsky-Korsakov: The Golden Cockerel - Bolshoi Theatre/Svetlanov. *YouTube*. Russia: Bolshoi Theatre, 1989. https://youtu.be/AJnAkpqVDcc.

Samson, Jim. "Romanticism." Grove Music Online. 2001; Accessed 24 Mar. 2021. https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000023751.

Smith, Marian Elizabeth. *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Smith-Autard, Jacqueline M. *Dance Composition: A Practical Guide to Creative Success in Dance Making*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Southwick, Heather, Selina Shah, and Kathleen Bower. “Return to Dancing and Training Considerations Due to-COVID-19.” Dance/USA Task Force on Dancer Health, 2020. https://dance-usa.s3.amazonaws.com/page_uploads/COVID%20-%20RETURN%20TO%20DANCE%20-%20MAY%202020%20-%20PDF.pdf.

“Stream The Nutcracker Reworked.” Royal Opera House. Accessed December 22, 2020. https://www.roh.org.uk/tickets-and-events/stream-the-nutcracker-reworked-details.

Taruskin, Richard. "Golden Cockerel, The."*Grove Music Online*. 2002; Accessed 10 Nov. 2019. https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000007911.

Tharp, Twyla and Mark Reiter, *The Creative Habit Learn It and Use It for Life: A Practical Guide*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006.

“The Deadliest Flu: The Complete Story of the Discovery and Reconstruction of the 1918 Pandemic Virus.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, December 17, 2019. https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/reconstruction-1918-virus.html.

“Third Round of Performing Arts Aerosol Study Produces More Scientific Data for Return to Activities.” NFHS. Accessed January 4, 2021. https://www.nfhs.org/articles/third-round-of-performing-arts-aerosol-study-produces-more-scientific-data-for-return-to-activities/.

“This Is Where All 50 States Stand on Reopening.” CNN. Cable News Network, April 26, 2020. https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/us/states-reopen-coronavirus-trnd/.

"Timeline: WHO's COVID-19 Response." World Health Organization. World Health Organization. Accessed January 4, 2021. https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/interactive-timeline.

Tomes, Nancy. "'Destroyer and Teacher': Managing the Masses during the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic." Public health reports (Washington, D.C. : 1974). Association of Schools of Public Health, April 2010. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2862334/.

"U.S. State and Local Government Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, November 14, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._state_and_local_government_responses_to_the_COVID-19_pandemic.

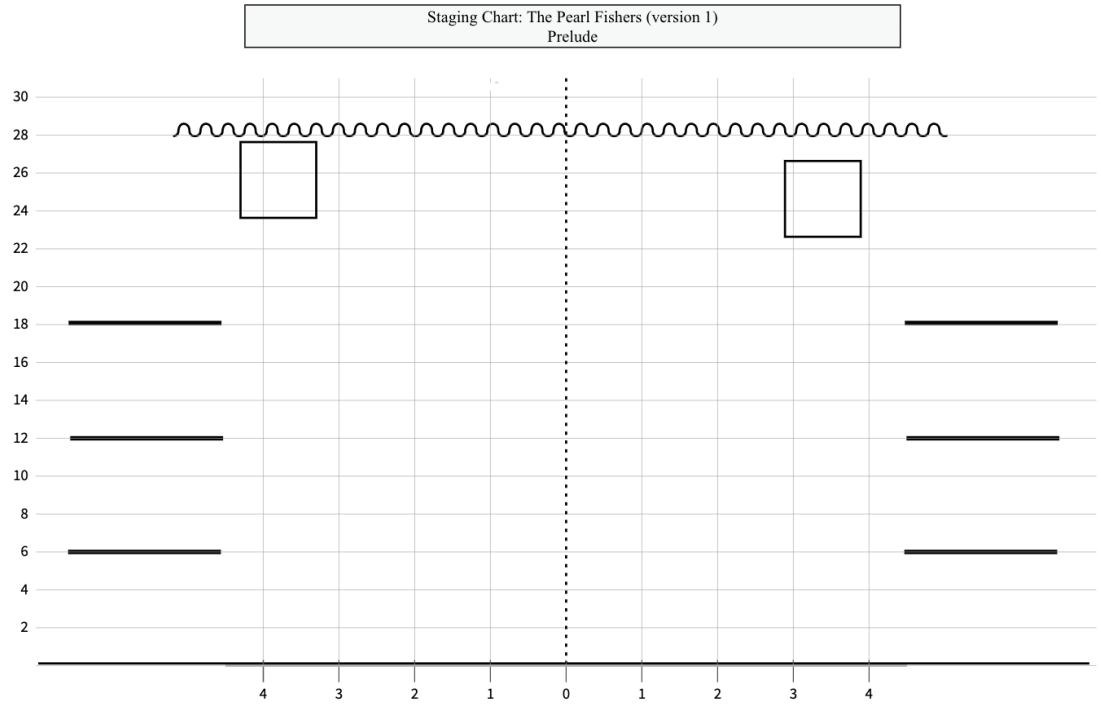
"Update on New SARS-CoV-2 Variant and How COG-UK Tracks Emerging Mutations - COG-UK Consortium." Covid-19 Genomics UK (COG-UK) Consortium. Published December 14, 2020. Accessed December 21, 2020. https://www.cogconsortium.uk/news_item/update-on-new-sars-cov-2-variant-and-how-cog-uk-tracks-emerging-mutations/.

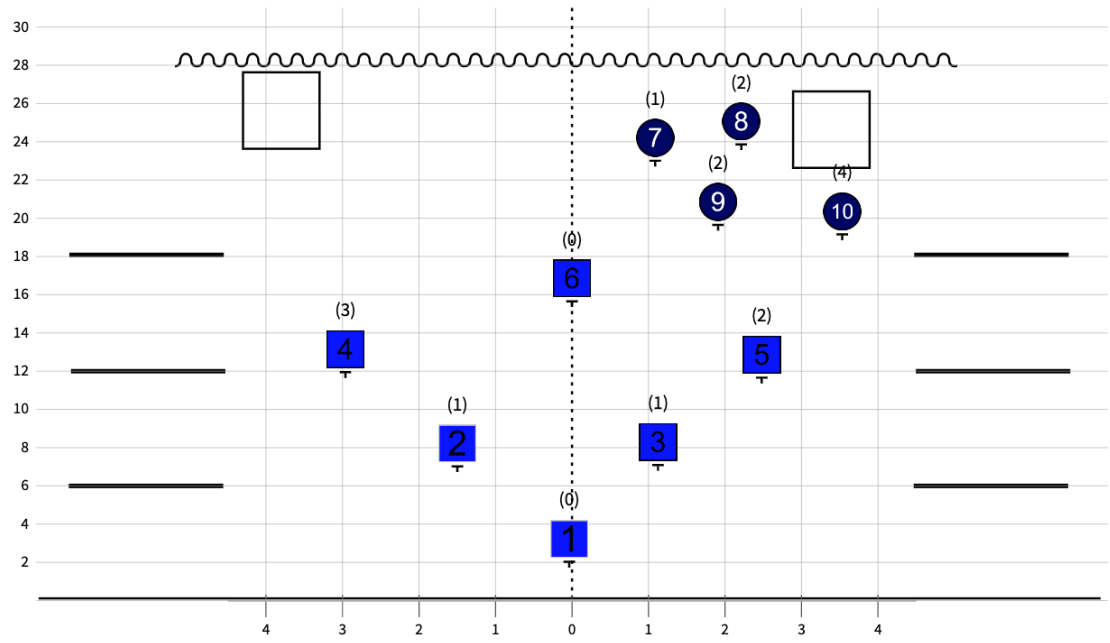
"Weekly Epidemiological Update - 15 December 2020." World Health Organization. World Health Organization. Accessed December 21, 2020. https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/weekly-epidemiological-update---15-december-2020.

World Health Organization. "Timeline: WHO's COVID-19 Response." World Health Organization website. Accessed November 4, 2020. https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/interactive-timeline?gclid=CjwKCAiAnIT9BRAmEiwANaoE1ZP50SyJtomVPVGQatj6ekxUXERdjHd3HFREKXp7KEd8hMc8K7FKqRoCc-wQAvD_BwE.

Appendix

Appendix A: Staging Diagrams: *The Pearl Fishers* Version 1

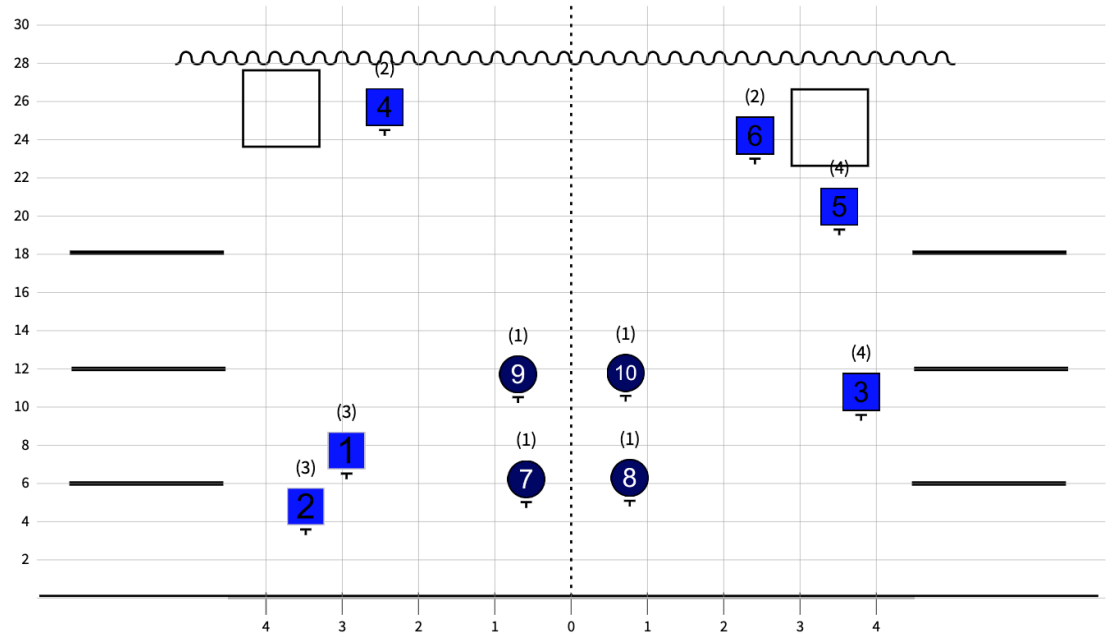




Start of Chorus Dance

Act I Scene I

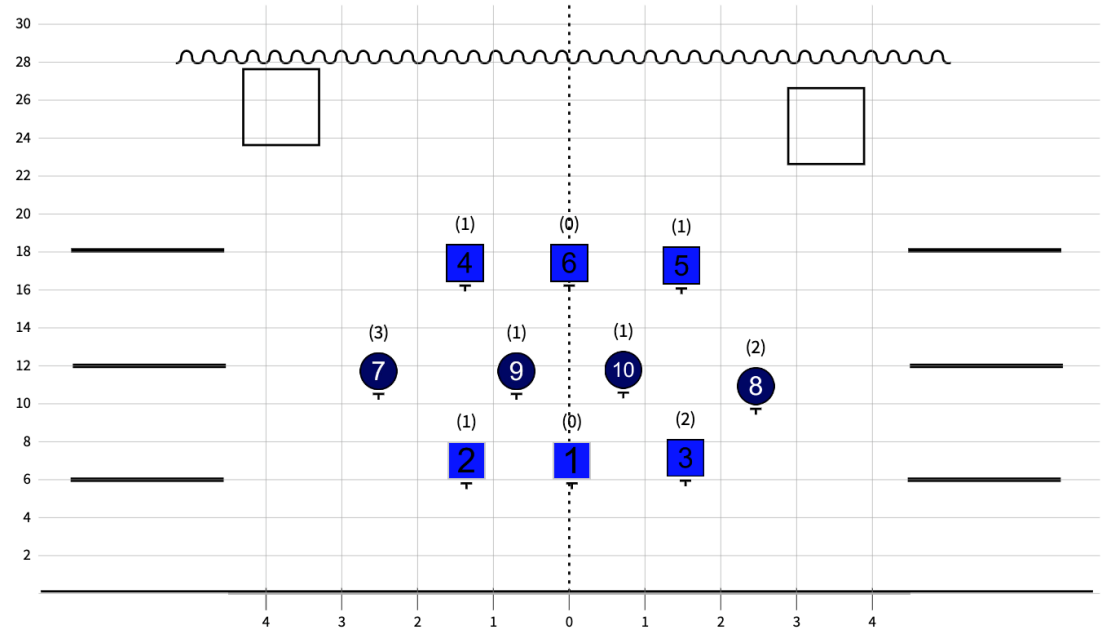
Chart: 2.1



Act I Scene I

Fishermen's Dance

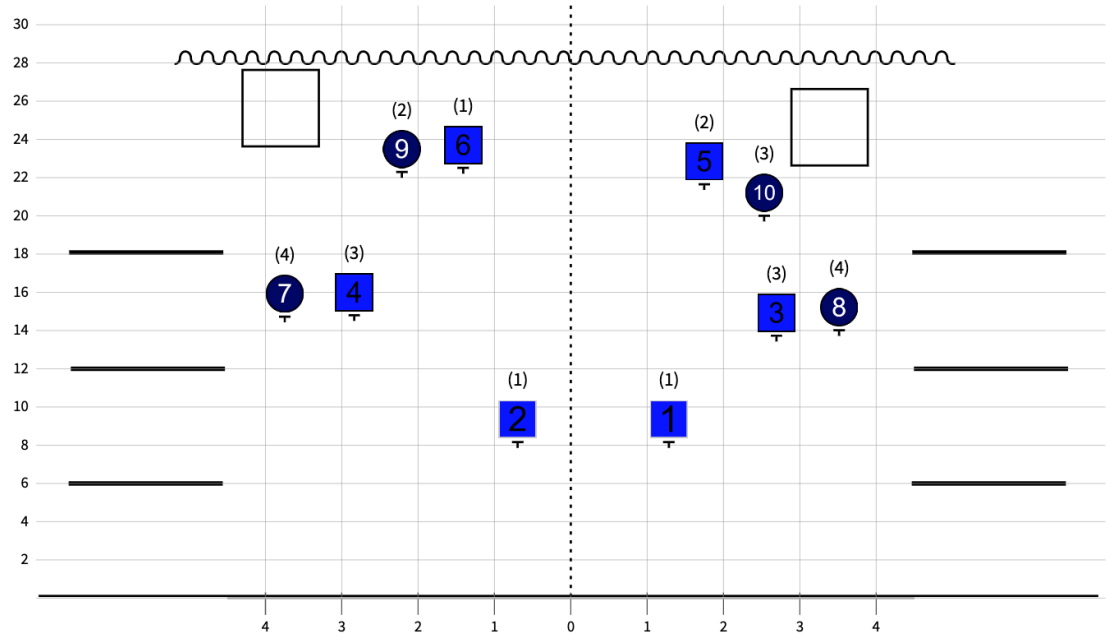
Chart: 2.2



Act I Scene I

Chorus Dance

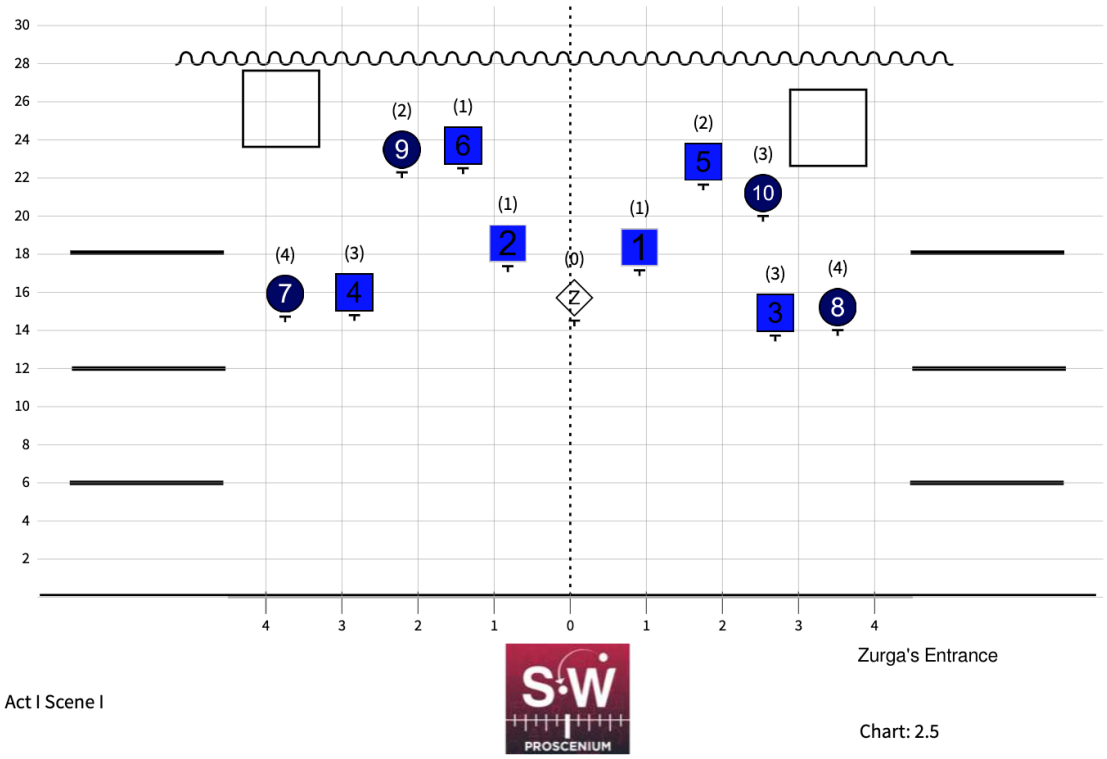
Chart: 2.3



Leila's Attendants dance

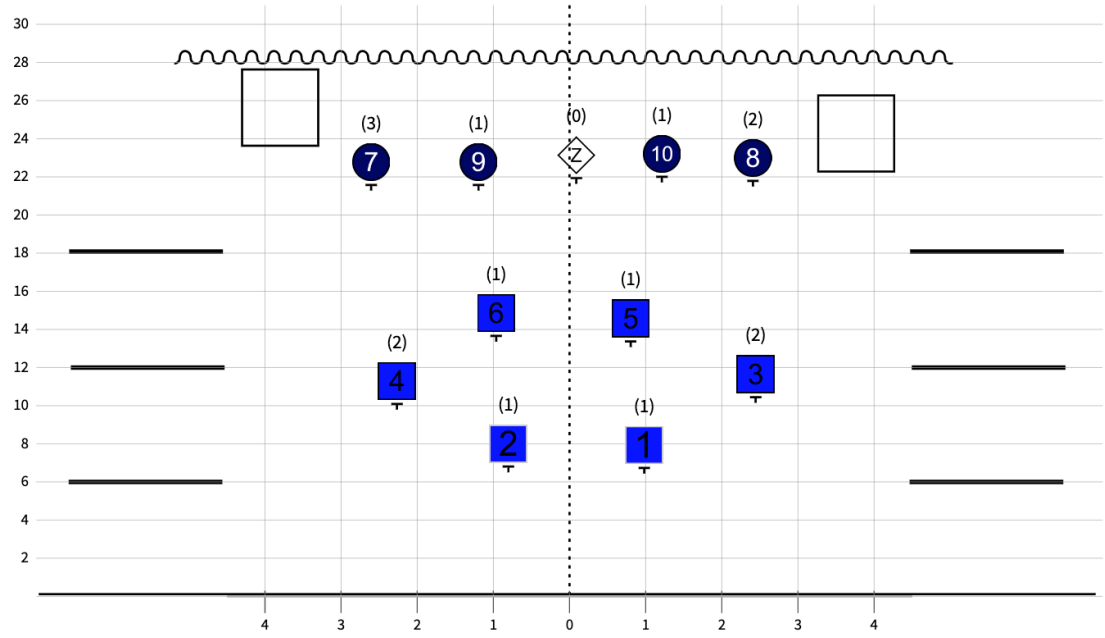
Act I Scene I

Chart: 2.4



Act I Scene I

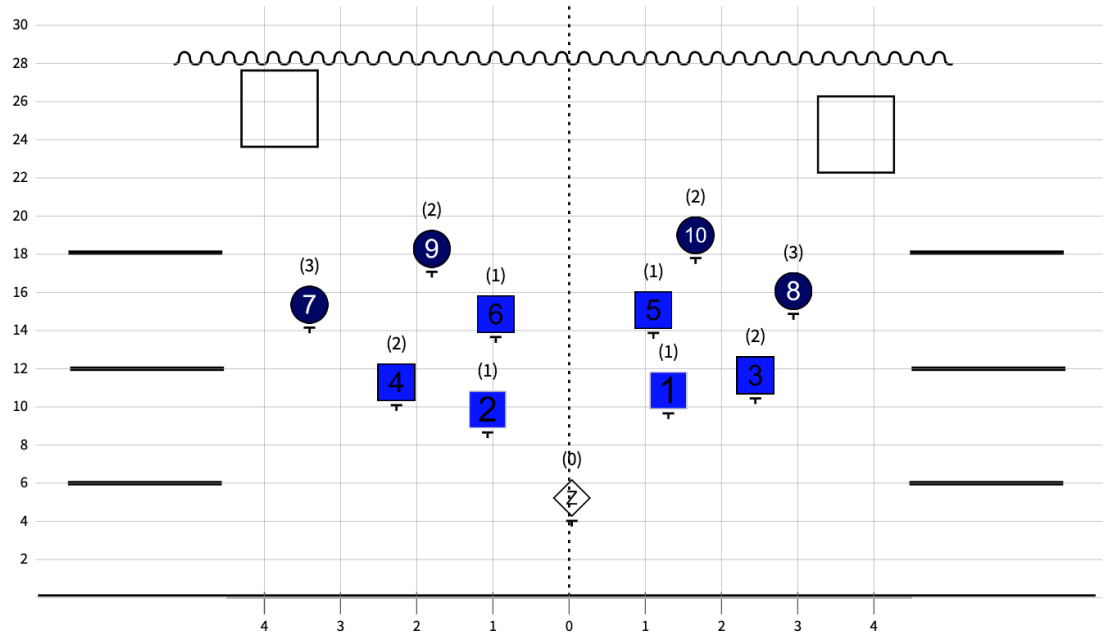
Chart: 2.5



Act I Scene I

Chorus Dance

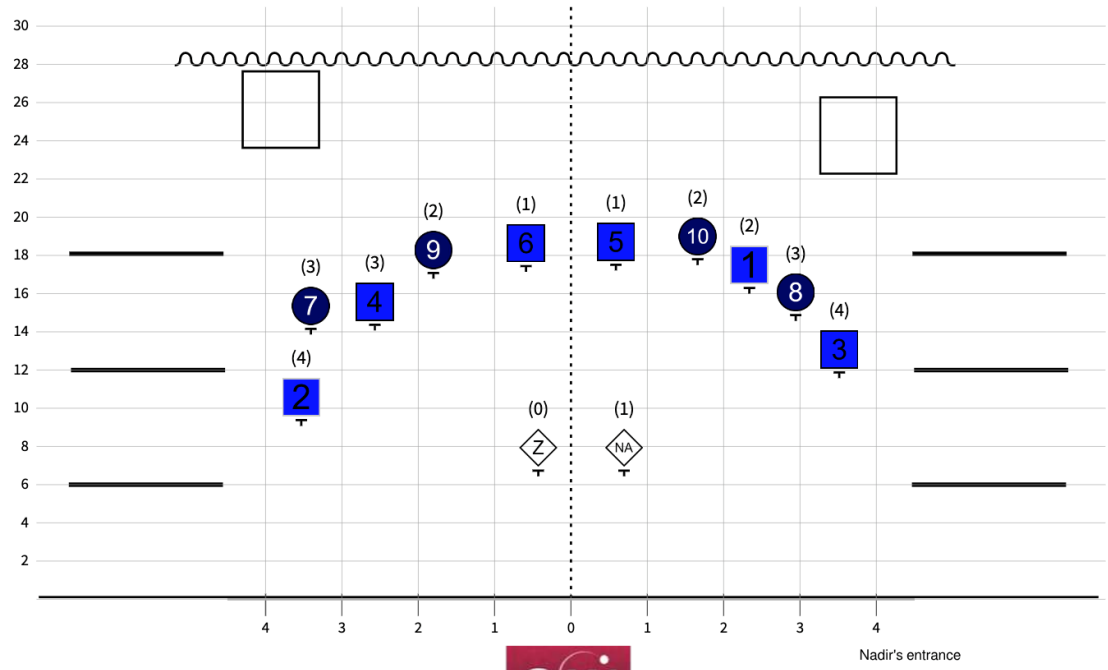
Chart: 2.6



Act I Scene 1b

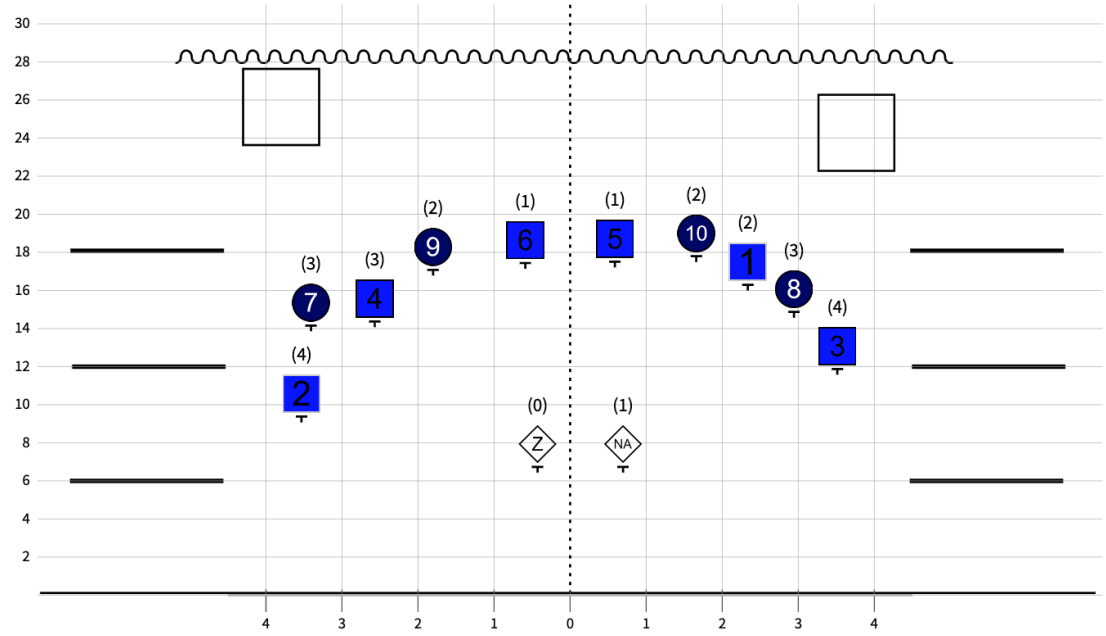
Zurga with chorus (Election as leader)

Chart: 3.1



Act I Scene 1b

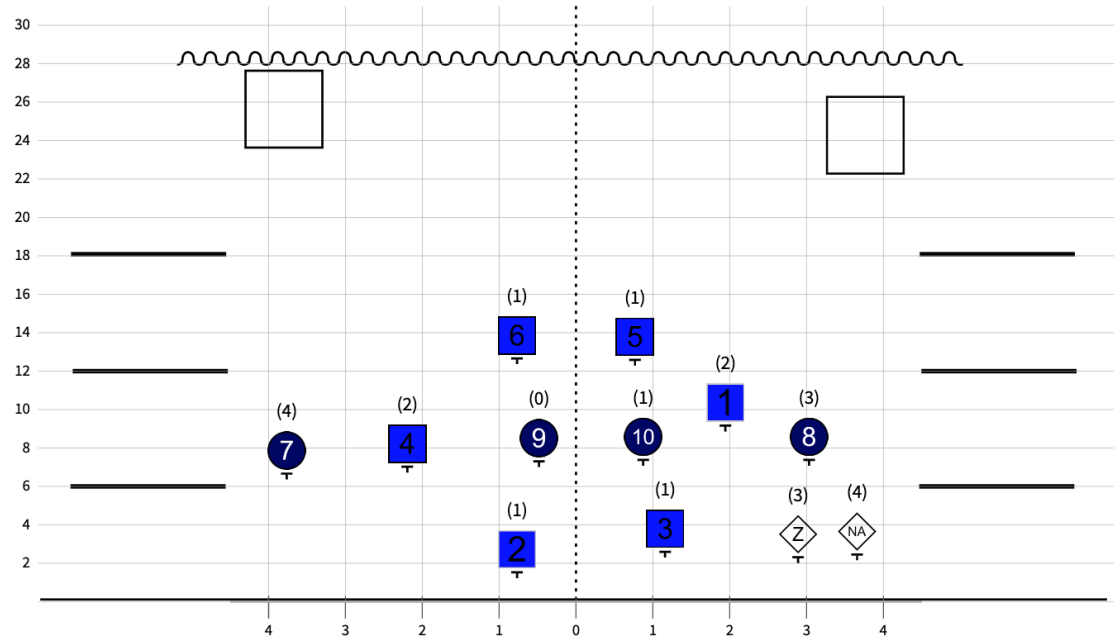
Chart: 3.2



Act 1 Scene 1c

Zurga asks Nadir to stay

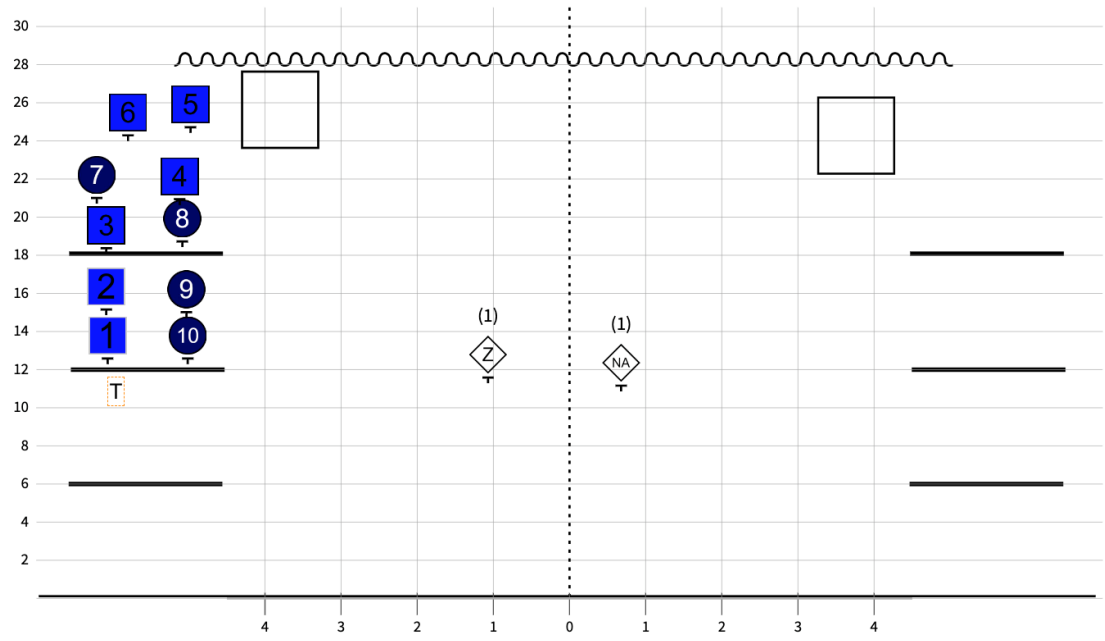
Chart: 4.1



Reprise of Chorus Dance

Act 1 Scene 1c

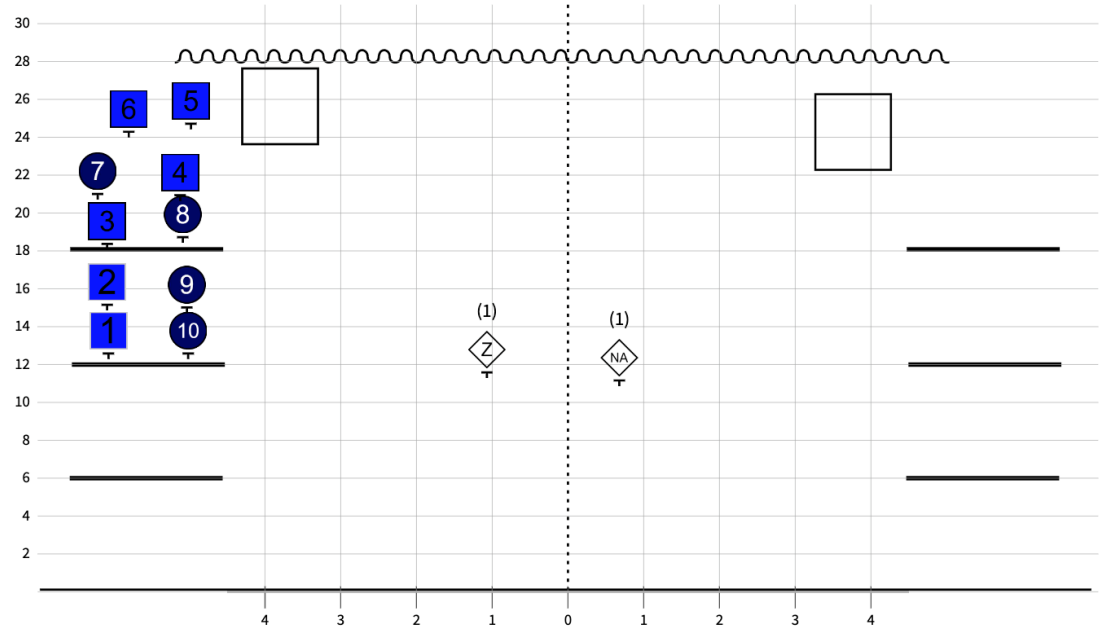
Chart: 4.2



Dancers off stage

Acti 1 Scene 2a

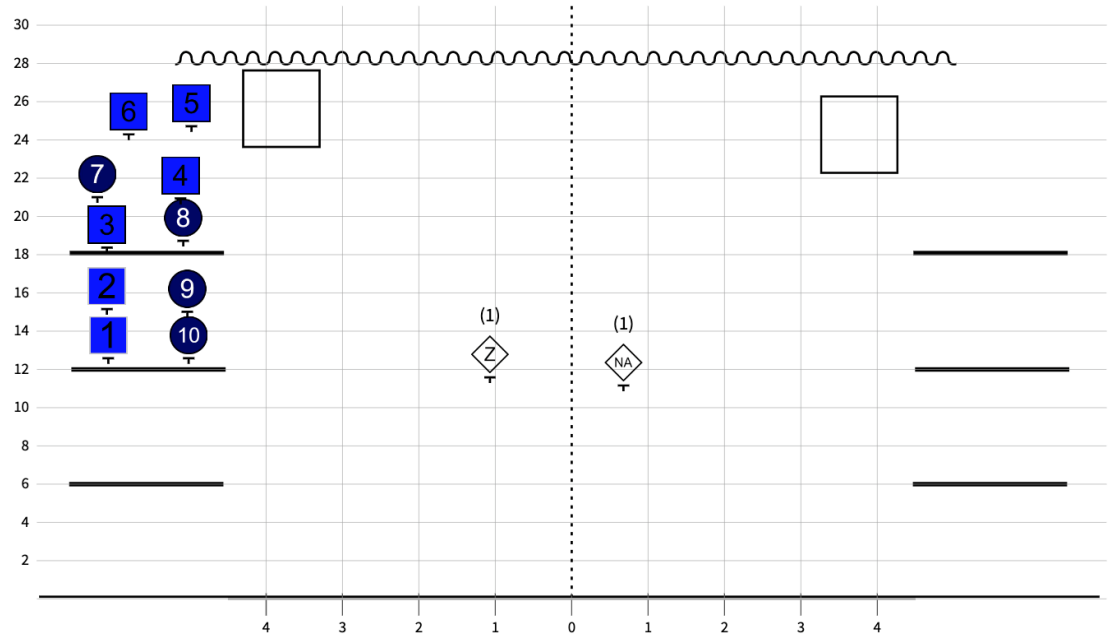
Chart: 5.1



Actl Scene 2b

Duo Nadir and Zurga (No Dancers)

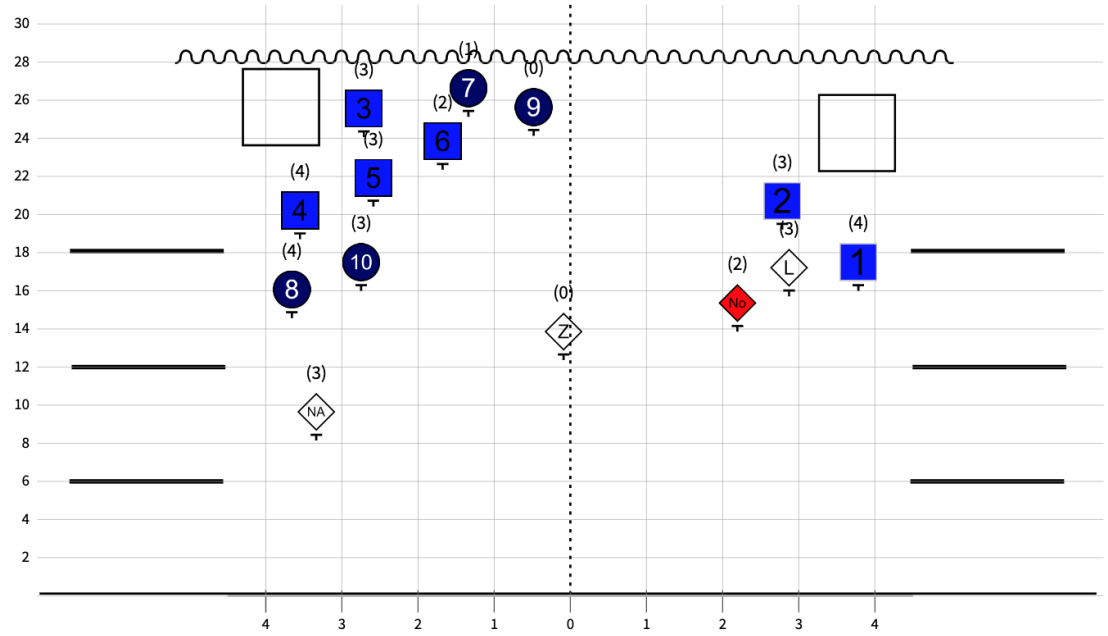
Chart: 6.1



Actl Scene 3a

Zurga and Nadir sing (No Dancers)

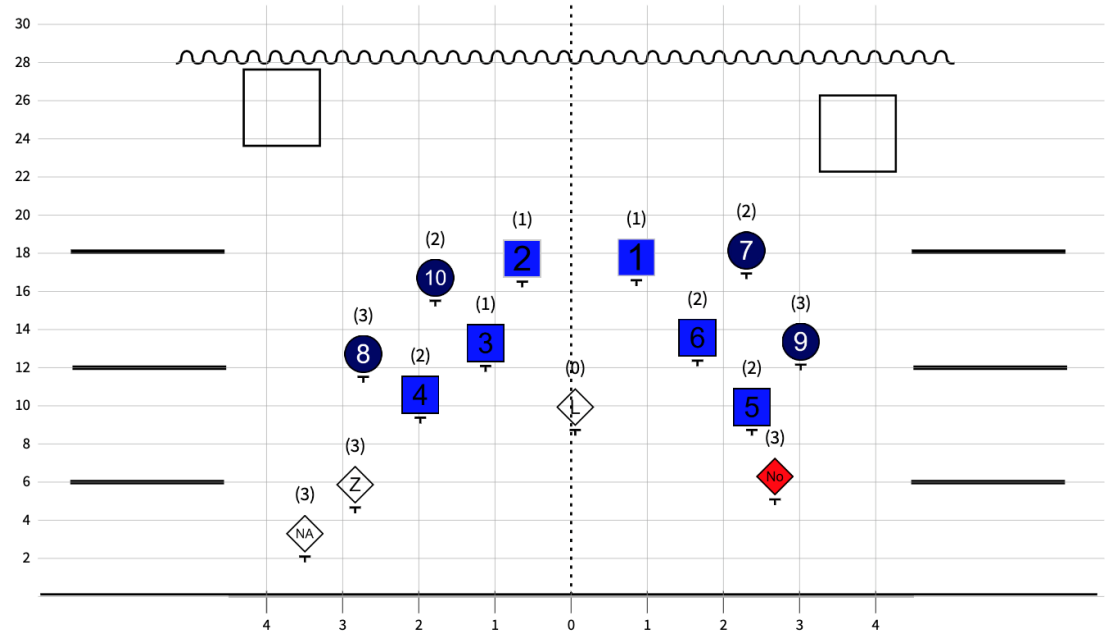
Chart: 7.1



Leila's Entrance with Nourabad

Actl Scene 3a

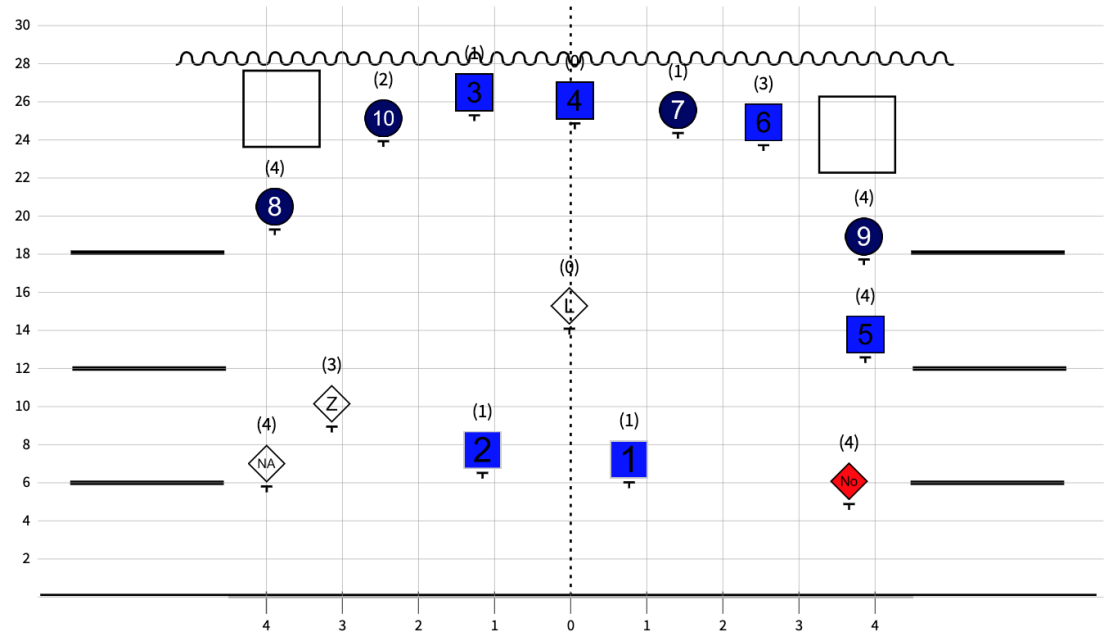
Chart: 7.2



Ceremony with Lelia

Actl Scene 3a

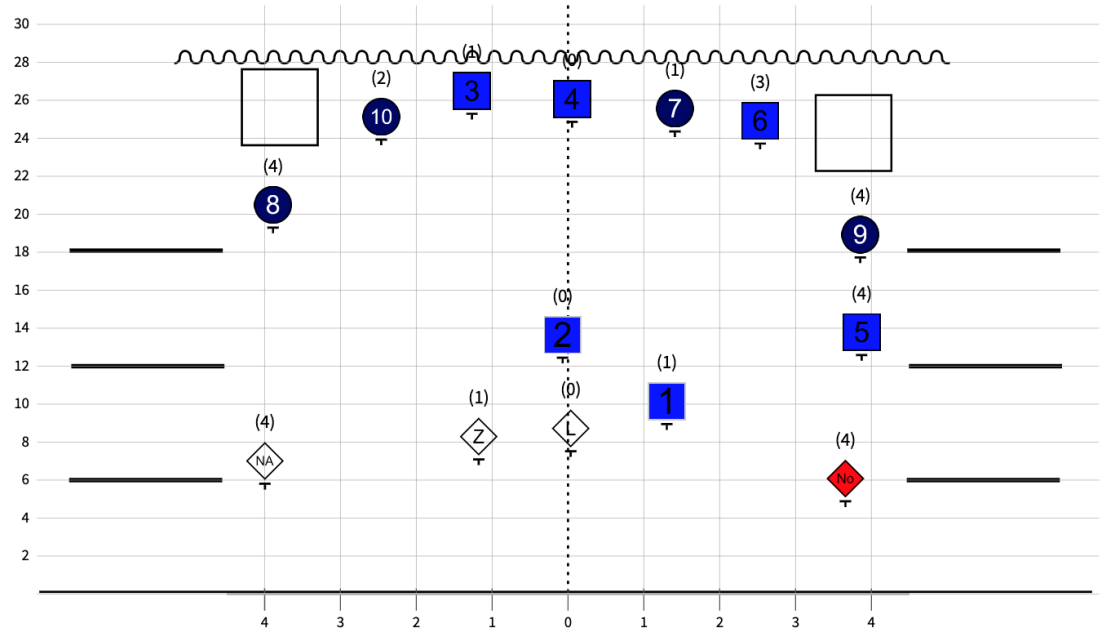
Chart: 7.3



Dance of attendants w/ chorus

Act I Scene 3b

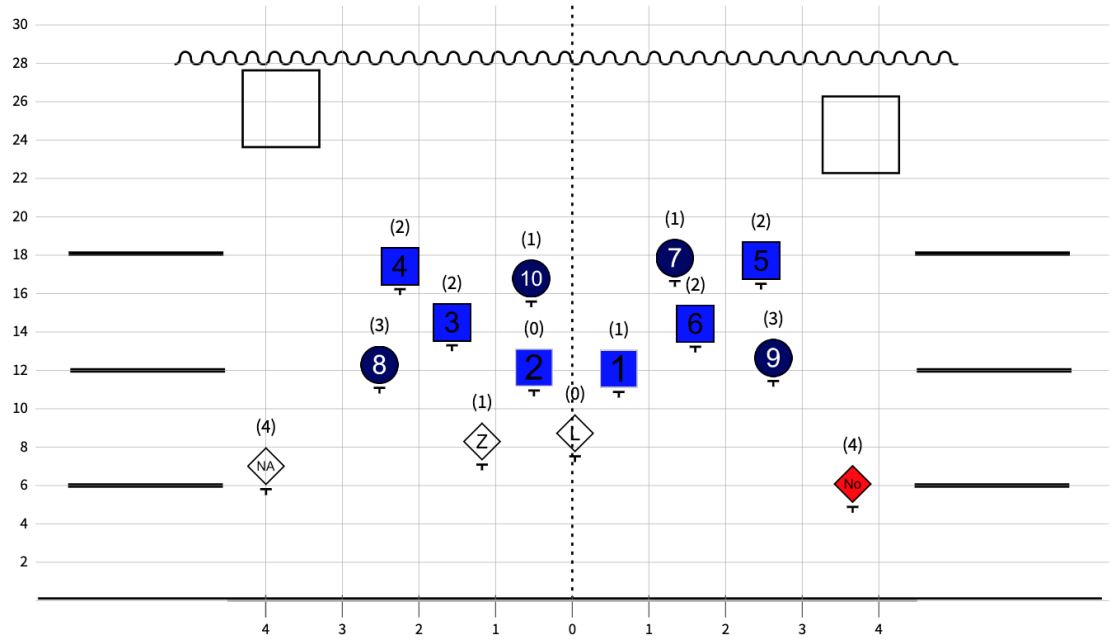
Chart: 8.1



Act I Scene 3c

Zurga and Leila (Leila's oath) No Dancing

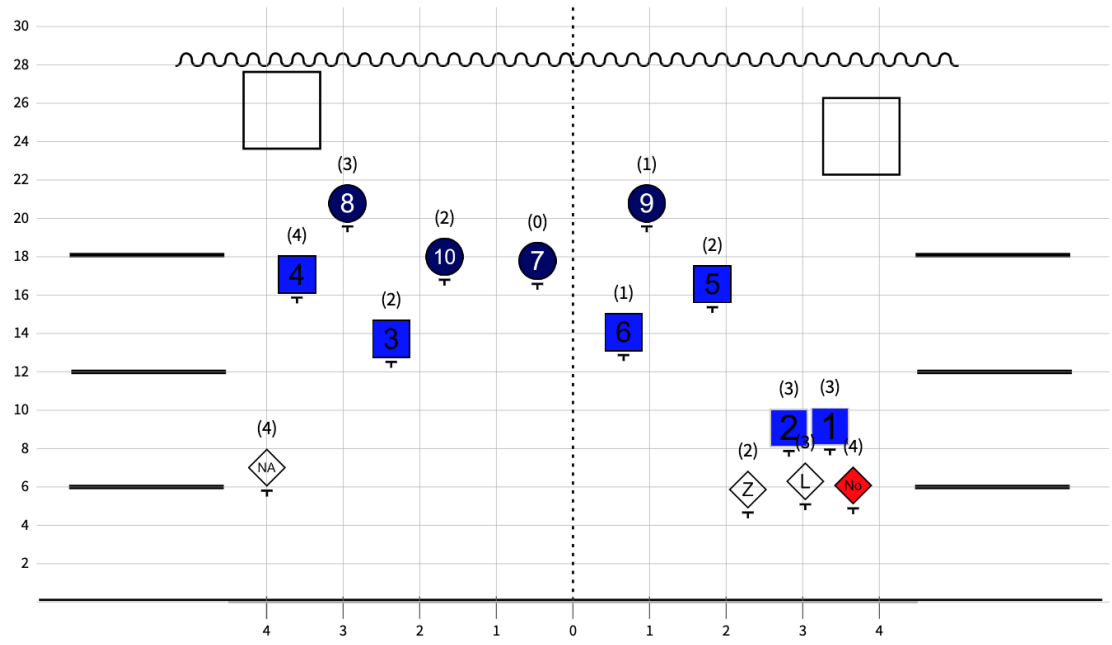
Chart: 9.1



Threat of being cursed w/ chorus

Act I Scene 3c

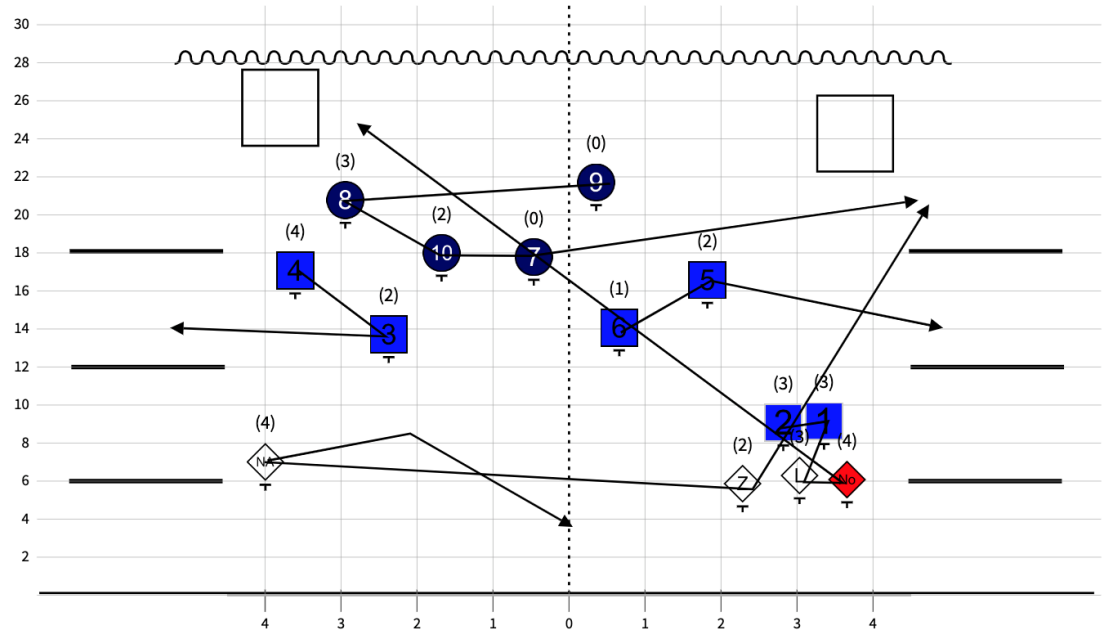
Chart: 9.2



Act I Scene 3c

Chorus after Leila's vow

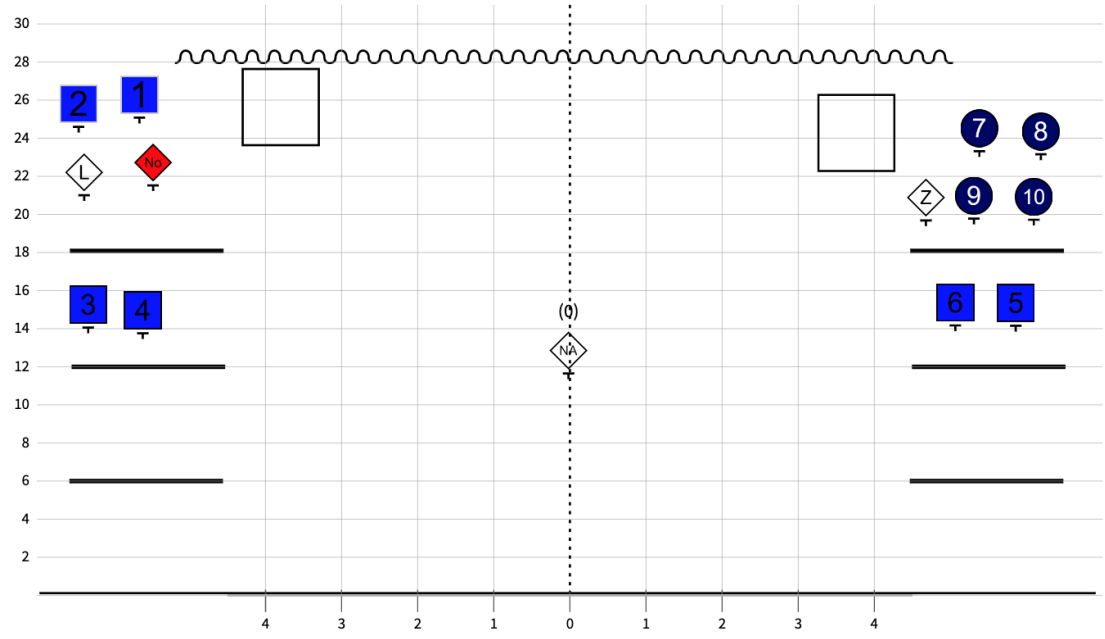
Chart: 9.3



Exit of Chorus (All But Nadir)

Act I Scene 3c

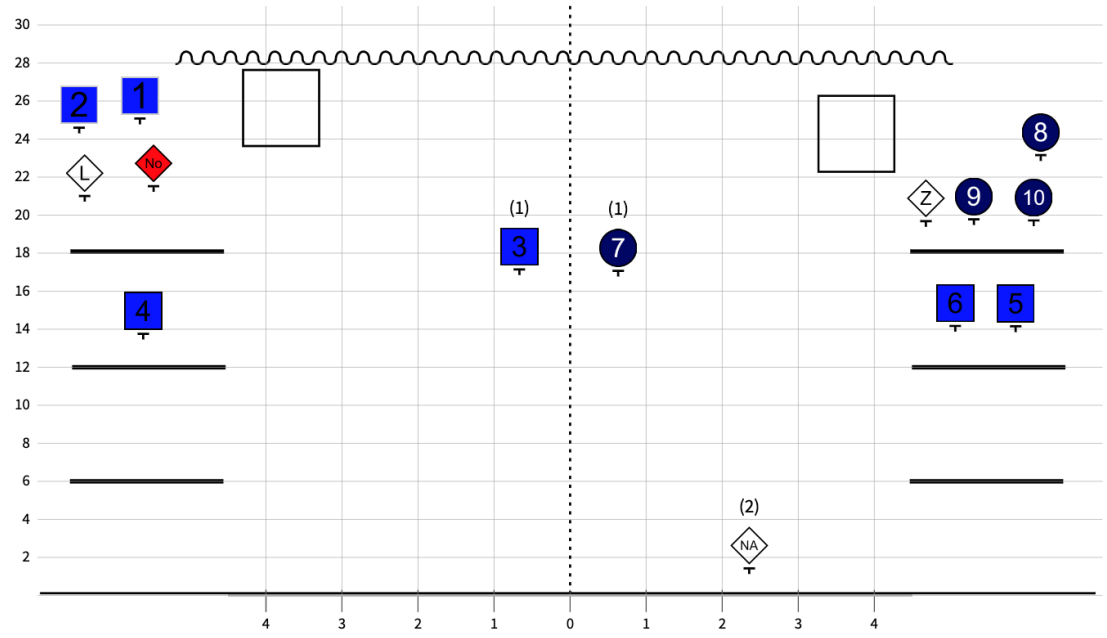
Chart: 9.4



Act I Scene 4a

Nadir Alone on stage (No Dancers)

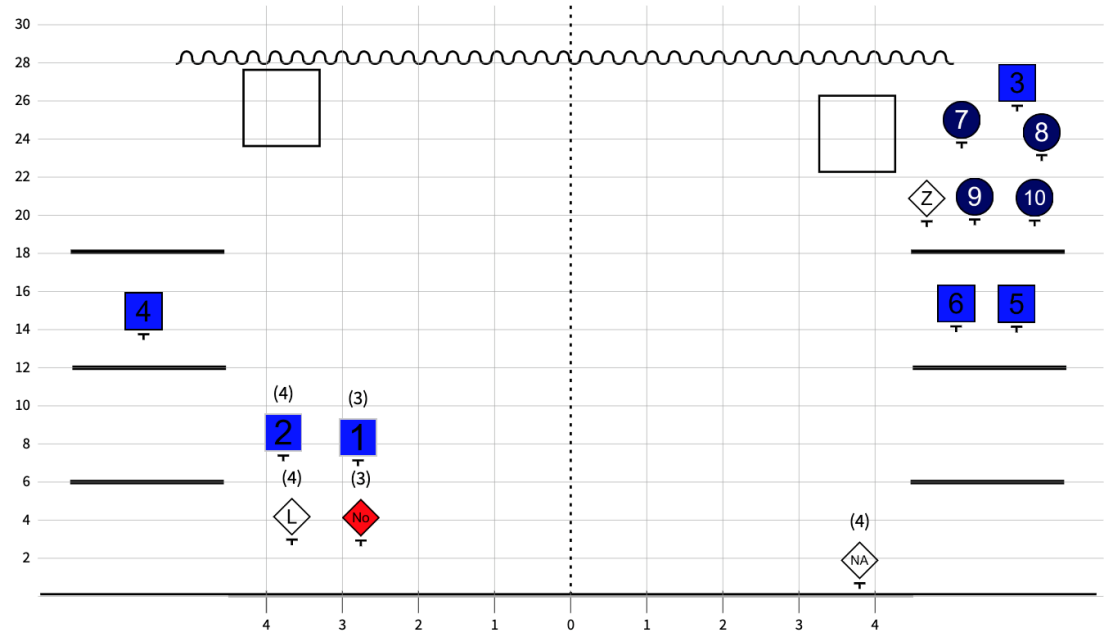
Chart: 10.1



Act I Scene 4b

Pas de deux (Two villagers) Nadir onstage

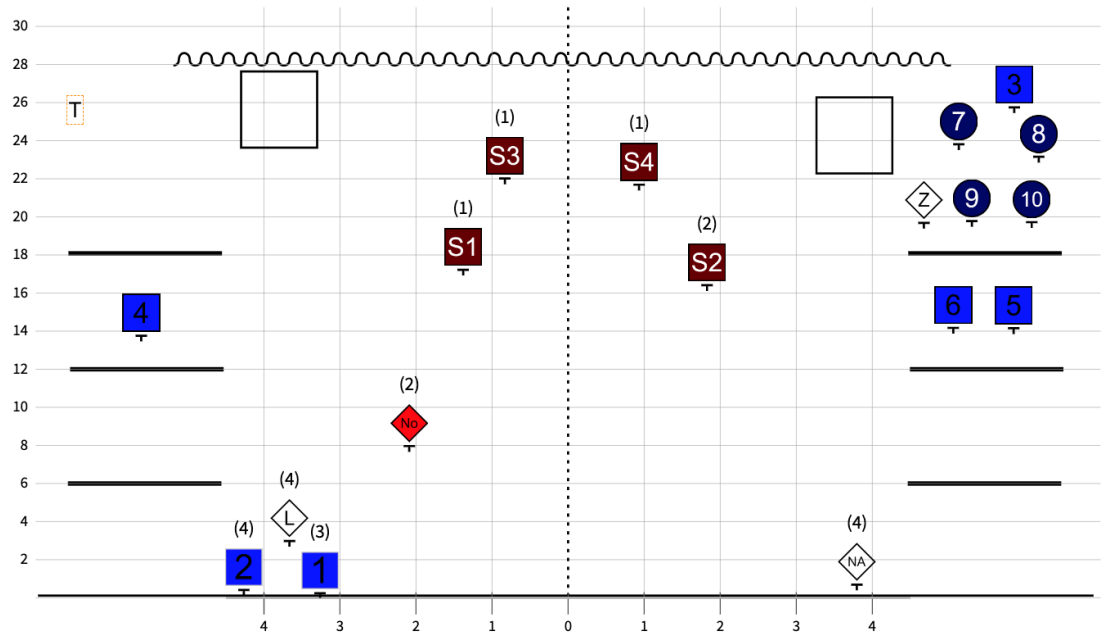
Chart: 11.1



Act I Scene 5a

Nourabad and Leila w/ attendants enter (Nadir is asleep)

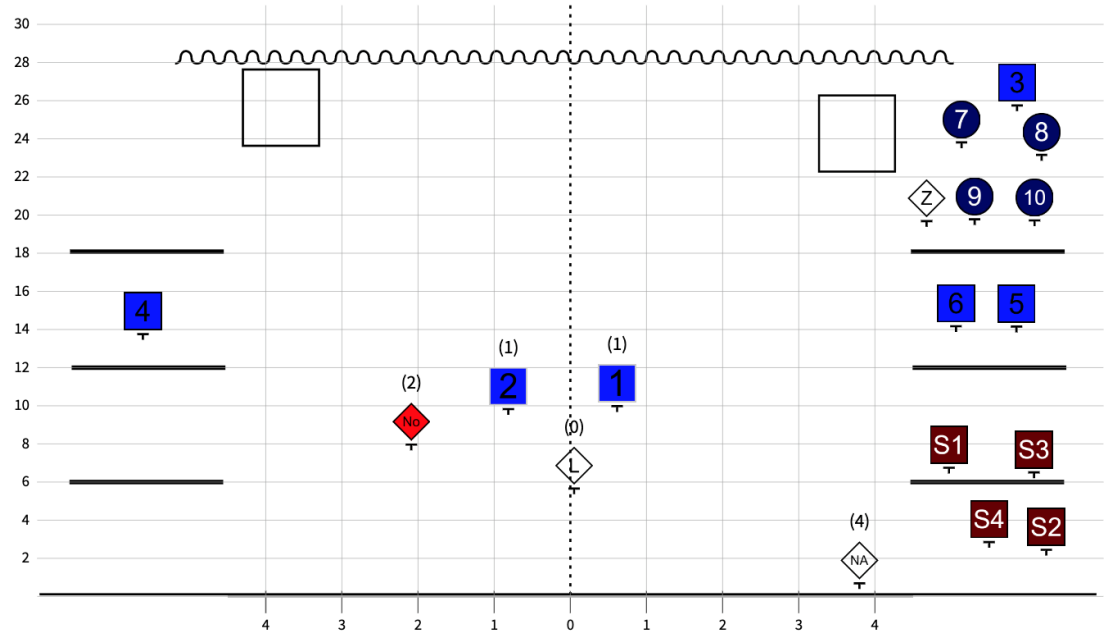
Chart: 12.1



First entrance of Evil Spirits

Act I Scene 5a

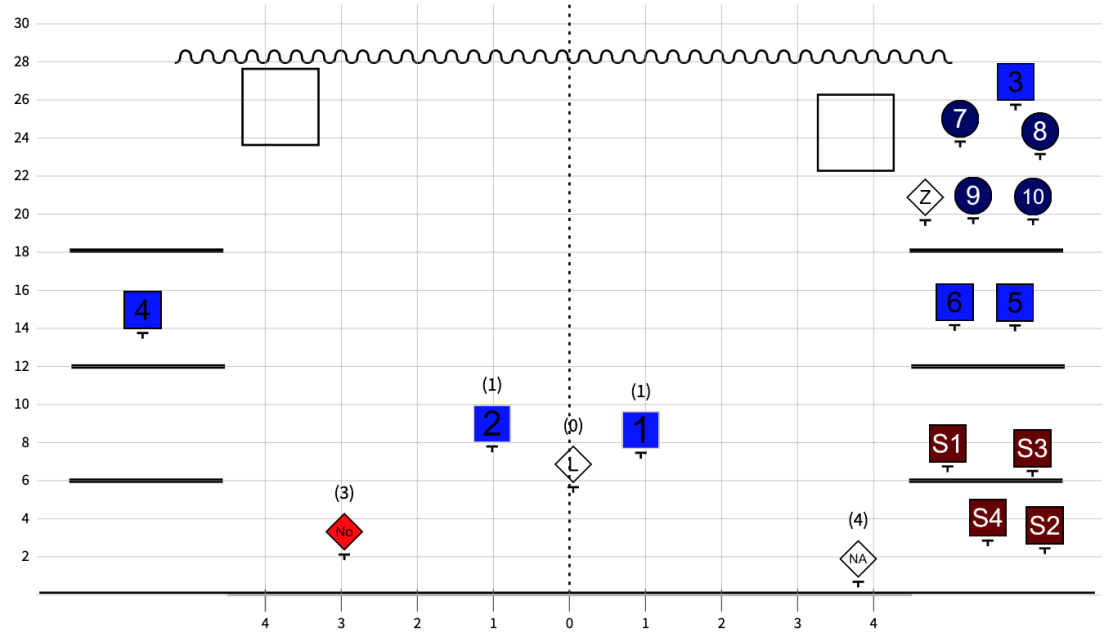
Chart: 12.2



Act I Scene 5b

Leila aria (spirits exit) Chorus is offstage

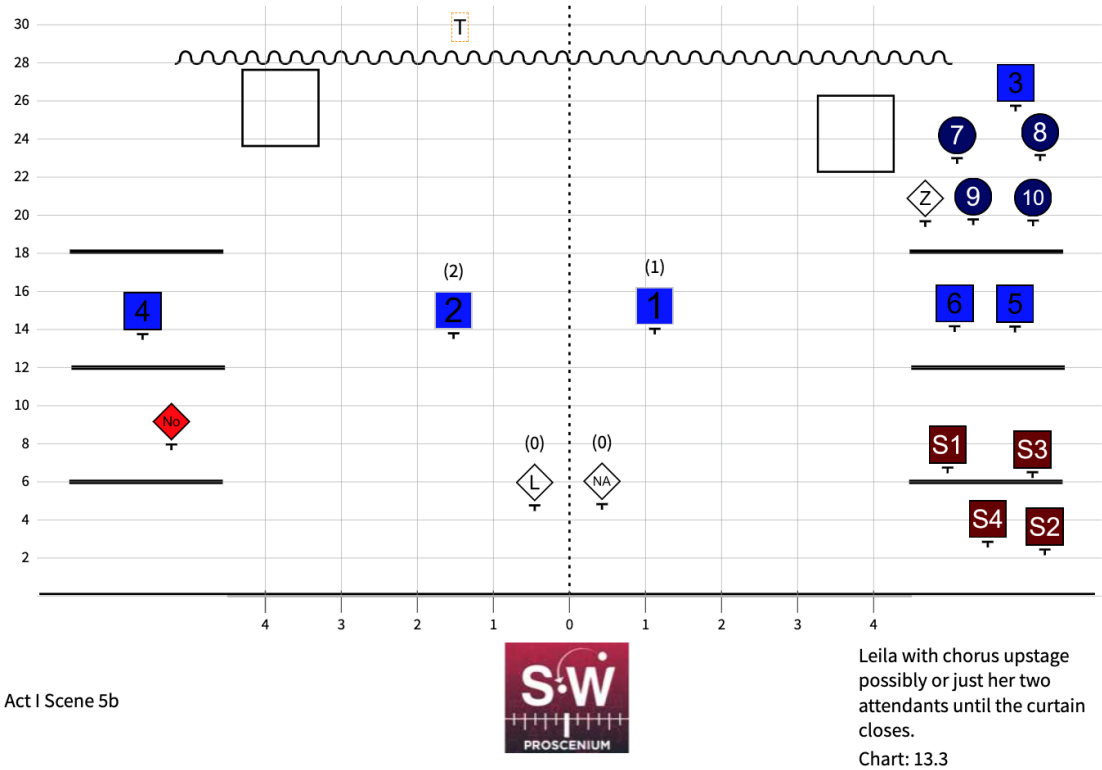
Chart: 13.1



Act I Scene 5b

Attendants dance with Leila as she sings

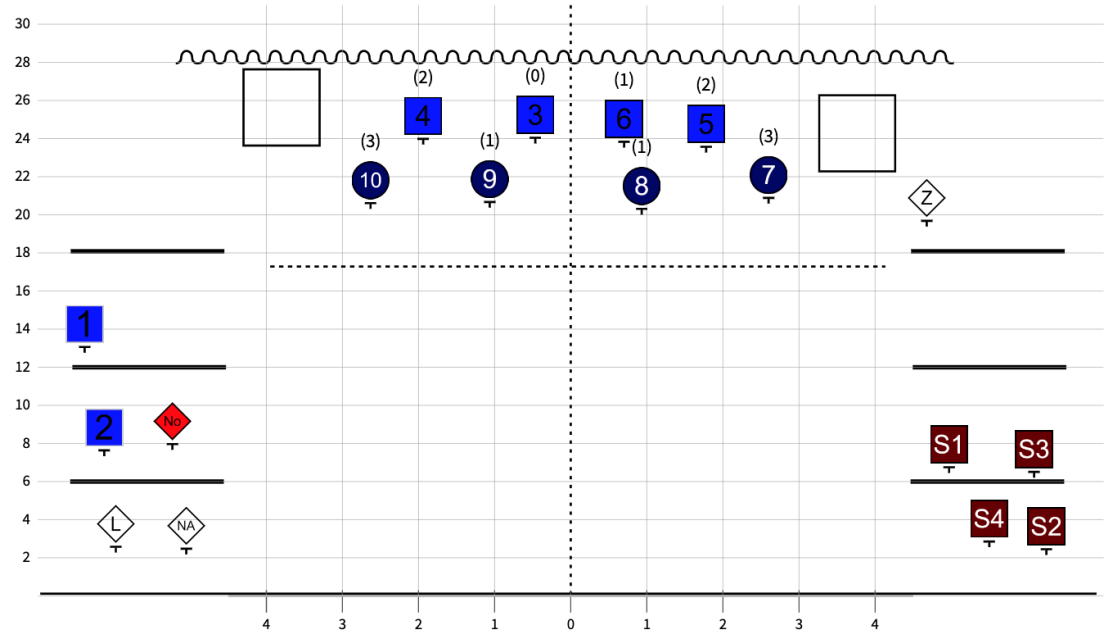
Chart: 13.2



Act I Scene 5b

Leila with chorus upstage possibly or just her two attendants until the curtain closes.

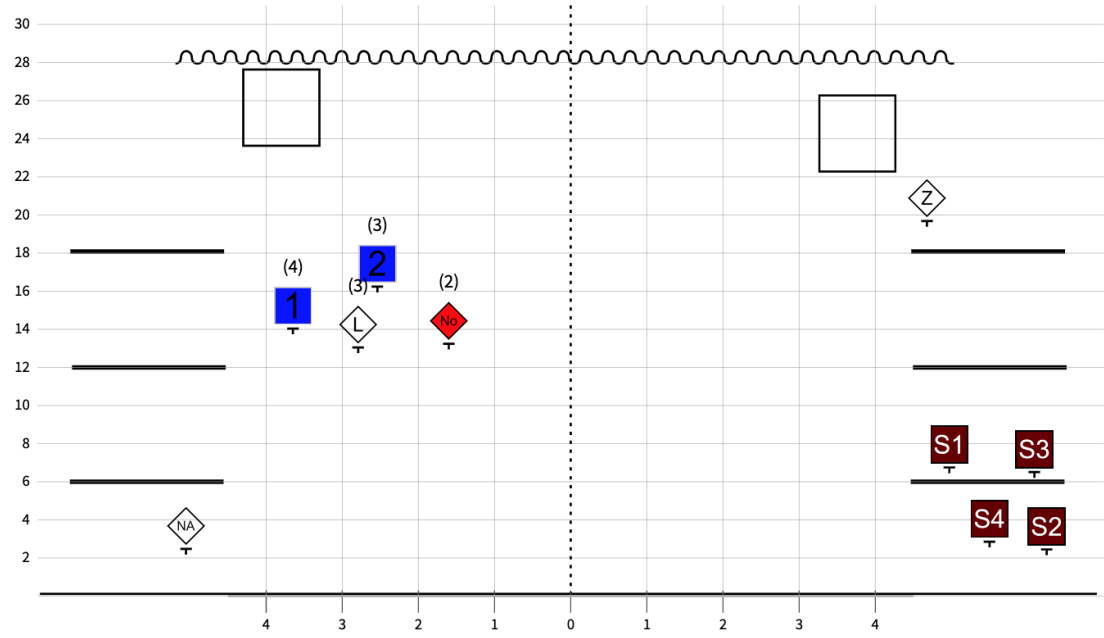
Chart: 13.3



Chorus upstage behind skrim

Act II Scene scene 6

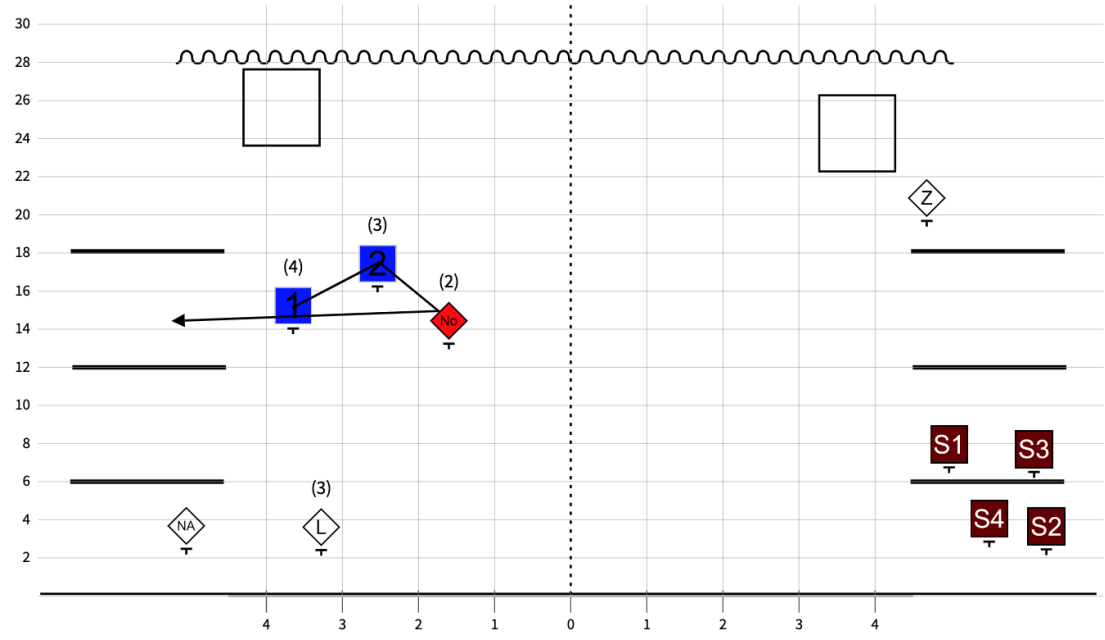
Chart: 14.1



Act II Scene scene 6

Nourabad with Leila (with attendants)

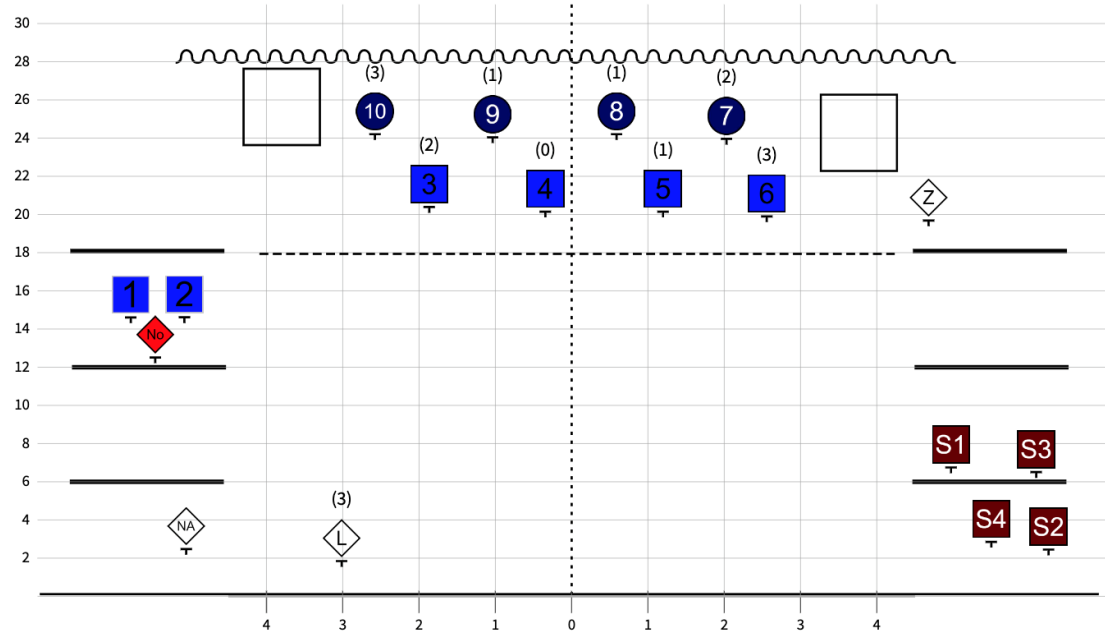
Chart: 14.2



Act II Scene scene 6

Leila alone (Nourabad and Attendants leave)

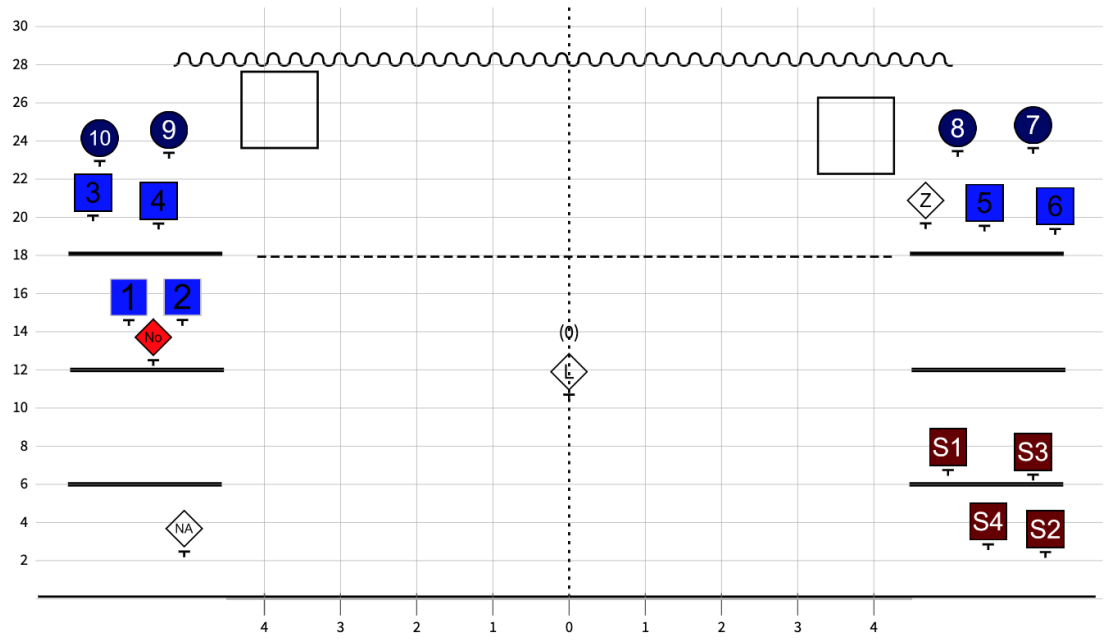
Chart: 14.3



Chorus behind skrim

Act II Scene scene 6

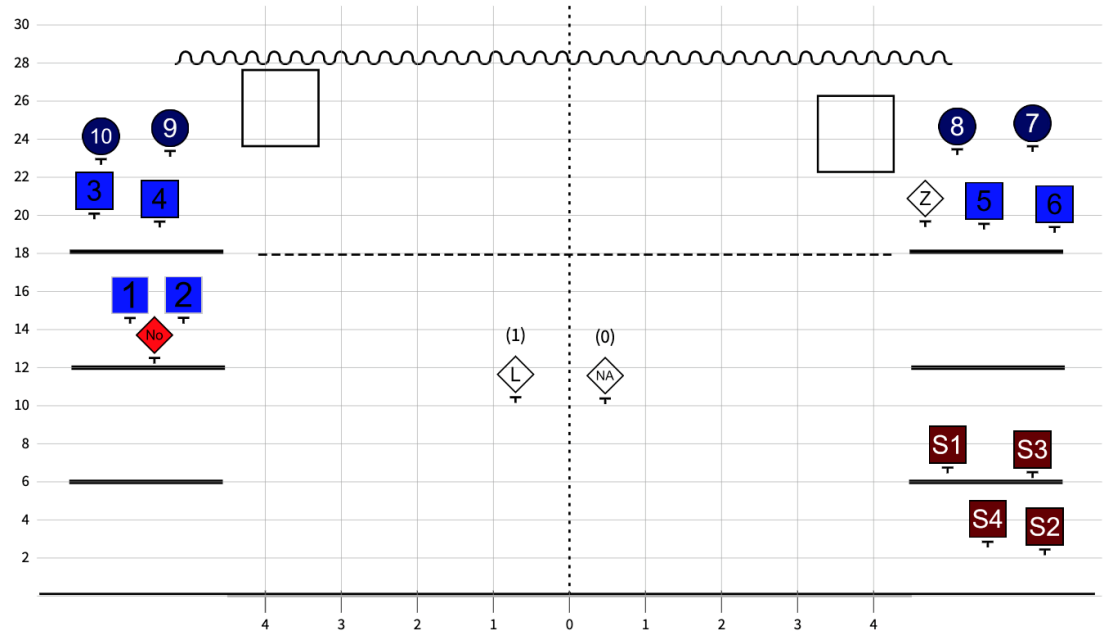
Chart: 14.4



Act II Scene 7

Leila aria (alone - no dancers)

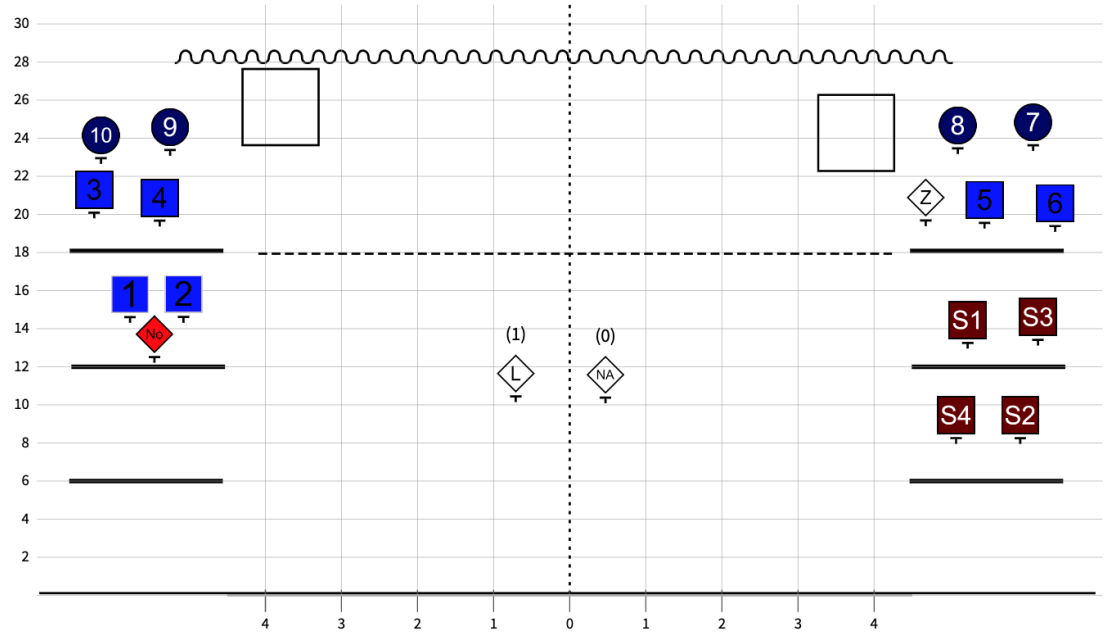
Chart: 15.1



Act II Scene 8

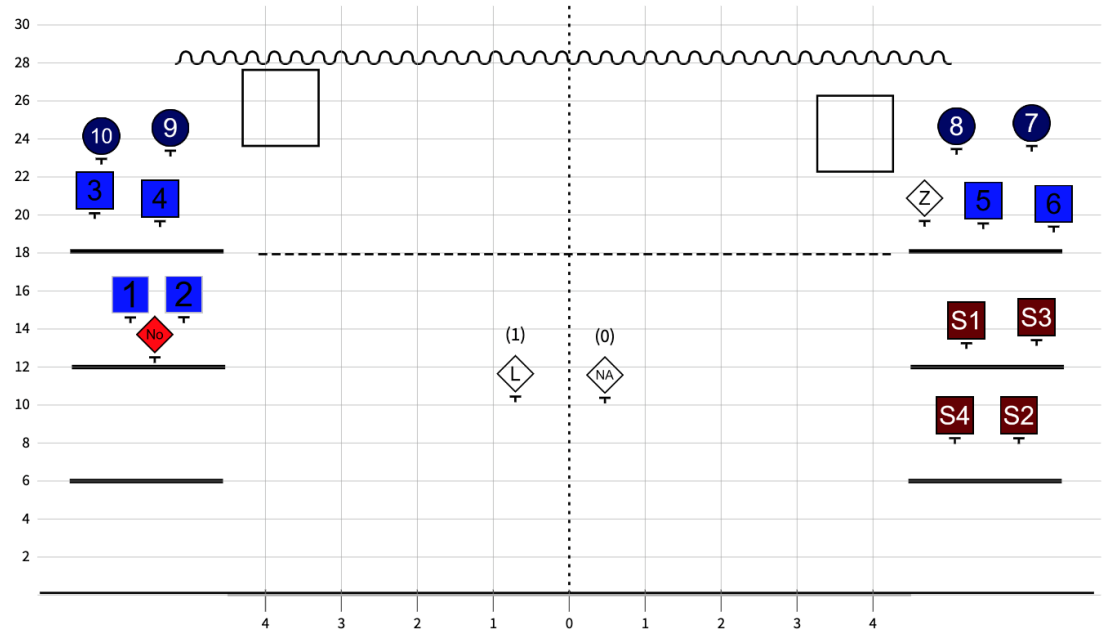
Leila and Nadir (alone- No Dancers)

Chart: 16.1



Act II Scene 9

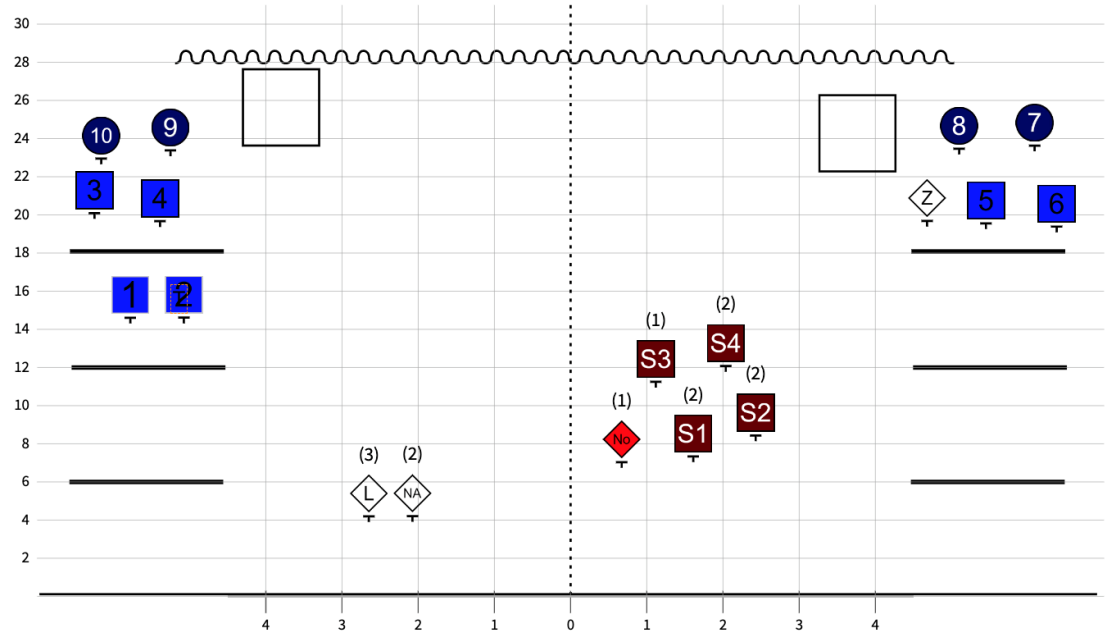
Leila and Nadir (alone no dancers)
Maybe evil spirits in the background?
Chart: 17.1



Act II Scene 10

Leila & Nadir alone

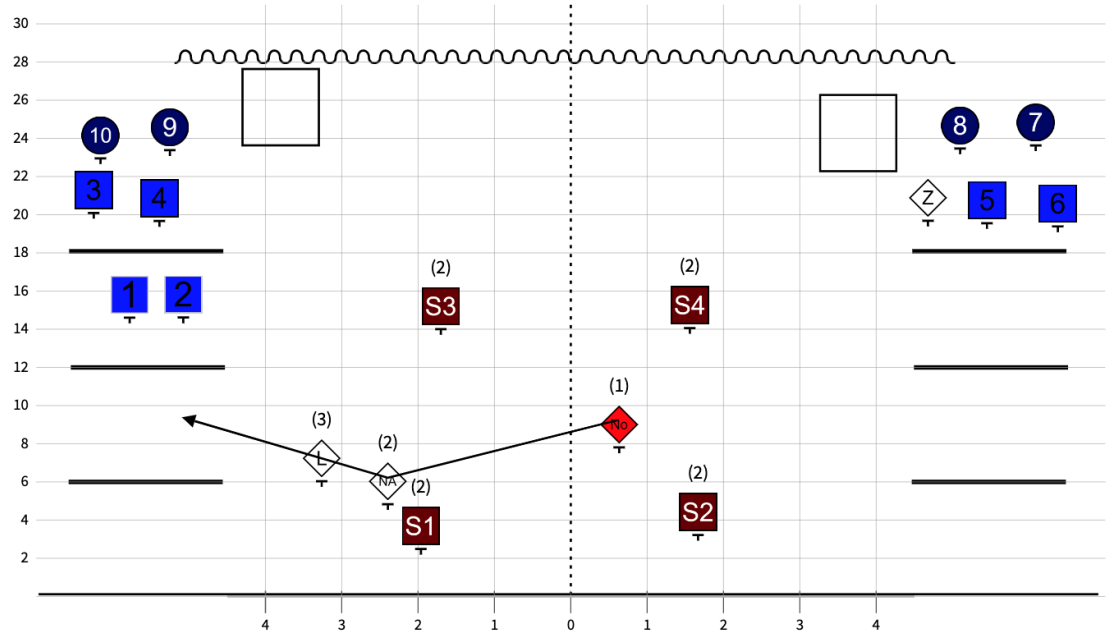
Chart: 18.1



Act II Scene 10

Nourabad enters with evil spirits
(46 sec in w/thunder)

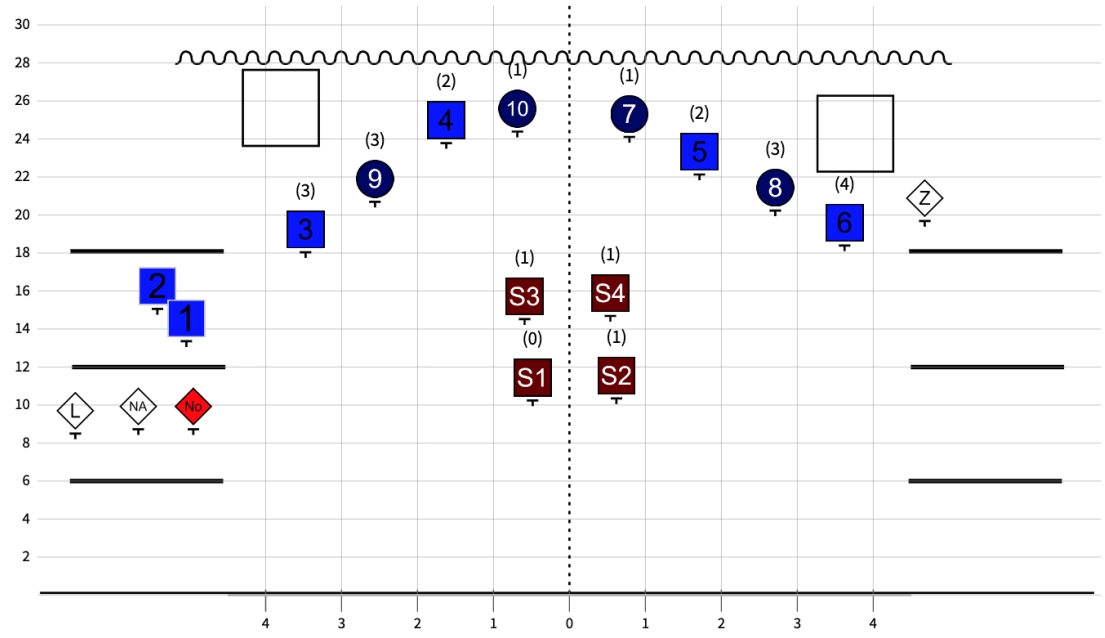
Chart: 18.2



Act II Scene 10

Nadir, Leila, and Nourabad flee - Dance of the Evil Spirits

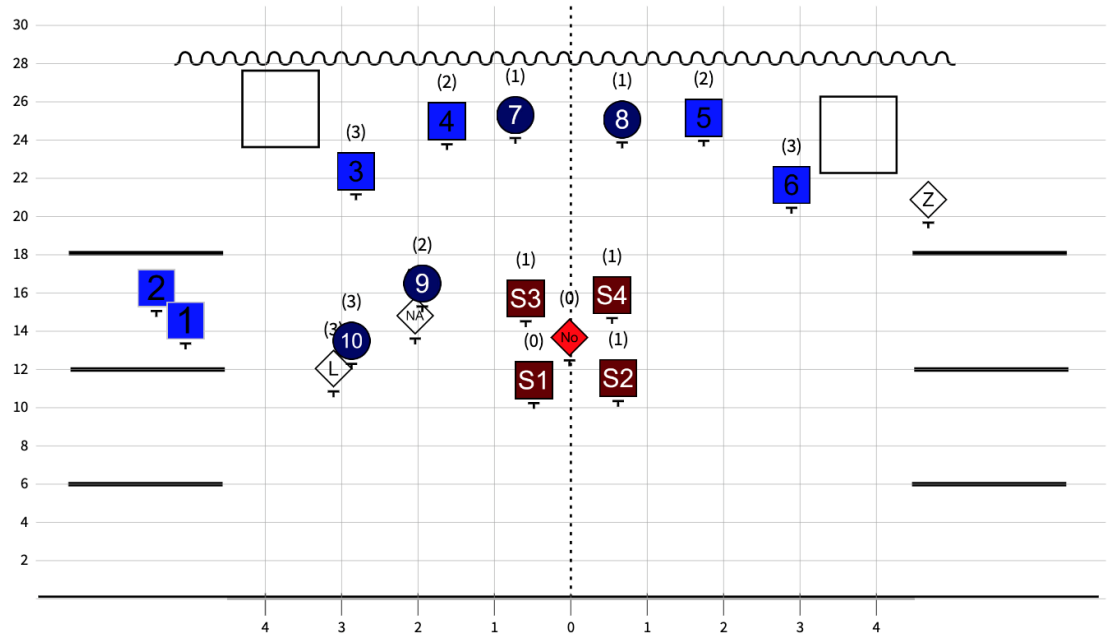
Chart: 18.3



Act II Scene 10

Evil spirits & Chorus dance (at 1:12)

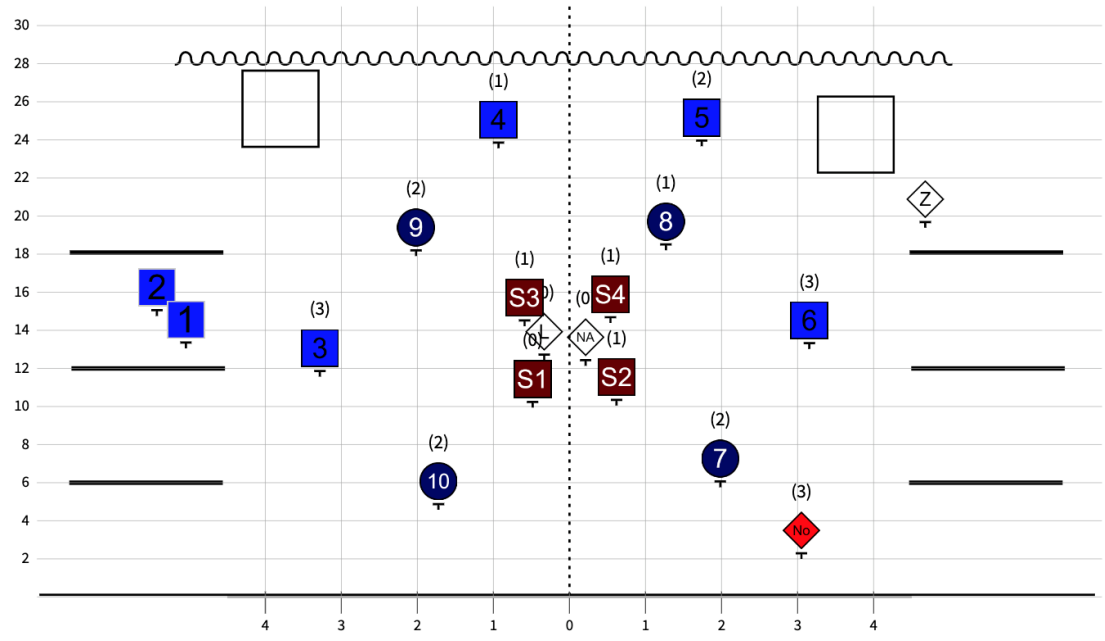
Chart: 18.4



Act II Scene 10

Nourabad enters and calls guards (or evil spirits) to bring out Nadir and Leila (3:23)

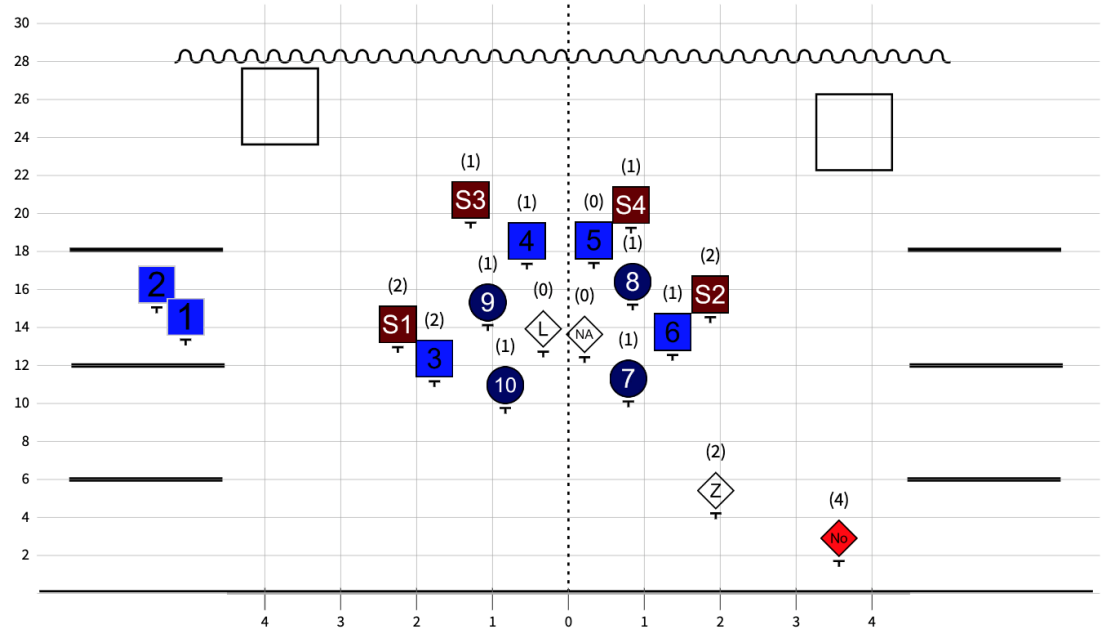
Chart: 18.5



Act II Scene 10

Alt. Idea w/ evil spirits instead of guards

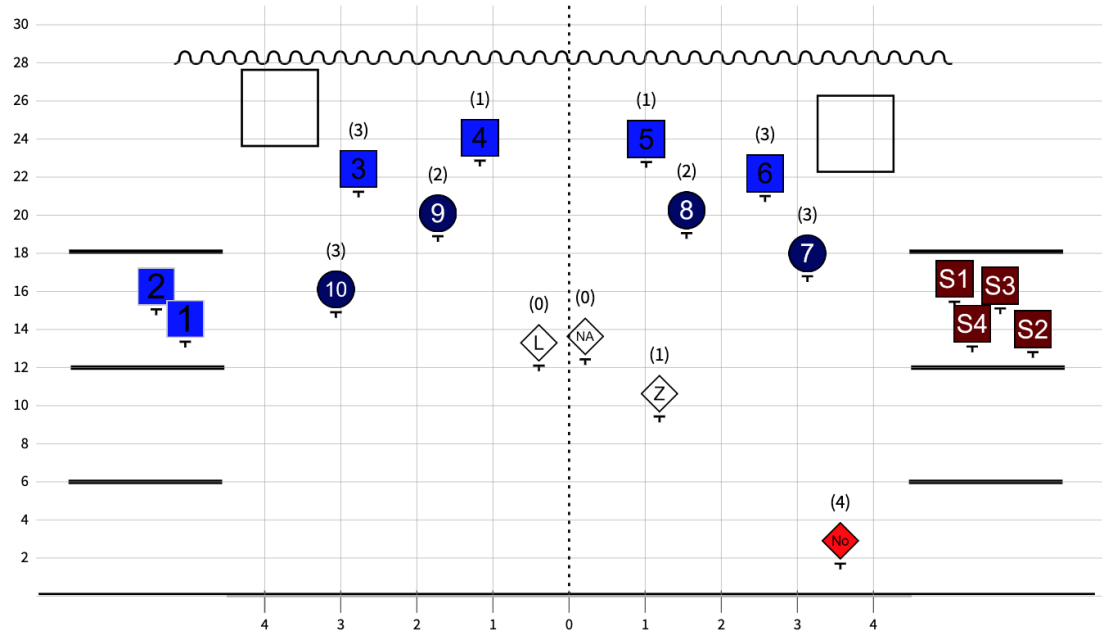
Chart: 18.6



Zurga enters Reh. 93 (5:49)

Act II Scene 10

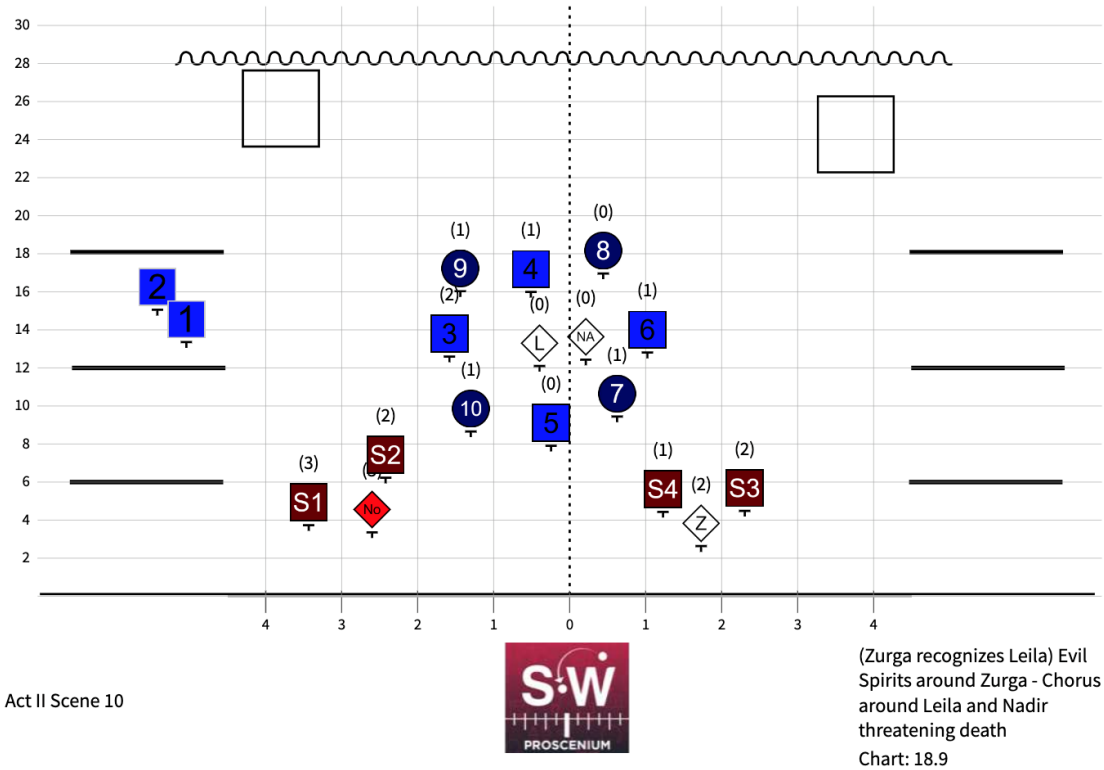
Chart: 18.7



Act II Scene 10

Zurga calls off chorus - evil spirits exit

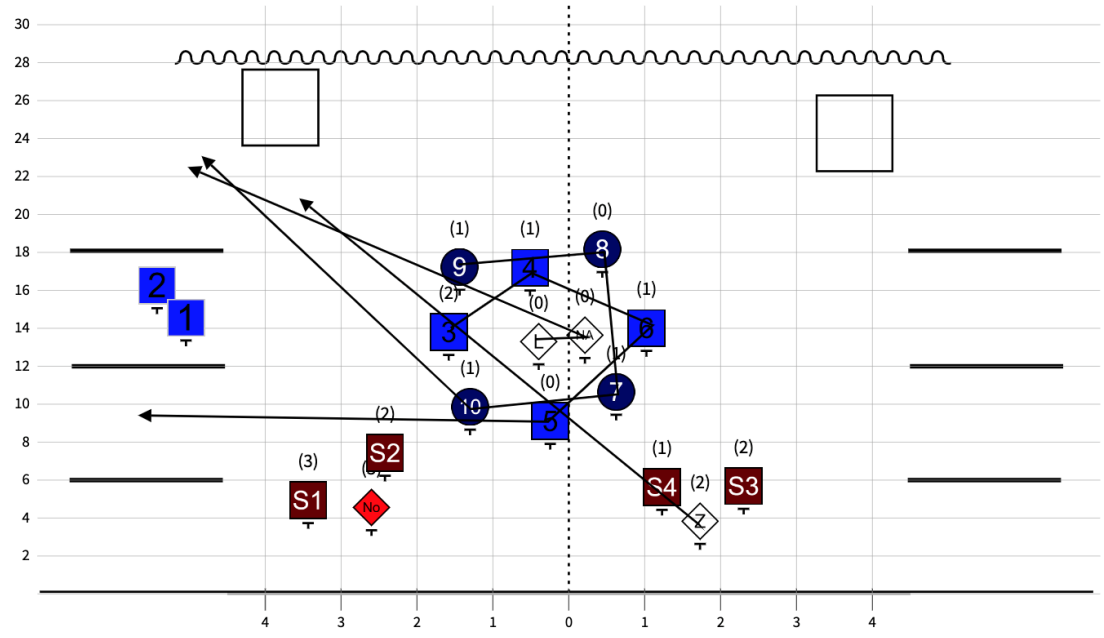
Chart: 18.8



Act II Scene 10

(Zurga recognizes Leila) Evil Spirits around Zurga - Chorus around Leila and Nadir threatening death

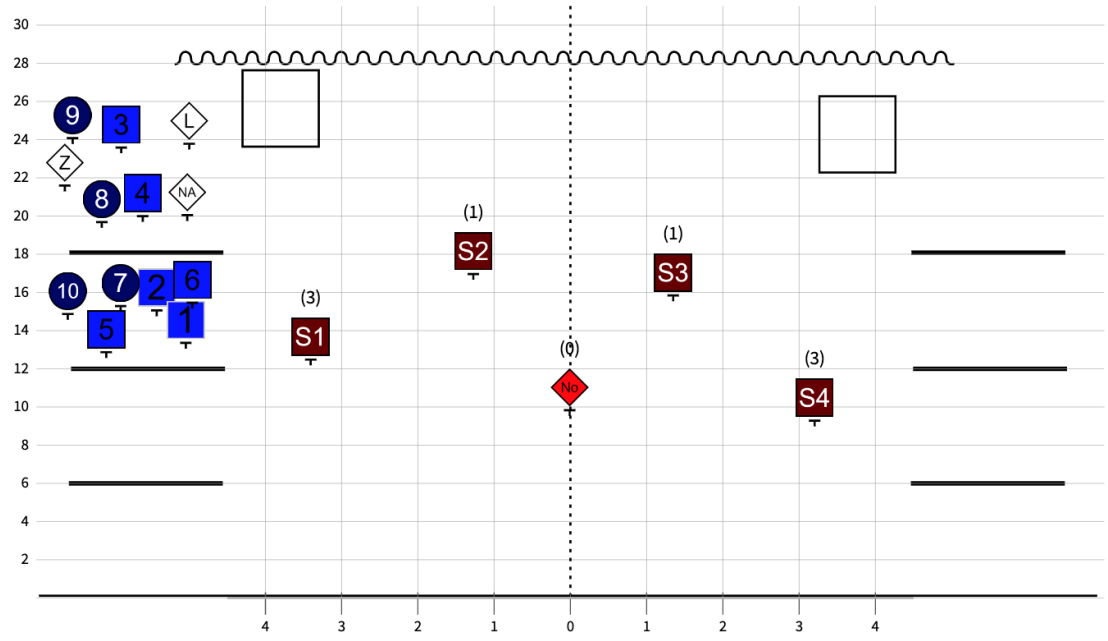
Chart: 18.9



Act II Scene 10

All exit but Nourabad and the Evil Spirits

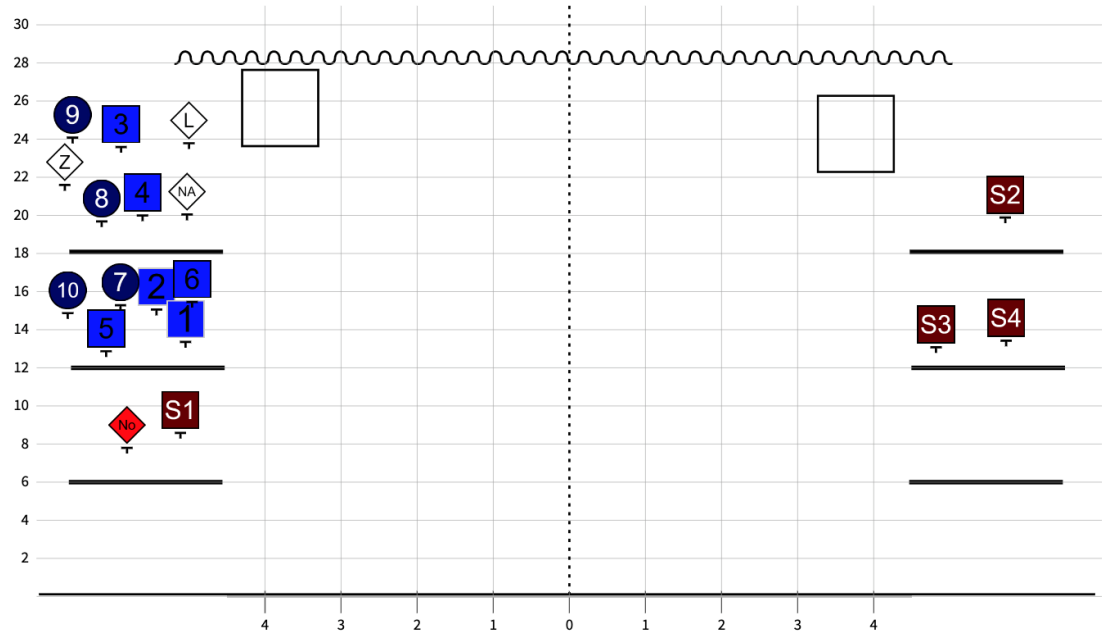
Chart: 18.10



Act II Scene 10

End of Act II (Nourabad w/ Evil Spirits) Reh. 107 (9:30)

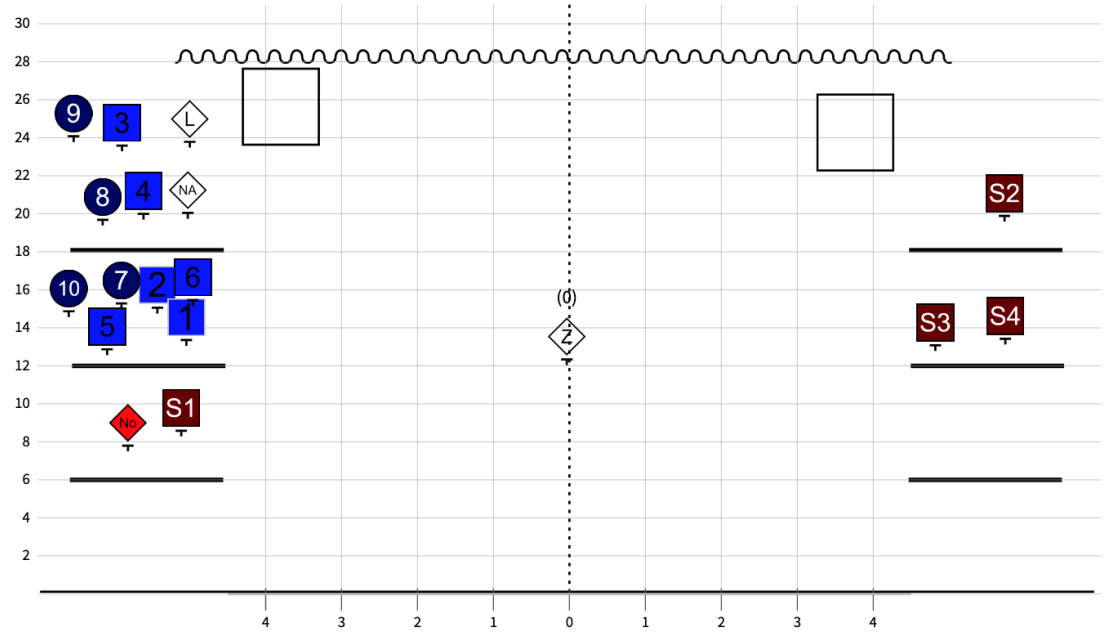
Chart: 18.11



Interlude (curtain closed)

Act III Scene 11

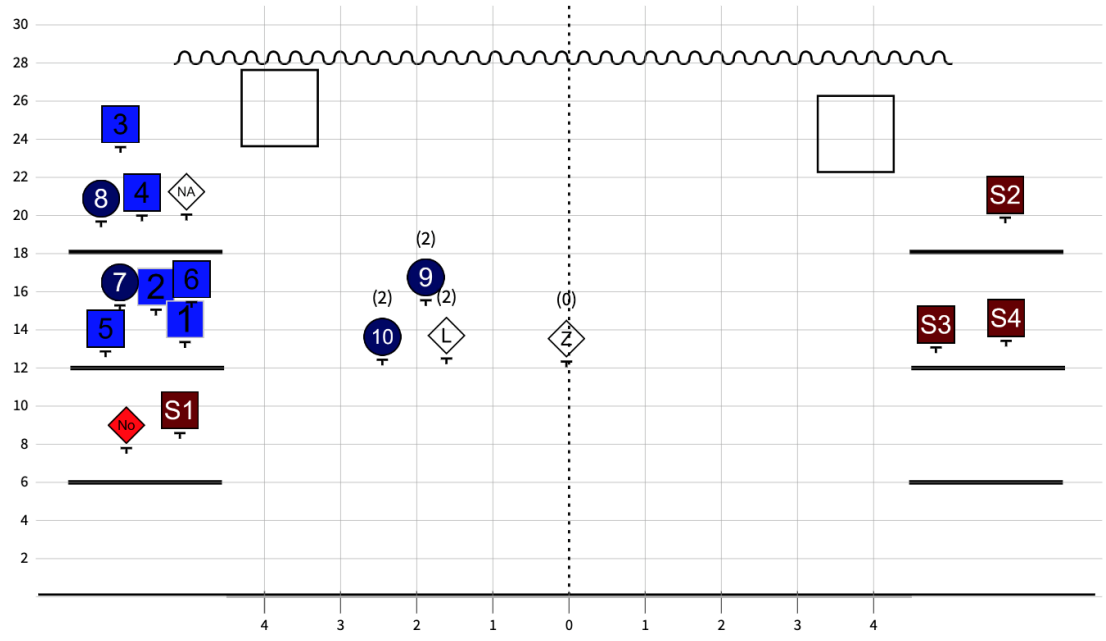
Chart: 19.1



Zurga alone at curtain rise

Act III Scene 11

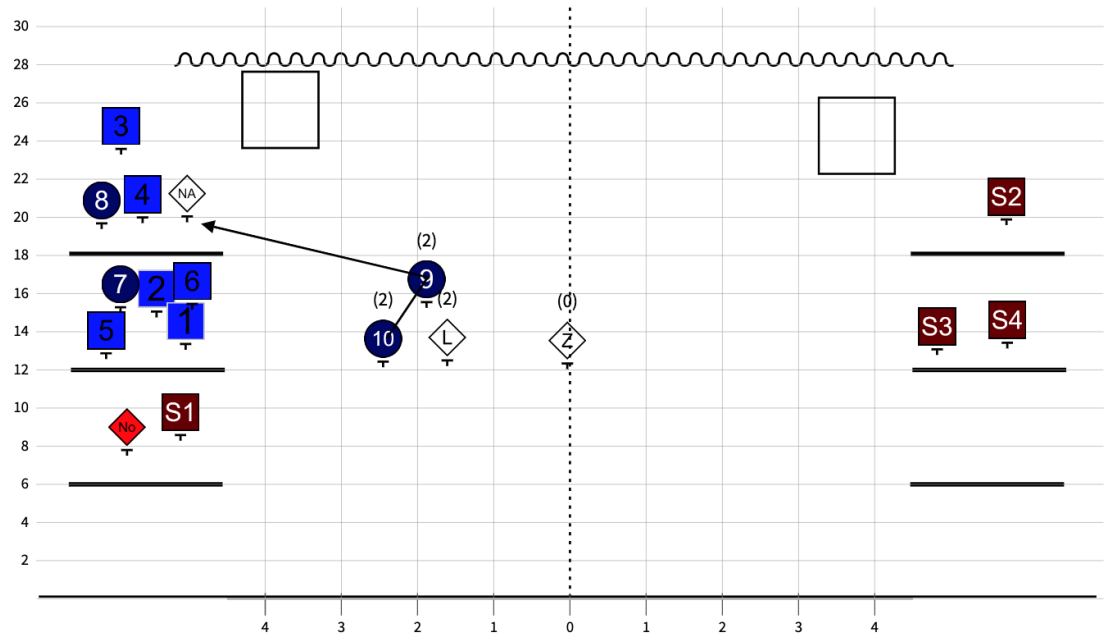
Chart: 19.2



Act III Scene 11

Leila with two guards enter

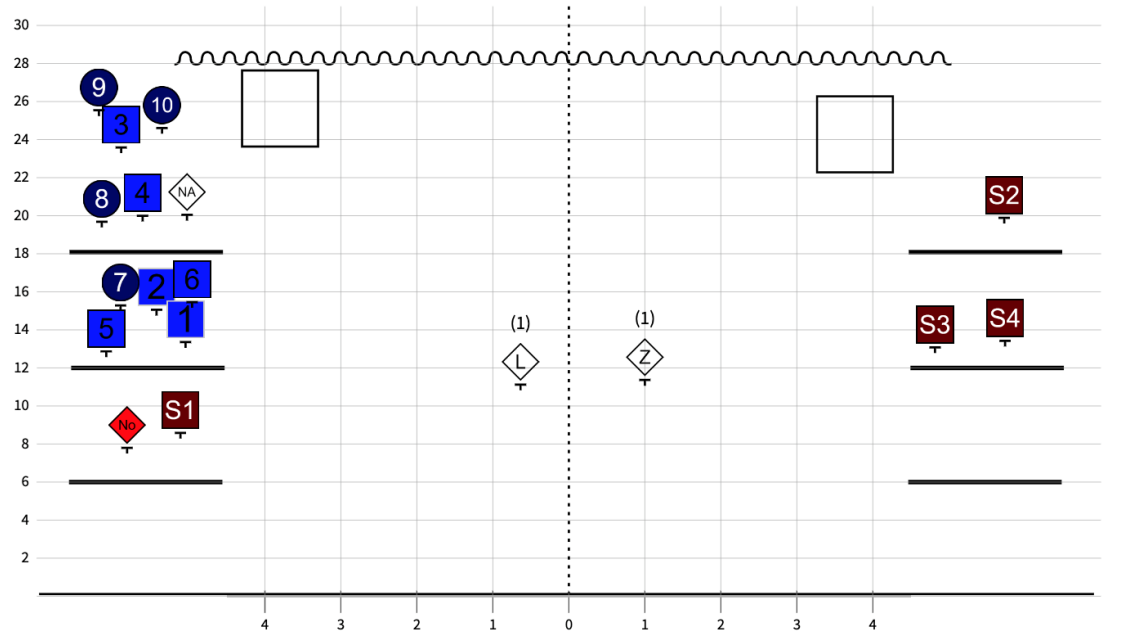
Chart: 19.3



Act III Scene 12a

Zuraga dismisses the guards/ fishermen

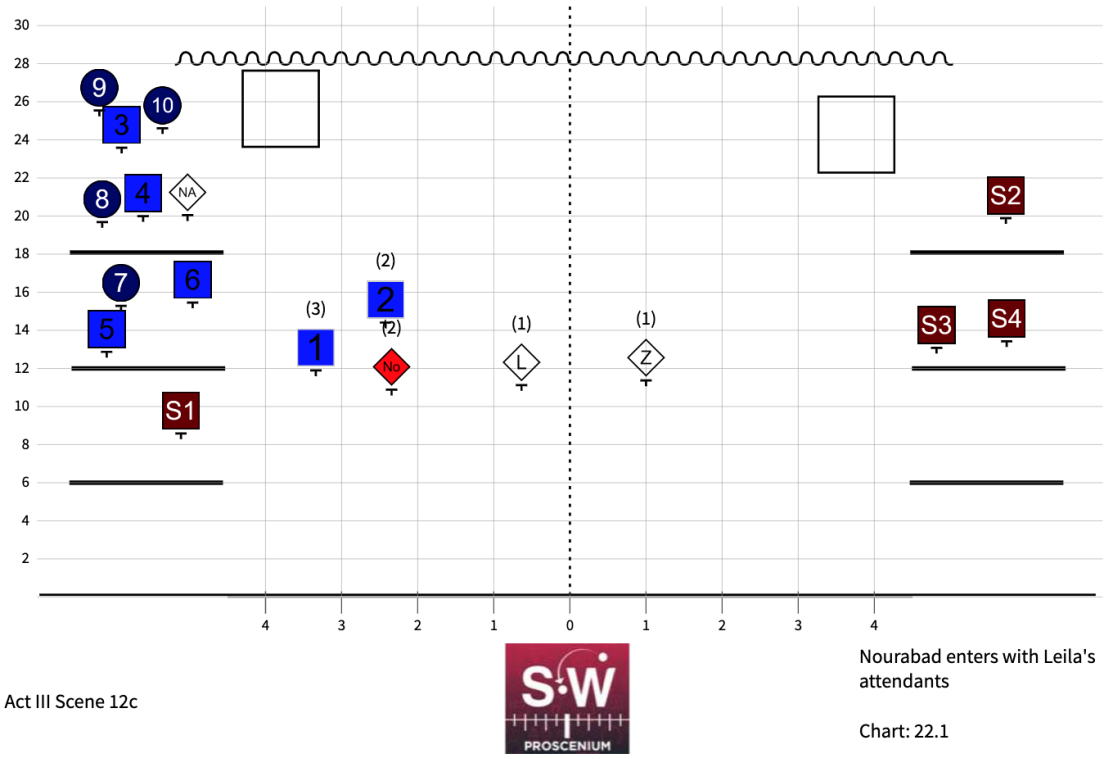
Chart: 20.1



Leila and Zurga duo (No dancers)

Act III Scene 12b

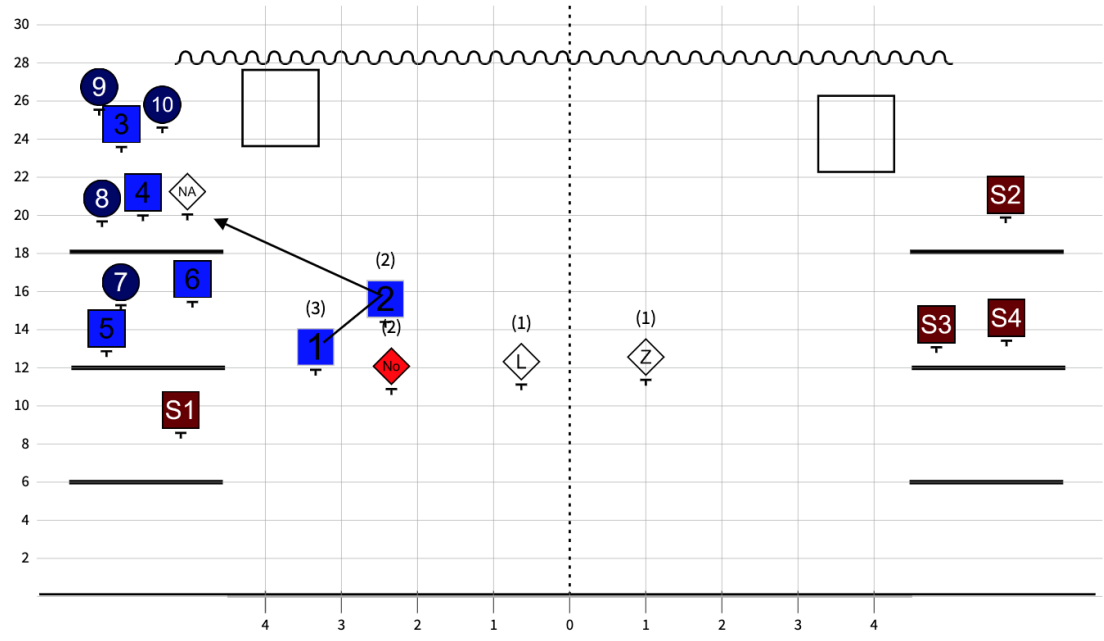
Chart: 21.1



Act III Scene 12c

Nourabad enters with Leila's attendants

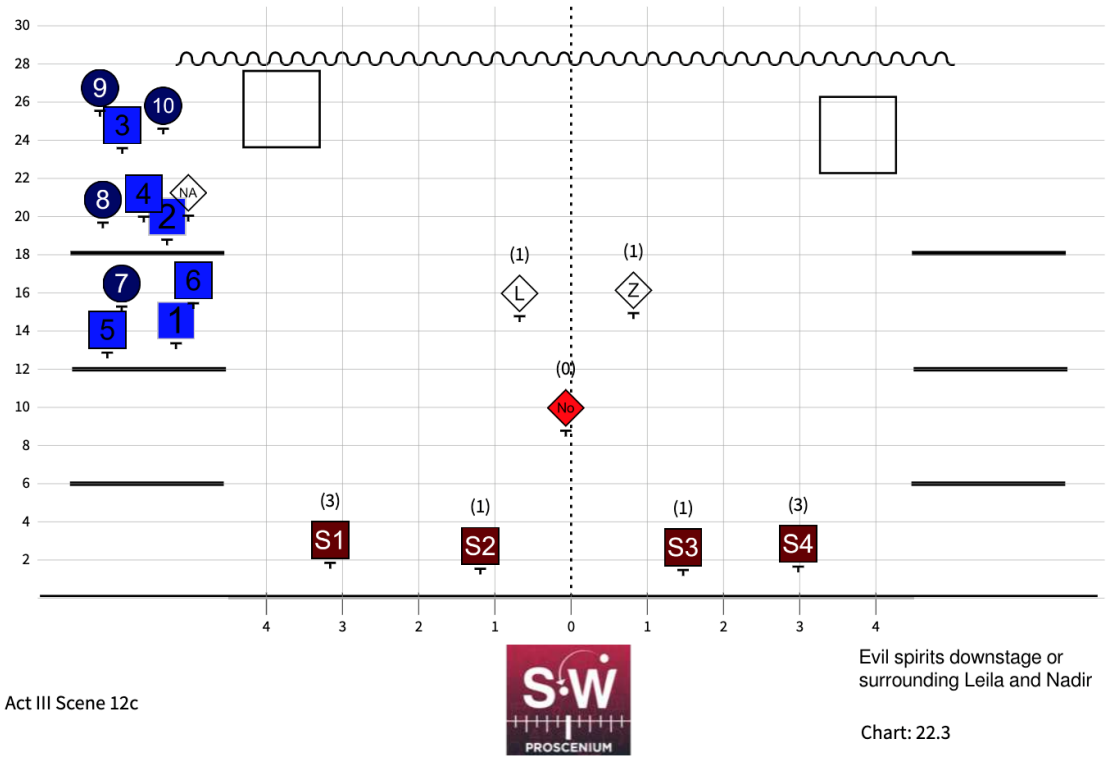
Chart: 22.1



Act III Scene 12c

Leila gives attendant 1 the necklace and they exit

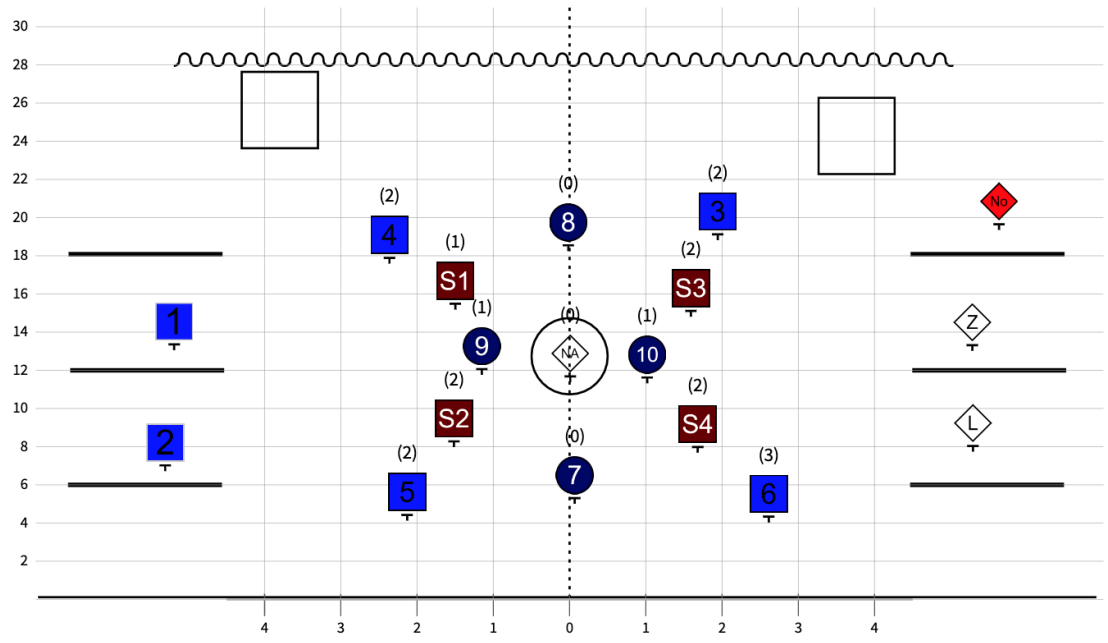
Chart: 22.2



Act III Scene 12c

Evil spirits downstage or surrounding Leila and Nadir

Chart: 22.3

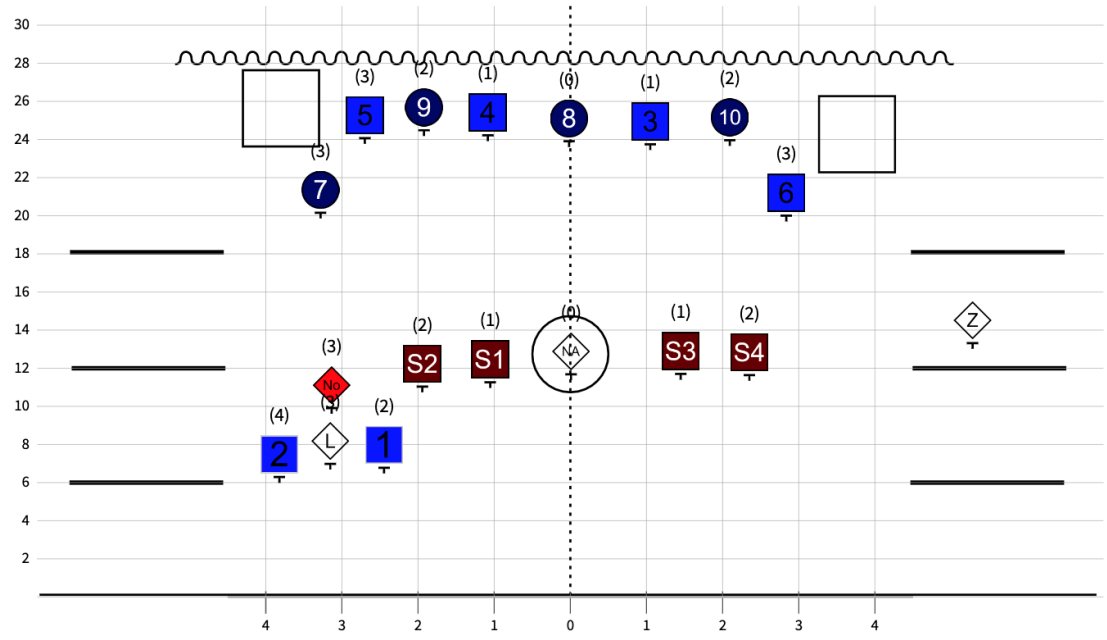


Act III Scene 13

S:W PROSCENIUM

Villagers and Evil Spirits dance around Nadir who is tied to a pyre (cut in recording at reh. 68)

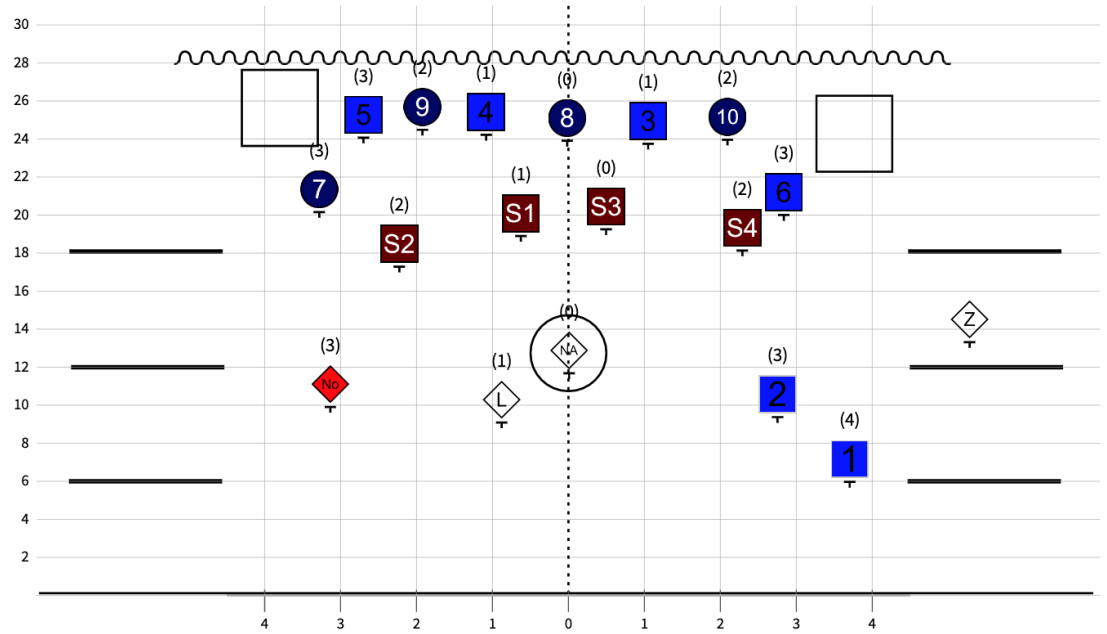
Chart: 23.1



Act III Scene 14a

Leila & Nourabad enter with two attendants with evil spirits in background

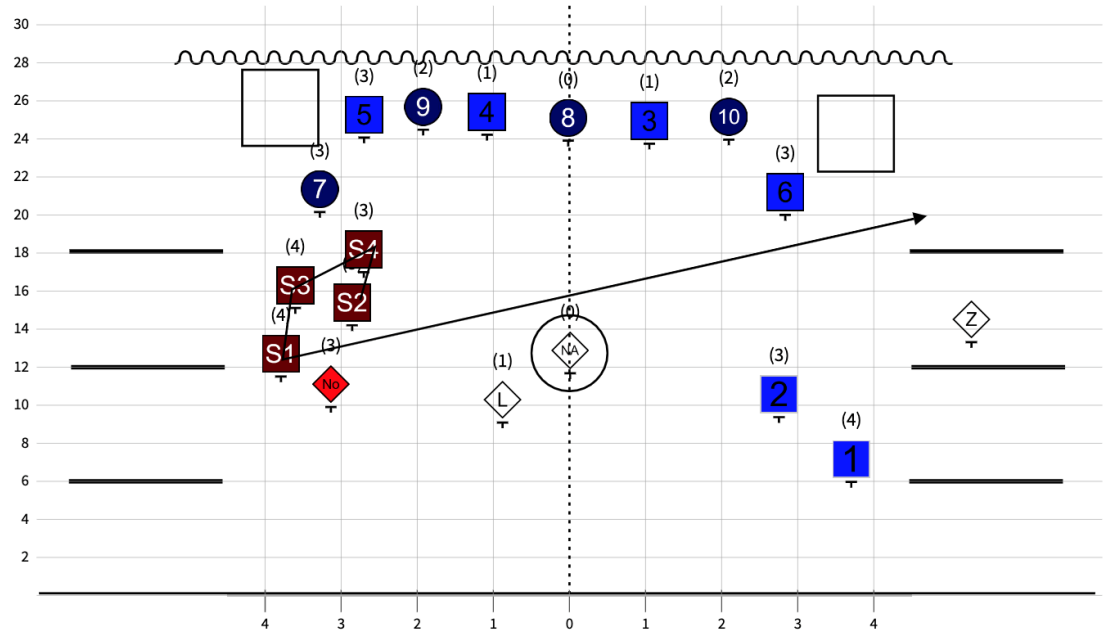
Chart: 24.1



Act III Scene 14b

Leila and Nadir sing to eachother (evil spirits lurk in the back with with angrey mob)

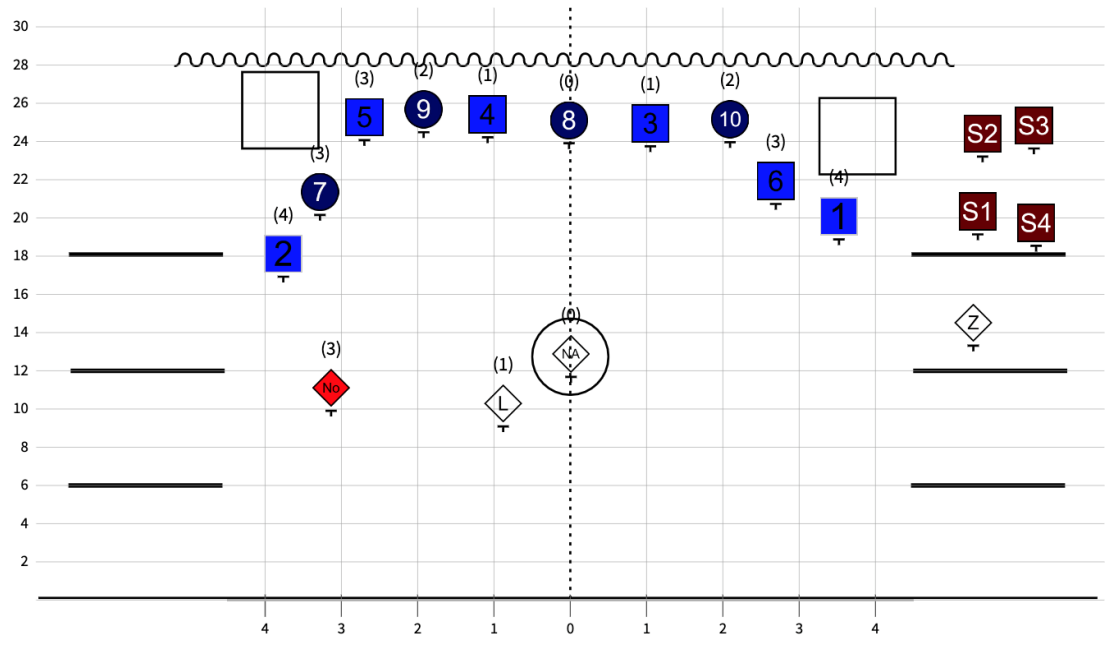
Chart: 25.1



Act III Scene 14b

As they sing the Evil Spirits surround Nourabad and exit

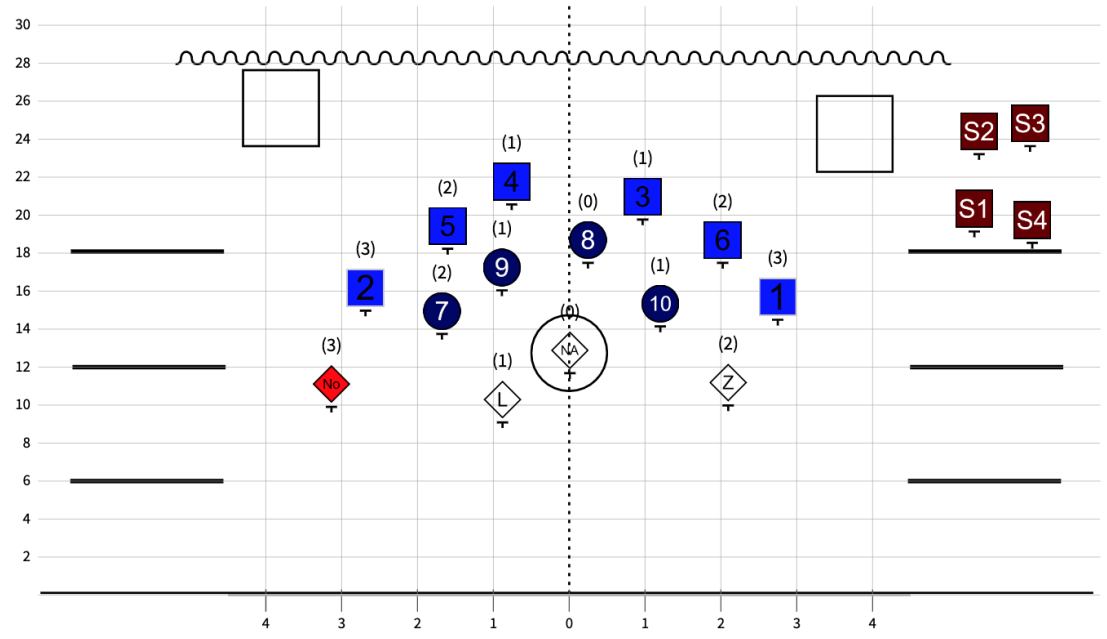
Chart: 25.2



Nourabad and chorus

Act III Scene 15

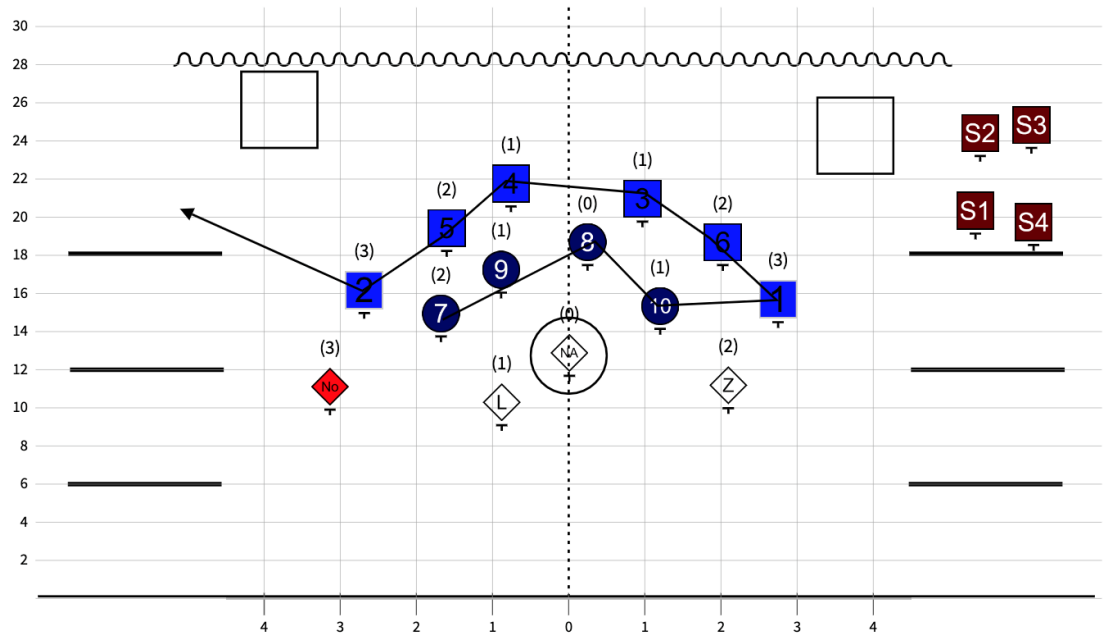
Chart: 26.1



Act III Scene 15

Zurga enters just as they start to raise their daggers at Nadir

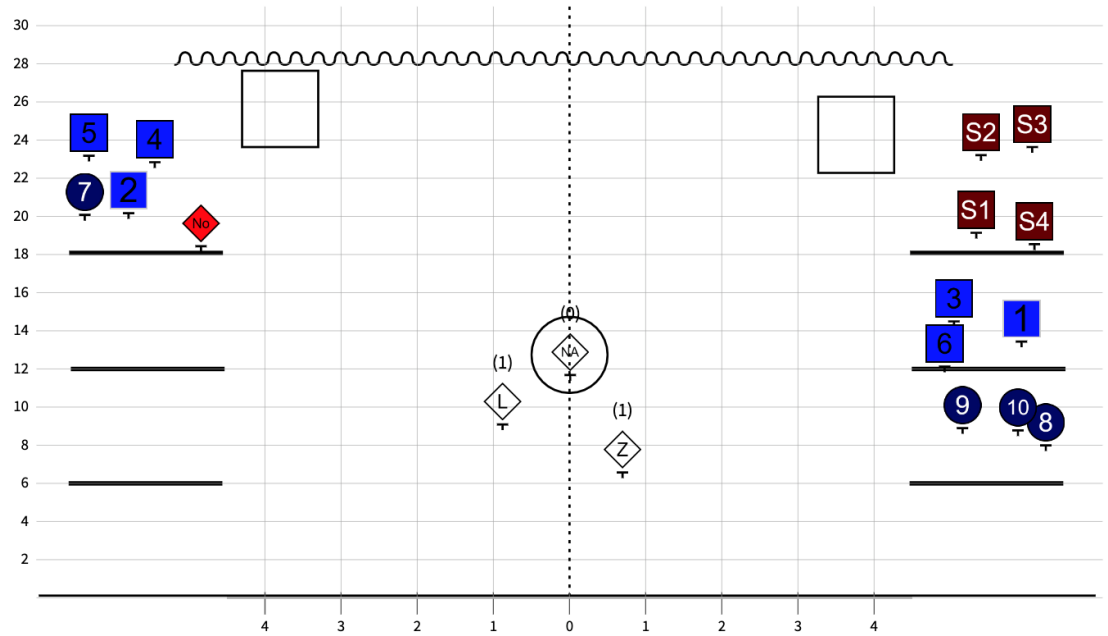
Chart: 26.2



Act III Scene 15

Chorus flees after they learn their village has been burned

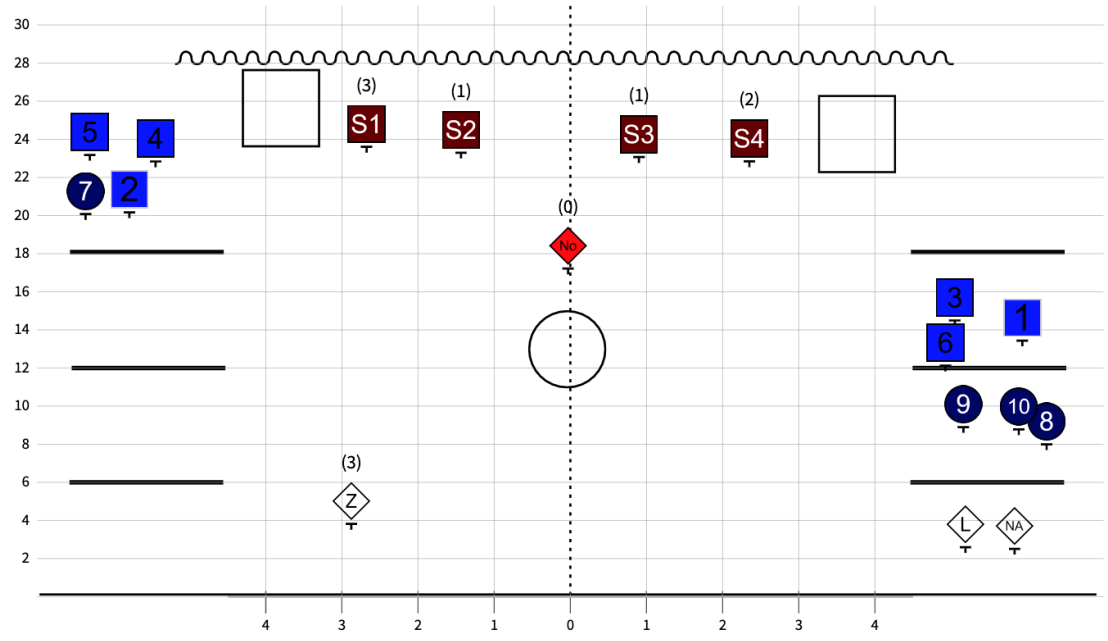
Chart: 26.3



Act III Scene 15

Villagers have fled Leila, Nadir, and Zurga alone on stage

Chart: 26.4



Act III Scene 15

Final Tablou of Nourabad and evil spirits with Zurga onstage

Chart: 26.5

Appendix B: Outline *The Pearl Fishers* Version 2

Pearl Fishers notes on Dancers On and OFF and Recording/Live
Live: Prelude (Dance?)
Record: Introduction (cut [11]-[18]) **(Dance enter top pg. 3)**
Live: recit at [23]
Record: 2 before [24] to [28]. (Zurga is recorded at 26) (**Dance exit at [28] p 21)**
Live: starting at [28]. Zurga sings chorus part: "Mais qui vient…le coureur des bois" (no chorus)
at 34, Nadir and Zurga sing the chorus parts (no chorus)
Recorded: at [38] **(Dance enter)**
No. 2: Live. **(Dance exit p 33 before No. 2)**
Recit No. 3: Live
At [66]: Recorded **(Enter Dance p 59)**
At [75]: Live **(Exit Dance p 63 before [75])**
At [81]: only Nourabad sings "Malheur à toi!" (no chorus)
At 87: Recorded **(Enter Dance at [87]. At [90] ceremony with Leila and Dancers. Exit before No. 4))**
No. 4: Live
No. 5: Live. Instruments only for "Le ciel et bleu" (no chorus) **(Dancers in background?)**
At [100]: Live. Instruments play chorus part under aria "O Dieu Brahma" (no chorus)
(Dance tableau at Act curtain)
Act II
At [2]: Recorded **(Dance on p 99)**
At [6]: Live **(Dance exit)**
Cut [19] to No. 7
No. 7, 8, 9, 10: Live
At [62]: Recorded **(Enter Dance p 140)**
At [73]: Live
At [78] Only Nourabad sings "Ah, Nadir! O trahison!"
Cut [79] to [93]
At [93]: Live
Only Nourabad sings at m302 "La mort" and at [95] "Qu'il partent donc?" (no chorus)
At [100]: Recorded to end of Act. At m382, Nourabad mime the line "Ah! La foudre…"
(Enter Dance p 176, at [100], to Tableau at Act curtain)
Act III
No. 11 and 12: Live **(Attendants, but no Dance)**
No. 13: Recorded. Cut [68] to [78] **(Dance enter p 221)**
No. 14: Live. Instruments only at m15, and [85] to end. (no chorus) **(Dance remain in tableau upstage)**
No. 15: Live, no chorus **(Dance exit p 252 at [94]. Spirits reenter for final threatening tableau p 258 at [100])**[212]

[212] William Ferrara, email to author, "Pearl Fishers Notes on Dancers On Off and Recording/Live, September 1, 2020.

Appendix C: Outline: *The Pearl Fishers* Version 3

Pearl Fishers Narration Script with Blocking

The Pearl Fishers *(Les Pêcheurs de Perles) by* Georges Bizet
Libretto by Michel Carré and Eugène Cormon

Cast

Singers (on stage)
Zurga, chieftain of the pearl fishers
Nadir, his friend
Leïla, priestess of Brahma

Dancers (on screen)
The Spirits of the Sea, Wind, Earth, and Fire
The Village Maidens
Leïla's Avatar
Leïla's Attendants
Nourabad, an old priest

Narrator

Blocking

I envision four spots for the singers, equally spaced across the front of the stage. I've numbered these 1 through four, starting with the spot downstage right. Singers should enter and exit from the wing closest to their spot: enter stage right to spots 1 and 2; enter stage left spots 3 and 4.

Narration Script with some Cues and Blocking

(Title slide)

Narrator
(before the music) This is a story of youthful love, and of an enduring friendship; it is a story of superstition and violence, but also of forgiveness and faith.

Prelude (dance with recorded music) page 1-2

ACT I

Narrator
(before No. 1) Long ago, on an island lost in the southern seas, there lived a band of fishermen. There, at daybreak, the young men would dive from high cliffs into the waves

to bring forth corals and pearls of great beauty. At sunset the maidens would dance, driving away the elemental spirits who threaten them: the spirits of the wind and sea, and the spirits of the earth and fire.

No. 1 Introduction (dance with recorded music) p3-15

(Dance ends. Applause. Scenic slide while Zurga and Nadir enter in darkness)
Nadir enters to spot 2; Zurga to spot 3

Narrator

(before No. 2) Today is a day of celebration. Zurga, the village chieftain, has commanded a feast to welcome home his boyhood friend, Nadir. As the two men drink and reminisce about their youth, they share a sacred memory: how once, from within the ancient temple, there appeared a mystical vision—a priestess with whom they both fell in love. Consumed by jealous passion they parted in anger. But now, after many years, they vow not to let the past destroy their bond of friendship.

No. 2 Duet Nadir and Zurga: *Au fond du temple saint* (live music)
Recitative p37 at [46] "Zurga…" to p39, then skip to appendix, p259-269

(Dancer vision of Leïla appears p259m12, disappears p265m57)

(Duet ends. Applause. Singers exit to nearest wing)

No. 3 (dance with recorded music) beginning p58 at [66] to p63 at [75]

Narrator

(Narration over music p58 at {66]) Now a sail is sighted on the horizon. Nourabad, the high priest, leads the villagers to the shore to greet the boat. Standing in the prow is a mysterious woman, her face covered by a shining veil. As she disembarks with her attendants, the people kneel in awe. None may see her, none may touch her, for she is the virgin priestess of Brahma, anointed to bless and protect the pearl fishers. It is she who will calm the sea with her prayers and protect the divers from the elemental spirits of creation.

(Leila and Zurga enter pg 63 at [74]. Dance and recording end at [75])
Liela enter to spot 3; Zurga to spot 4 (use wings 1 and 2 stage left to keep singers separated)

Scene 3C The Oath. Zurga and Leila (live music) Pg. 63 at [75] to p72 at [87]
(Recording resumes precisely at [87], and continues to end of scene, p75)

(Singers Exit p74 at [90] to separate wings stage left)

Narrator

(Narration over music p74 at [90]) One by one the villagers go to the priestess for a blessing. Nadir watches from a distance. (softly) Something about the sound of her voice, her gestures as she prays…could it be? Her veil slips for a moment… (whispered) Yes! It is Leila! But Zurga must not know…That night long ago, Nadir secretly returned to the temple. The lovers found each other in the perfumed night. Now she is here. Once again, her voice haunts Nadir with memories of love.

(Enter singer Nadir p75 at [91]) ***Nadir to Spot 1***

No. 4 Romance, Nadir (live music) ***Je crois entendre encore*** **p76-81**

(Dancer vision of Leïla appears p78 at [94], disappears p81 m110. Live music must coordinate with recorded dancer. Lights fade as Nadir exits. Applause)

No. 5 (dance with recorded music) p82-86 m95

(Enter Leïla p83 at [100])
Leila to spot 3

Narrator

(Narration over music p83 at [102]) At twilight, the high priest leads Leïla to a cliff high above the sea.

(p86 at [109]) Spirits of the sea! Spirits of the sky! Hear her prayer!

No. 5b ***O Dieu Brahma,*** **Leila (live music) p86-98** *(Chorus does not sing)*

(Nadir enters p91 at [116]) ***Nadir to spot 1***

(Lights fade p98 at [24] as Leïla and Nadir exit)

INTERMISSION

Act II

No. 6 (dance with recorded music) p99 to 104 at [6]

(Leila enters p102 at [4]) ***Liela to spot 3***

Narrator

(before music No. 7, p 114) Later that evening, in the ruins of the ancient temple, Leïla tries to pray, but cannot. Her thoughts return to that night, years ago. She remembers Nadir and the sweet embrace of his love.

No. 7 Cavatine, Leila: ***Comme autrefois*** **(live music) p114-121**

(Applause. Leïla remains on stage.)

Narrator

(before No. 8, p122) Leila knows that the penalty for breaking her vow of chastity is death—for her, and for her lover. But now, as she hears Nadir's voice in the distance, she surrenders to her feelings.

No. 8 Chanson, *De mon amie fleur en dormie,* Nadir (live music) p122-124

(Nadir sings Chanson from offstage, p122-124, then enters at [35])
Nadir to spot 2

No. 9 Duo Leila and Nadir (live music) p124-137

(Applause. Nadir and Leila remain.)

No. 10 Beginning of Finale p138 to p139 at [60] (live music)

Narrator

(*Narration over piano, p139 m18*) Nourabad discovers the couple and summons an angry mob.

(narration over recorded music at [60]) The elemental spirits lash out in anger; a violent storm engulfs the island. *(narration ends at recording [61])*

(Exit Leila and Nadir p140)
Note: Both Liela and Nadir exit stage right

No 10 Finale of Act II (dance with recorded music)
p139 at [60] to p155 at [82]. Cut to p176 at [100] to end of the act, p188

(No intermission between Acts II and III)

ACT III, 1st Tableau

Entr'acte No. 11, (recorded music) p189 to 190 at [5]
Zurga to spot 4, p 190 at [3]

Narrator

(over music, p190 m 37) Zurga has condemned the lovers to death. Alone, he laments his friend's betrayal.

No. 11 Aria Zurga : *O Nadir, tendre ami* (live music) p190 at [5] to 196)

(Applause. Zurga remains on stage.

Narrator

(p196 before No. 12) Leila comes to Zurga's hut to plead for Nadir's life. But Zurga is consumed by the fire of jealous passion. If Leia will not love him, then Nadir must die.

(Enter Leila p196 at No. 12)
Liela to spot 2, Zurga cross from spot 4 to spot 3

No. 12 Duet Leila and Zurga (live music) p196 to 217

(*After the duet, Zurga and Leila exit)*

ACT III, 2nd Tableau

No. 13 (dance with recorded music) p221 to p228 at [68], then cut to p237 at [78]

Narrator

(p221 m5) Liela escapes Zurga's embraces and runs to join Nadir at the place of execution. The lovers are lashed together at the stake. The sun rises blood-red as the community celebrates in a drunken orgy of violence.

(Enter Leila and Nadir p237 at [78])
Leila to spot 2; Nadir to spot 1

No. 14 Finale: Scène and Duo, Leila, Nadir: *O lumiere sainte* (live music) p239 at [81] to 249

(Enter Zurga, p248 at [90]. Cut p250)
Zurga to spot 3

No 15 Finale: Leila, Nadir, Zurga. (live music) p251 at [91] to p255 at [98]

Recorded music p255 at [98] to end

Narrator

(over recording p255 after [98]) Zurga slashes the ropes and sets the couple free. The bonds of love and friendship are stronger than the chains of jealousy and hate.

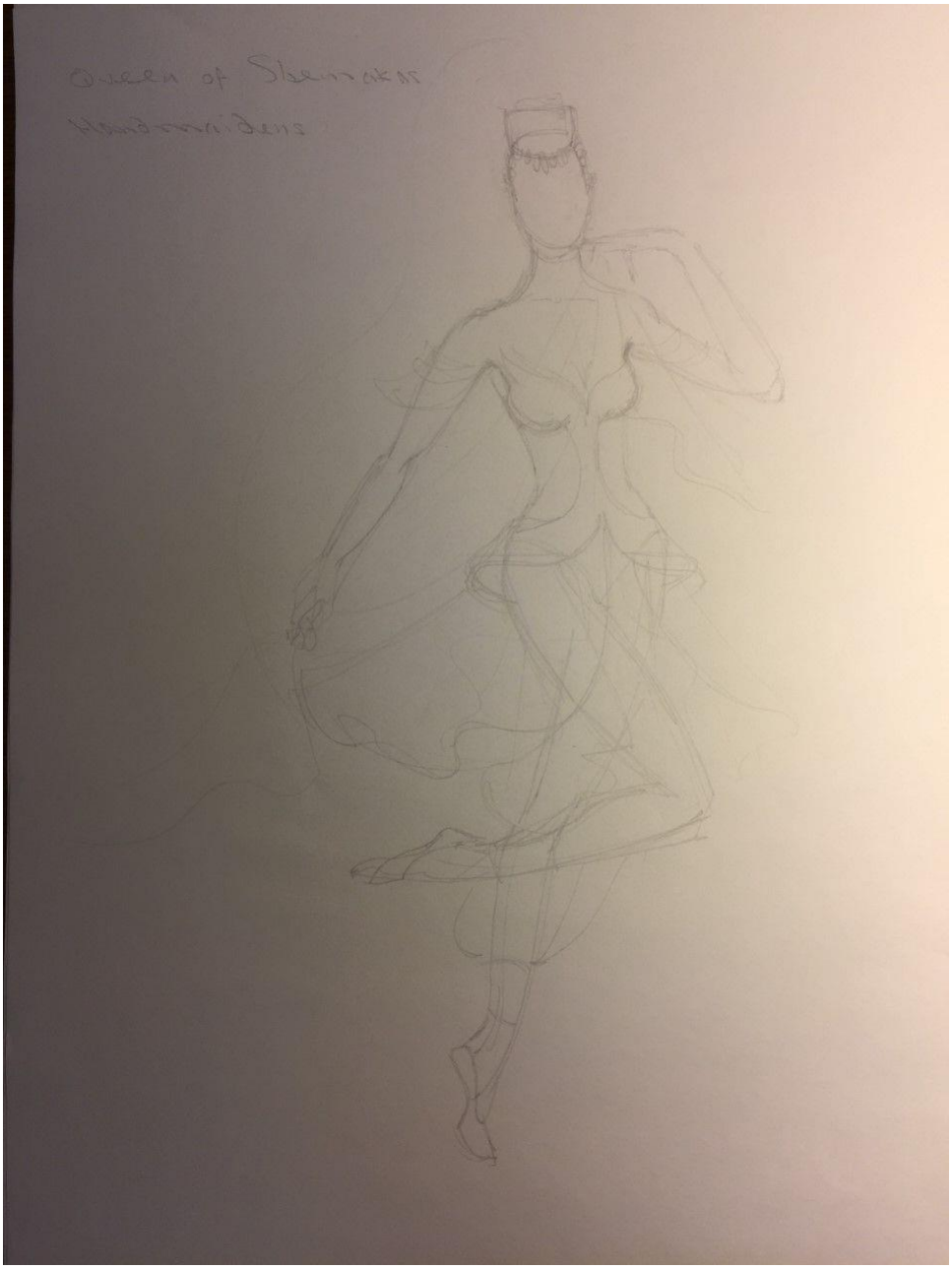
(p256 at [99]] Light fades on Leia and Nadir. Zurga, in the center spotlight, turns upstage to the screen, menaced by the Spirits)

END OF OPERA[213]

[213] William Ferrara, email to Pearl Fishers Cast and Crew, "Narration Pearl Fishers with Blocking," January 26, 2021.

Appendix D: Costume Designs *The Golden Cockerel* and *The Pearl Fishers*[214]

The Golden Cockerel: Handmaidens & Queen's Mirror Image

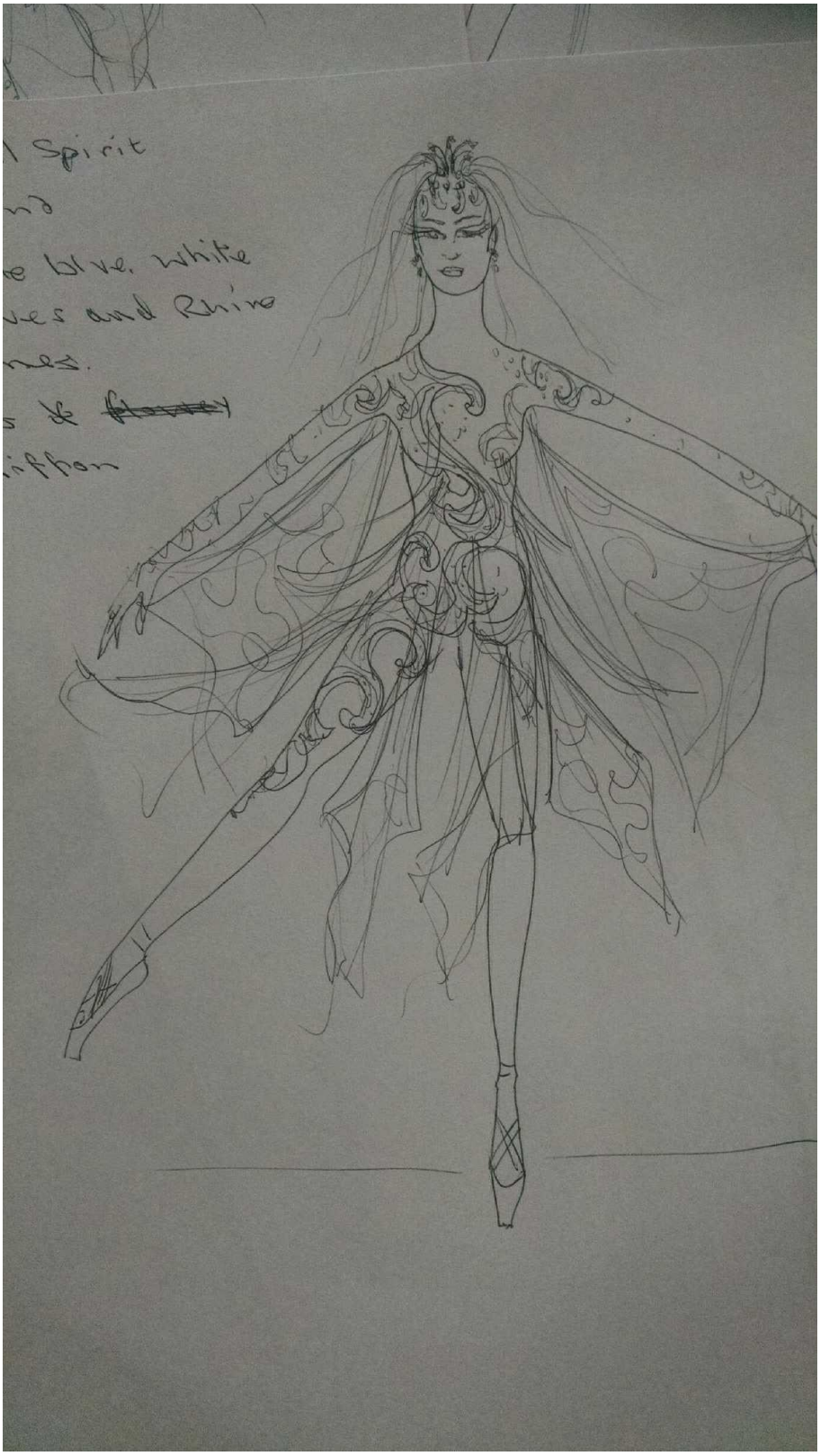


[214] Costume sketches and designs by Lloyd Cracknell.

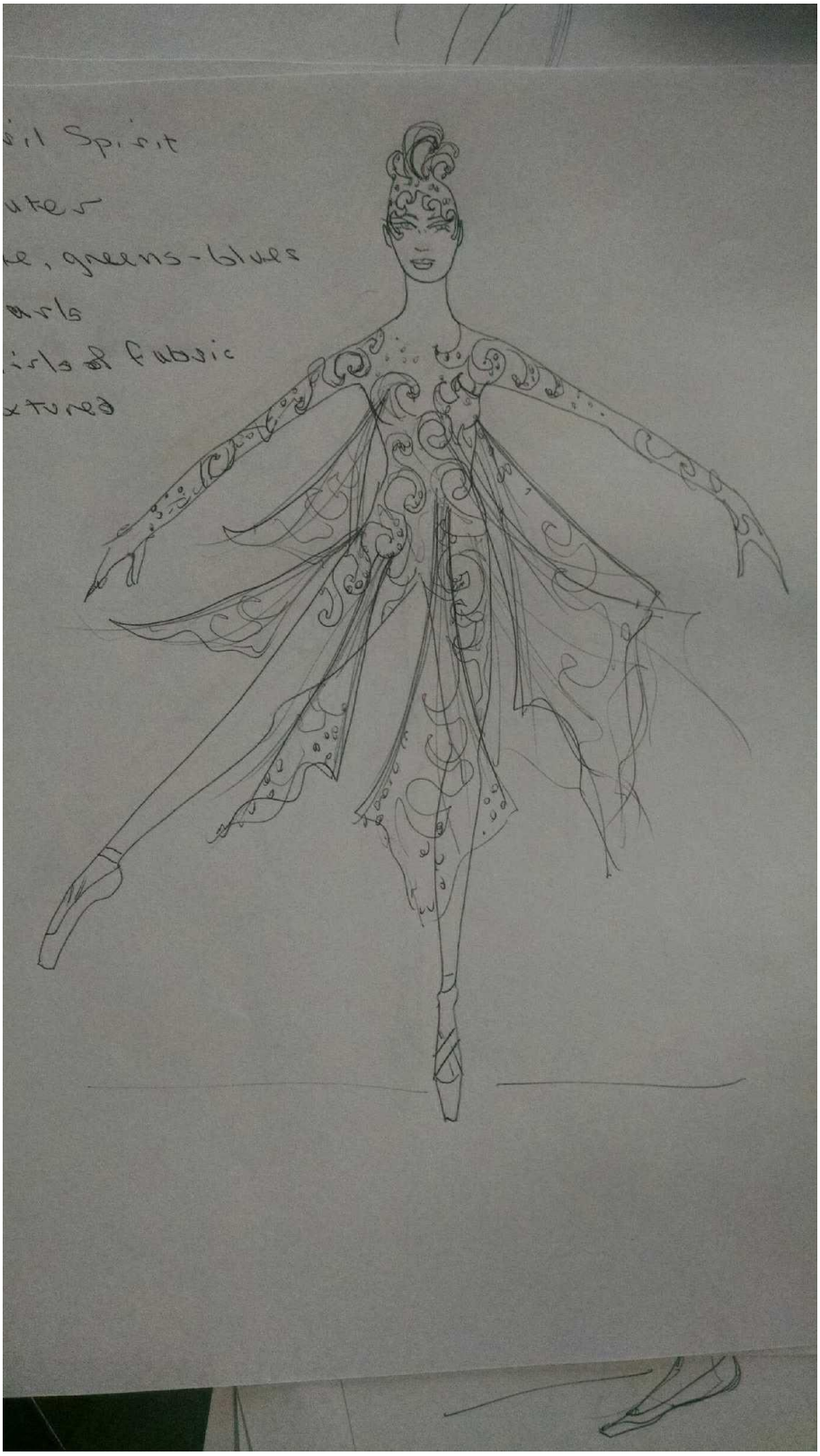
The Pearl Fishers Earth Spirit



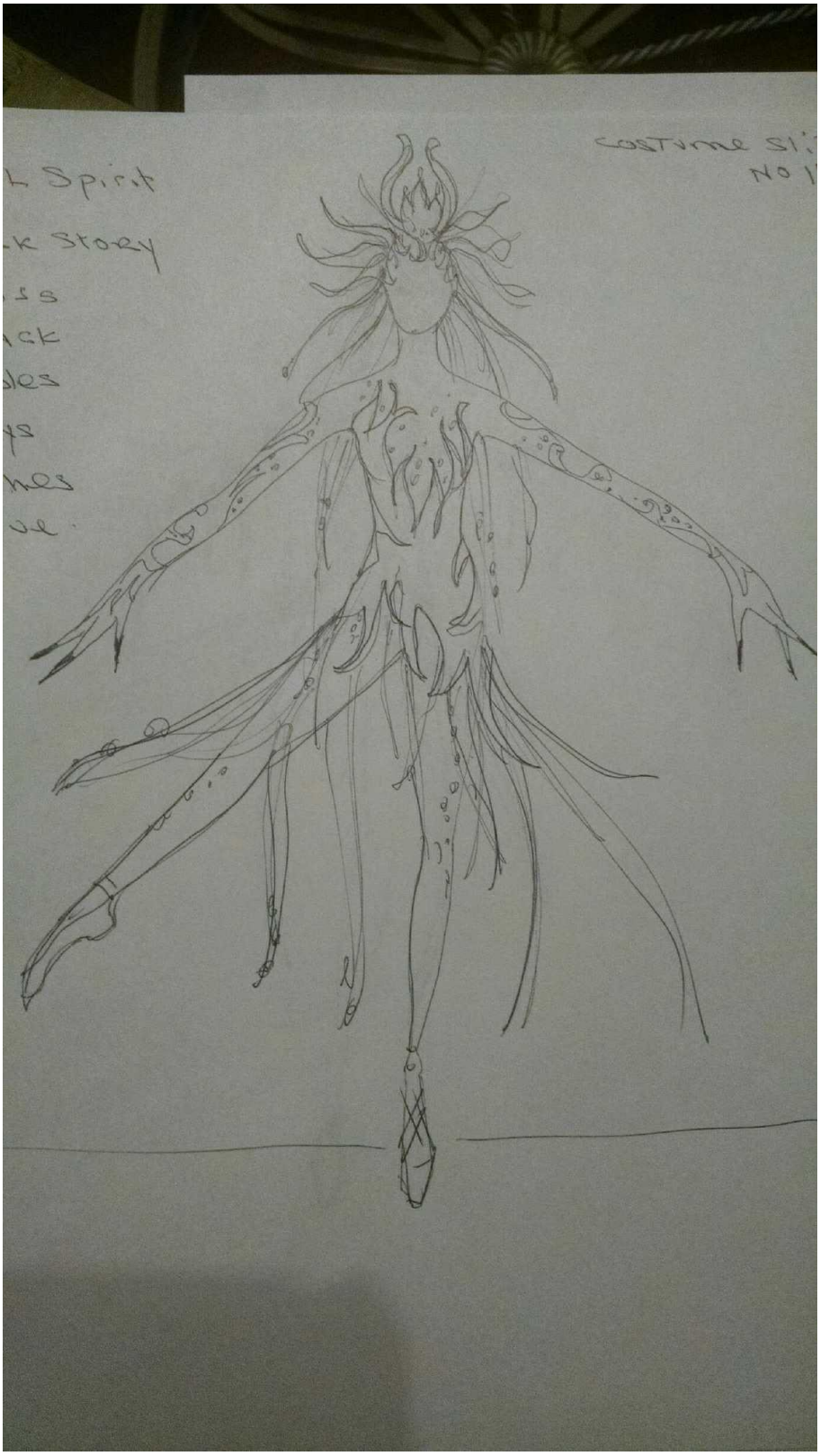
The Pearl Fishers Wind Spirit



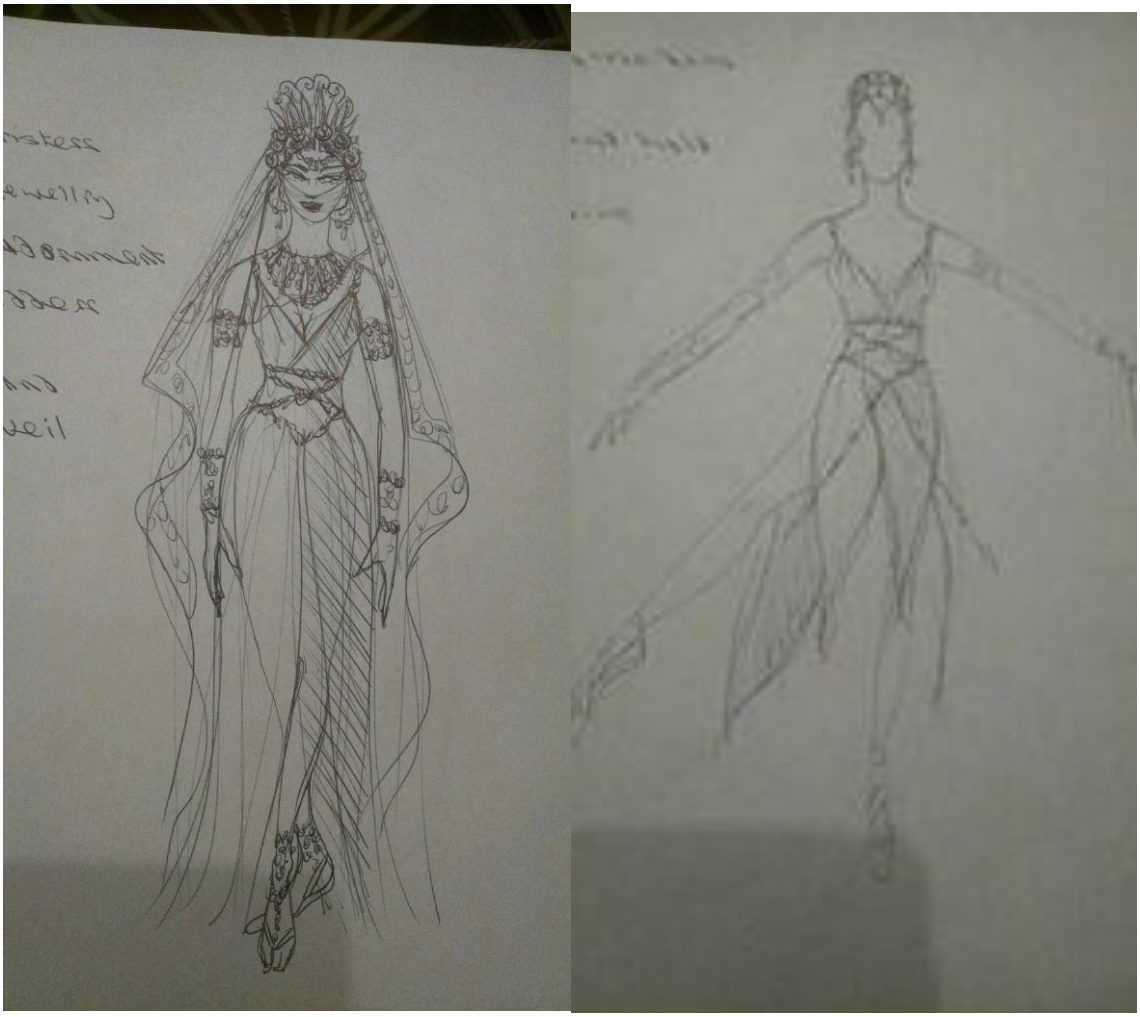
The Pearl Fishers Water Spirit



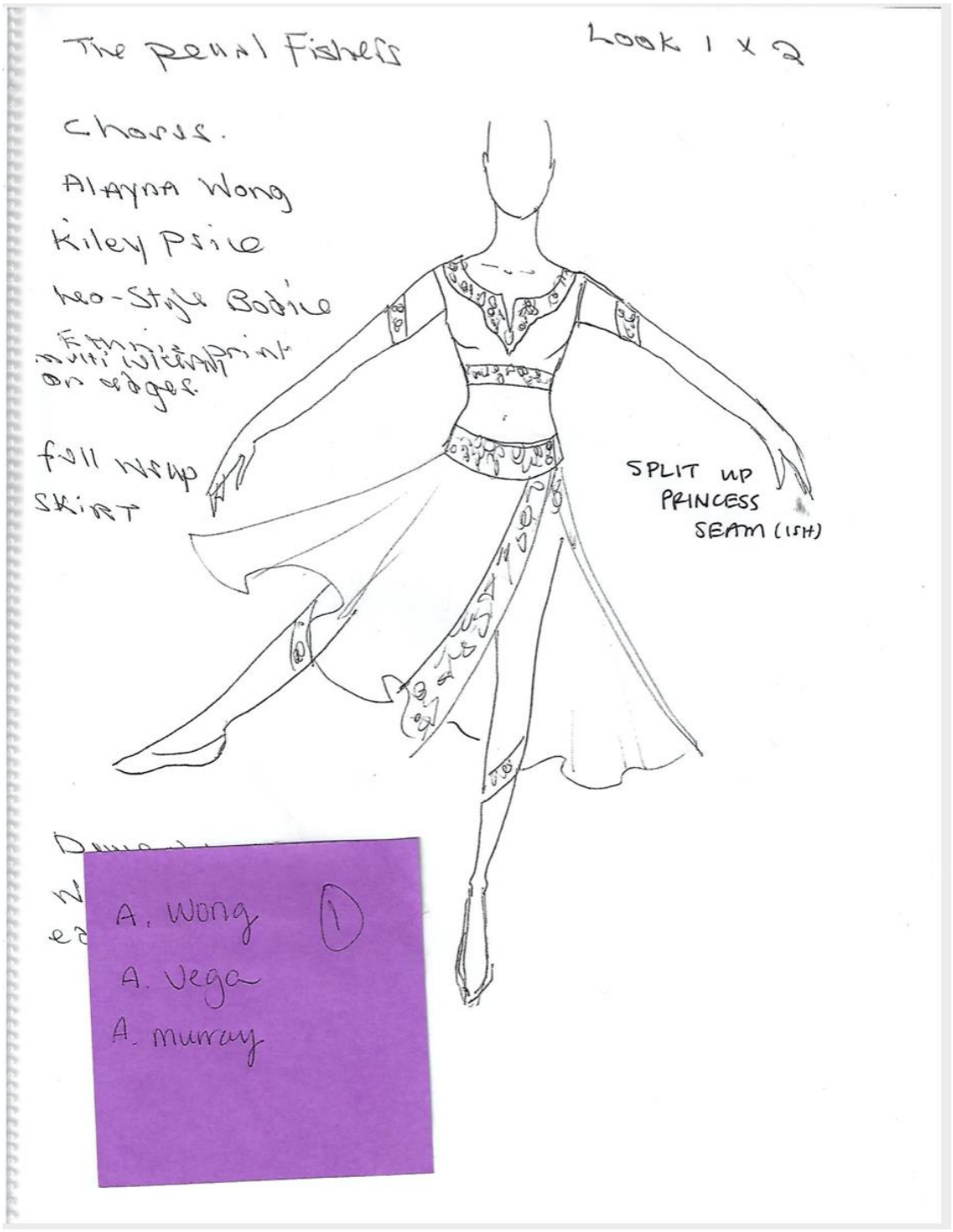
The Pearl Fishers: Fire Spirit

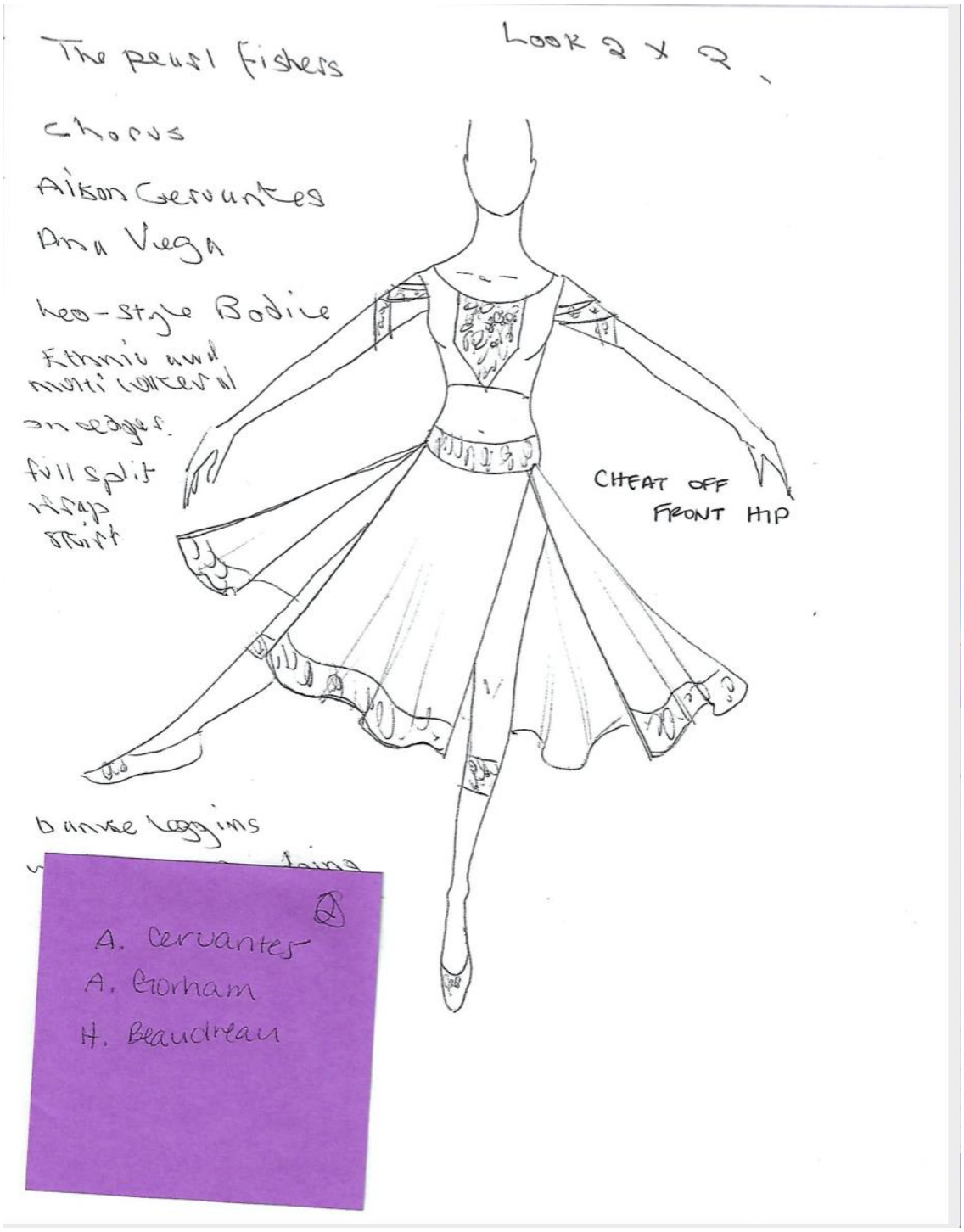


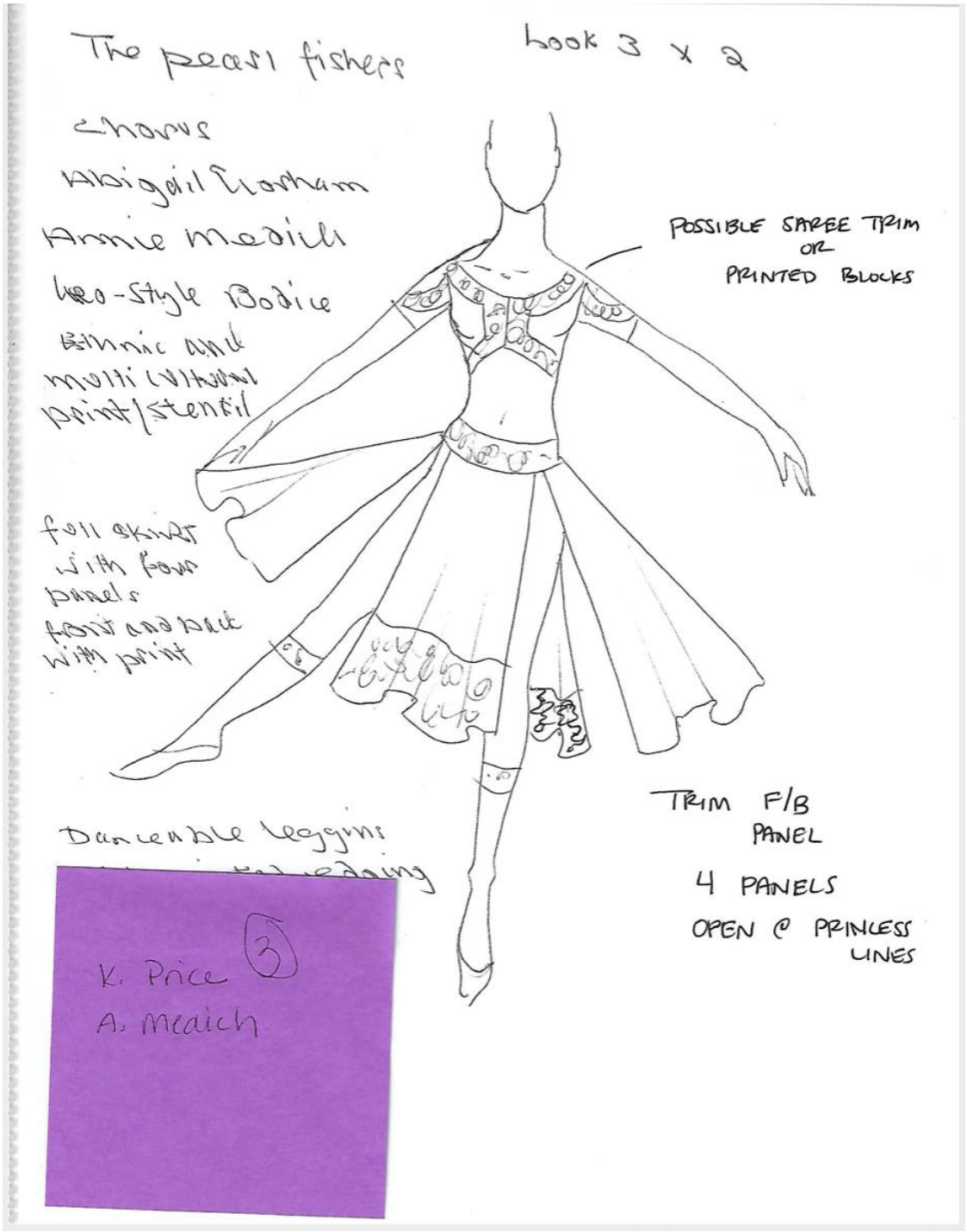
The Pearl Fishers: Leila & Attendants



The Pearl Fishers: Village Maidens




The Pearl Fishers
Look 2 x 2.
Chorus
Aikon Cervantes
Ana Vega
Neo-style Bodice
Ethnic and
multi colored
on edges.
full split
Wrap
Print
CHEAT OFF
FRONT HIP
Dance Leggins
A. Cervantes
A. Gorham
H. Beaudreau


The pearl fishers
look 3 x 2
chorus
Abigail Gorham
Annie Medili
Neo-Style Bodice
Ethnic and multi cultural print/stencil
full skirt with four panels front and back with print
Dancable leggins
POSSIBLE SAREE TRIM OR PRINTED BLOCKS
TRIM F/B PANEL
4 PANELS
OPEN @ PRINCESS LINES
K. Price
A. Meaich
3


~~Iyriga~~ NOURABAD
Village chief
Slightly more ornate feathers Headdress
Cloak.
Animal Symbols.
SHIRT IS A POTENTIAL
WRAP PANTS

Appendix E: Video Links to *The Golden Cockerel* and *The Pearl Fishers*

The Golden Cockerel Act I: https://youtu.be/VvYhLTg-Ogc

The Golden Cockerel Act II: https://youtu.be/0NCkqpV-olk

The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined) Full Production: https://youtu.be/r7Te1QD4Rcc

The Pearl Fishers (Reimagined) Dance Scenes:
https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLyeSSqVjO6cJYT8CE6mSiyjfJZoY-z0fK

The Pearl Fisher's (Reimagined) program:

