

AS ONE

A chamber opera for two singers and string quartet

Music and Concept: Laura Kaminsky

Libretto: Mark Campbell and Kimberly Reed

Commissioned and developed by American Opera Projects

LIBRETTO

4/20/2015

The logo for Bill Holab Music features a stylized musical staff with a treble clef on the left. The text "Bill Holab Music" is written in a flowing, cursive script that begins with a large, decorative flourish that overlaps the staff.

Commissioned and developed by American Opera Projects. *As ONE* received generous funding from OPERA America's Opera Discovery Grants for Female Composers Program, supported by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo, the New York State Legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Art Works, Dr. Coco Lazaroff, Lynn Loacker and Judith O. Rubin. *As ONE's* premiere production is supported by an AOP 2013-14 residency, awarded by the BAM/DeVos Institute of Arts Management at the Kennedy Center Professional Development Program (PDP).

Synopsis	i
Libretto	ii

Part I

Introduction	1
Paper route	5
Cursive	21
Sex ed	29
Entire of itself.....	41
Perfect boy.....	56
To know	66

Part II

Two cities	82
Three words.....	94
Close.....	101
Home for the holidays.....	112
A christmas story.....	117
Dear son.....	124
Out of nowhere	127
I go on to... ..	148

Part III

Norway	158
--------------	-----

As One

Synopsis

As One is a chamber opera in which two voices—Hannah after (mezzo-soprano) and Hannah before (baritone)—share the part of a sole transgender protagonist. Fifteen songs comprise the three-part narrative; with empathy and humor, they trace Hannah’s experiences from her youth in a small town to her college years on the West Coast, and finally to Norway where she is surprised at what she learns about herself.

Part I

In “Paper route,” Hannah rides around her suburban neighborhood delivering newspapers and revels in her more feminine impulses. Her youthful challenges in conforming to gender norms are related in “Cursive,” “Sex ed,” “Entire of itself” and “Perfect boy”—in such disparate subjects as handwriting, sex, a John Donne poem, and exemplary male behavior. However, in “To know,” she discovers that she is not alone in the world and seeks understanding about herself at a local library.

Part II

During her college years, Hannah struggles with her bifurcated existence in “Two cities,” but also encounters the joy of being perceived as she wishes in “Three words.” In “Close,” she has made the decision to undergo hormone therapy and briefly suffers its vertiginous effects before feeling at one with her own body. “Home for the holidays,” “A christmas story” and “Dear son” all occur around the Christmas season and relate Hannah’s growing distance to her family and her past, which is countered by an immediate connection with a stranger in a local café. In “Out of nowhere,” Hannah escapes a harrowing assault that prompts her to find a link to the larger trans community and end her self-imposed alienation. Reacting to the conflicting voices in her head, she finally resolves to escape in the fragment, “I go on to...”

Part III

“Norway.” In this extended aria, Hannah finds, in Nature, solitude, and self-reflection, the simple yet surprising equation that will help her achieve happiness.

[The quartet is onstage when the audience enters. The violist is in a separate space from the rest of the quartet, either offstage or delineated by lighting and/or placement. After tuning their instruments, the introduction begins. At Measure 18 in the music, the violist joins the rest of the quartet. Toward the end of the introduction, both Hannah before and Hannah after appear onstage.]

PART I.

Paper route

Hannah before:

Like every other boy
I have a paper route.
And like every good boy
I wake each morning,
Ride my bike around,
With my jacket on,
And enjoy the “thumph”
Of a well-aimed paper as it lands.

However, unlike every other boy,
Unlike every other boy,
I sometimes wake extra early,
While everyone’s asleep,
Ride my bike around
With my jacket on
And a blouse underneath.

(The blouse I stole
From a neighbor’s clothesline.
It isn’t much,
But fits my twelve-year-old frame...)

Hannah before/Hannah after:

And
Just
Feels
So right.

Hannah before:

And the papers still get delivered.
The papers still get delivered.

I’m home.
Before anyone sees me,
Before anyone wakes up,
I remove the blouse
And hide it where it
Never will be found.
I button up a thick, flannel shirt

Put my jacket back on
And get ready for school.
One day I’m braver
And tuck two rolled up socks
Inside the darts of the blouse.

What could be a breast
Is gently grazed
By my throwing arm.

Other girls are
Getting theirs, too.

Hannah before/Hannah after:

It all just feels so right.
It all just feels so right.

Cursive

Hannah after:

Controlled...
Constrained...
It cannot betray me.
My teachers,
My classmates,
My family,
Cannot know.

Hannah before:

A firm grip,
A taut wrist,
A watchful eye,
Maintain
A controlled...
Constrained...
Constricted...
Cursive.
As it should be.

Hannah after:

I will not repeat
My mistake.
The one I made
In the second grade.
For one assignment,
I wrote like my cousin Annie.

I let the pen guide me,
My writing like a girl’s.
Generous loops,
Graceful swirls,
Expansive ascenders,
Crosses with curls.

When I get the paper back
From the teacher
She has ordered me to redo it,
And written in big red letters:

Hannah before/Hannah after:

“This is not
What you were taught.”

Hannah before:

A firm grip,
A taut wrist,
A watchful eye.
Controlled...
Constrained...
Constricted...
Confined.

Sex ed

Hannah after:

The boys stand in one line...

Hannah before:

The girls in another.
The boys go to one room...

Hannah after:

The girls to another.
The boys hear one teacher...

Hannah before:

The girls hear another.

Hannah before/Hannah after:

We have been separated,
By gender,
To learn about...
Sex.

Hannah before:

[Impersonating an instructor.]

“In the animal kingdom,
There are only two genders:
Male and female.
These two genders
Have very distinct differences
And these become most apparent
During puberty...”

Hannah after:

And so on,
Through...

Hannah before:

Testosterone,
Voice deepening,
Acne,
Facial hair,
Masturbation,

Hannah after:

And the rest.

Hannah before:

All delivered in a commanding
But detached voice
Without looking anyone in the eye.

Most of the boys know these things.
Most of the boys stifle their laughter.

Hannah after:

But this boy only wants to be in
The other room.

Entire of itself

[Late in the introduction of this song, Hannah before, Hannah after, the conductor and members of the quartet mechanically recite the poem “No Man Is an Island” by John Donne, as if they are in a Junior High School classroom.]

Hannah before, Hannah after, Conductor, Quartet:

“No man is an island;
Entire of itself
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main;
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less...”

Hannah before:

In junior high, we are assigned
“No Man Is An Island”
By John Donne.

We read the poem,
Together,
Then discuss.

[Hannah before, Hannah after, the conductor, and members of the quartet continue the recitation of the Donne poem:]

Hannah before, Hannah after, Conductor, Quartet:

“...Any man’s death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind...”

Hannah before:

I am the lone,
Dissenting voice
In the classroom.
I rise and declare
To a sea of non-islanders:
“It isn’t true,
I am an island.”

With all the experience
Of my fourteen years,
I see no other life
Than one apart,
Alone.

I need no one.
No one needs me.
I consigned myself
To my own island long ago.
Long ago.

I argue, and,
Satisfied by
My brilliant discourse on independence,
Sit back down.
The classroom is silent.
The teacher seems impressed.
(Or was she/he concerned?)*

Perfect boy

[Hannah before jogs and is out of breath by the end of the song.]

Hannah before:

I must—must!—be
The perfect boy:
The fastest,
The smartest,
The strongest,
The best,
The perfect boy.

I need to
Out-achieve
Out-accomplish

Out-perform
Out-run,
Out-scramble,
Out-do,
Everyone;
The perfect boy.

Class president,
Straight “As,”
Star quarterback,
Honor roll,
All of it.
Most likely to:
Succeed,
Win the game,
Score the point,
Make the grade,
Never get in trouble,
Never do wrong,
Ever upstanding,
Always the best,
Perfect,
Perfect.
And no one will know.

I must run so fast,
Succeed so much,
Do so well,
No one will know,
No one will know.
Class president,
Straight “As,”
Star quarterback,
Honor roll,
All of it.
Most likely to:
Succeed,
Win the game,
Score the point,
Make the grade,
Never get in trouble,
Never do wrong,
Ever upstanding,
Always the best,

Perfect
Perfect

Achieve
Accomplish
Perform
Run
Scramble

* choose pronoun depending on the gender of the conductor

Run
Scramble
Perfect
Game
Run
Point
Run
Grade
Run

And no one will know,
I will run so fast,
Succeed so much,
Do so well,
No one will know,
No one will know,
No one will ever know.
[Offhandedly:]
Not even me.

To know

Hannah after:

Then, I see her on TV.
There she is.
She is.
And I hear the word.
The real word.
The magic word.
Finally a name for this.
That is me.
That is *my* word.
I repeat it,
Over and over.

As soon as I can,
I go to the library,
The Lewis and Clark Library,
Named for explorers.
When the coast is clear
I creep to the card catalog,
Thumb through the cards,
My hands trembling.

“Transatlantic Travel”
Farther...
“Transfiguration, The”
Farther...
“Transylvania”
Too far...
And there it is,
The word,
The magic word.

Typed,
On a yellowing card.
[Hannah before appears out of nowhere and impersonates a snoopy librarian.]

Hannah before:

“Need help, young man?”

Hannah after:

I slam the drawer shut,
And come face to face
With the beady eyes
Of a stealth librarian.
“No th-thank you, sir.”
How could I have let this happen?
How did I let down my guard?
Never again,
Never again.

Later I grab a book
With the magic word,
And hide it in
Another book.
And slip to the darkest corner
Of Lewis and Clark...

Hannah after/Hannah before:

And I read.
And learn.
Read.
And I learn.
Learn
There are others.
There are others.
To learn
I’m not the only one.
The relief,
The power,
The power!
Just to know.
Just to know.

Hannah after:

I return to Lewis and Clark many times.
And hide new books
In the same old one.

Hannah before:

(To the world it might look like
I’m becoming an expert on
The Transvaal War.)

PART II.

Two cities

Hannah before/Hannah after:

Now I live in two cities
Adjacent to each other.
To one I bring
The outward trappings
Of femininity
In a small bag
And drive across
The bridge that connects them.

The bridge itself
Is very high,
Suspended,
Aglow in light,
With a lovely view.

Once in
My other city
I put on my things
And am overcome
With joy.

Hannah after:

I glide
I fly,
Suspended,
Free,
Free.

Hannah before/Hannah after:

Too soon I have to go back
To my other city.
I cross the bridge
Now choked by fog.

My small bag grows,
So do the frequency
Of my trips
Across the bridge.

It feels like compulsion,
Something I should control,
Not allow.
How do I contain it?
Subdue it?
End it?

And yet I still drive

To my other city.
Drive
Across the bridge,
Very high,
Suspended
Aglow in light,
With a lovely view.

Hannah after:

I glide
I fly,
Suspended,
Free.
Free.

Three words

Hannah after:

"Pardon me, miss."

I hear
Three words.

"Pardon."

"Me."

"Miss."

Three words.

Pretty dull
As words go.

But they mean
Everything to me.
Everything.
For I have passed.
To the man
Who said those words in passing,
Three small words.
Just three words.

And I feel
A rush of contentment
For once.
All the jarring noises
Resolve in harmony,
All the warring voices
Are at peace.
Because I'm perceived,
Finally perceived,

Finally seen,
Finally,
As I am
As I am.
As I am.

Close

Hannah before:

Some yellow pills,
A stiff martini to wash them down,
And it is done.

Hannah after:

I wait.
Days.
A week.
Weeks.
I devise corporeal variations on
“A watched pot never boils.”

Hannah before:

Is my skin really softer?
Is my face really fuller?
Am I just imagining it?

More pills.
Months.
No, I'm not imagining it.

I knew about
The outer changes—
Weight migrating,

Hannah after:

Edges rounding,

Hannah before:

Hair softening—
But I am not prepared for—

Hannah before/Hannah after:

The inner changes.
These are intense.
Sudden.
Disorienting.

Hannah after:

Emotional vertigo.

Hannah before:

Hypersensitivity,

Hannah after:

Crying at the weirdest things.

Hannah before:

Burnt soup,
Dumb pop lyrics,

Hannah after:

Diamond commercials.

Hannah before:

I fight it.
What am I fighting?
Who am I?
The new me, the old?
What is happening?

And then I finally learn
To accept the changes,
To trust,
To see them as integral,

Hannah before/Hannah after:

Natural.

Hannah after:

And that's when
A tremendous euphoria
Takes over,
Joy.
Joy.
At feeling
Aligned.
At peace.
As one.

Hannah before/Hannah after:

I see myself in the mirror
And think...

Close.

Home for the holidays

[Hannah before composes a letter to her parents.]

Hannah before:

Dear Mom (and Dad!):
I wanted to call you,
But thought it
Better to write.
I'm sorry, but
I don't think
I'll make it home
For Christmas
This year.
I have so much work to do,
And so much going on.
And I really can't afford
A plane ticket
At this late date.
It will be my first Christmas away
And I'll miss you guys,
And the tree,
And the house
All done up
For the holidays.
And the snow.
I know you're disappointed.
At any rate,
I might get home this Spring,
And that's just around the corner.
But I'll call you on Christmas Day.
In the meantime
I send you both
A lot of love.
—H.

A christmas story

Hannah after:

Christmas Day.
Late afternoon
At a coffee shop,
Blessedly open.
I sit with the others exiled
By the holidays—
Self-imposed
Or otherwise.
I'm writing,

And look up to see a guy
Smiling at me.
A very sweet smile.
The kind that you can't help
But smile back at.

And soon he's at my rickety table,
Asking if he can join me.
A momentary panic—
No one told me how to do this!
How to flirt!
Is this how it starts?
What does it mean?
I say "yes."
He asks what I'm writing.
I say "I'm not sure."

We talk and talk.
He's very cute.
Pierced and inked,
But not overly so.
I like being
On this side of the table.
But flirting this way
Is a new thing.
(As if one puberty
Weren't awkward enough.)
But soon we're just two
Exiled people
Denying our exiles
And connecting.

The sun is setting,
And we notice the fog come in.

For all the flirting
We acknowledge,
Silently and sweetly,
That this will not go
Any further.
That this connection suffices.
And that's the beauty of it,
The beauty I feel
When he kisses me lightly
On the cheek.
A beauty I feel
In the warmth of his hand
As he places it in mine
And says, "good night."

Dear son

[Hannah before reads a letter from her mother.]

Hannah before:

Dear son:
It snowed all day.
The Coopers dropped by
Like they always do.
Everyone asked about you.
I love the new sweater
And am wearing it now.
And your Dad thanks you for
The box set of Classic Movies.
Thanks also for your call
On Christmas Day.
You sounded quiet.
I just want to know
You are happy.
We love you.
—Mom

Out of nowhere

Hannah after:

Out of nowhere
He sticks out his arm
To block me from getting in my car.
He snarls, “What are you?”
His breathing is hard,
His eyes are inflamed.
There’s no one around.
The lot is not lit.
He shouts it.
He shouts it this time:
“What are you?”
I ask him to stop,
To leave me alone.
Where’s a weapon?
Anything!
“What the fuck are you?”
Keys, anything.
And suddenly
He clutches my neck,
He tightens his grasp.
With all of my strength
I leverage a kick.
I jump in the car.
He reaches for me.
I slam the door.
Start,
Car,

Hannah before:

[In a completely separate space or from offstage, far apart from Hannah after, Hannah before speaks in a quiet and robotic voice, reciting a roster of transgender people who’ve recently been slain.]

Nakia Ladelle Baker
Nashville, Tennessee
Trauma to the head
Stefania Koppi
Rome, Italy
Violently beaten, skull bashed in
Thanawood Wiriyananon
Phuket, Thailand
Strangled and beaten
Silvana Berisha
Hamburg, Germany
Stabbed to death
Dilek Ince
Ankara, Turkey
Shot in the back of the head
Katia Otacilio Vilela
Jatai, Brazil
Stabbed
Diksy Jones
Wellington, New Zealand
Blunt force trauma to the head
Agnes Torres Sulca
Atlixco, Puebla, Mexico
Neck wounds, burned, thrown in a ditch
Thapelo Makutle
Kuruman, South Africa
Throat cut, partial decapitation, genitals stuffed in mouth
Erica Keel
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Run over repeatedly by a car
Elly “Sayep” Susanna
Jakarta, Indonesia
Stoned and drowned by police
Kellie Telesford
Thornton Heath, UK
Strangled
Dayana Nicole Castillo Garcia
Tarapoto, Peru

Car,
Start!
He pounds at the window.
Start, start,
Please, God.
Oh God.
“You bitch.”
Pound. Pound.
“I’m going to kill you.”
I’ll kill you, I’ll kill you.”
I drive off.
He chases still shouting.
I drive and drive,
My heart is pounding.
I have escaped.

Stabbed to death
Marion Lanza
Honduras
Shot
Krissy Bates
Minneapolis, Minnesota
Stabbed
Ashley Sweeney
Detroit, Michigan
Shot in the head
Selma Diaz
Chicago, Illinois
Drowned
Shelley Hilliard
Detroit, Michigan
Murdered, decapitated, dismembered, burned
January Marie Lapuz
British Columbia, Canada
Stabbed to death
Ruby Molina
Sacramento, California
Drowned
Noor Azian Khamis,
Johor, Malaysia
Stabbed
Islan Nettles
Harlem, New York
Beaten to death

I am safe.

[During the orchestral interlude, Hannah gets safely home, locks the door, retrieves her laptop and turns it on. She searches online for other incidents of violence against transgender people.]

Hannah after:

Later,
Alone at home,
I look online.
I look online.
There are others.
I am not safe.

Hannah before:

Emanuelly Colaco Taborda
Paraná, Brazil
Strangled
Patricia Murphy
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Shot several times in the head
Menakshiammal
Krishnagiri, India
Burned and throat slit

Hannah before/Hannah after:

Kamilla
Volgograd, Russia
Shot to death.
Amanda Gonzalez Andujar
Queens, New York

Hannah before:

Unidentified
Guayaquil, Ecuador
Unknown
Milan, Italy

Hannah after:

I am not an island.
I am not an island.

Hannah before/Hannah after and Quartet:

Unidentified...
Unknown...
Unidentified...
Unknown...

I go on to...

Hannah before:

They continue.
The voices.
In my head.
You won't be happy.

Hannah after:

You won't be happy.
You can't go back.

Hannah before;

It is wrong.

Hannah after:

What are you doing?

Hannah before:

What are you thinking?

Hannah after/Hannah before:

The noise is too loud.

Hannah before:

The noise is too loud.
I cannot go on.
I cannot go on.
But somehow, somehow...

Hannah after/Hannah before:

I must go on.
I must go on.

Hannah before:

I go on
To...
Norway.

PART III.

Norway

Hannah after:

Norway.
Where else?
Norway.
A friend of a friend
Rents out a cabin
In Norway,
In the middle of nowhere,
Just me and the Northern Lights,
Which I've always wanted to see,
Just me,
The middle of nowhere,
Neither here nor there.
—Perfect.

Soon, I'm lurching past fjords
And road signs with slashed "o's."
I attempt a yodel,
Then remember that yodeling
Isn't Norwegian.

A fjord.
Fields,
Mountains far off,
And the cabin.
Which is really just a shack
With cabin aspirations.
No one around for miles.
And I think:
Here is a setting for
A moment of transcendence.
Or murder.

I go inside the shack.
It smells of goat.

I throw down my bag.
And weep.

That night,
I don't sleep.
Grief.
Loneliness.
Doubt.

Why am I here?

The following day,

I decide to make jam.
I gather berries.
It takes forever.
And tastes awful.
I throw out the bitter fruit.

A few more sleepless nights.

One day,
I take the wooden skiff
Out on the water.
Clear, Calm, Deep.
Clear. Calm. Deep.

Halfway out,
I realize it has a leak.
But make it back in time
With a boat half-filled of icy water.
And sit on the shore
Out of breath.

Why am I here?

I realize that I
Have not spoken to anyone in days.
I am alarmed because
I have this realization
Out loud.

I also realize
That I've spent four days
As I am.
As I am.
Without regard to
Anyone else,
Or what they think.
I only care if I pass
To myself.

Every night
I go to the water
And sit beneath the
Shuddering stars.
And wait for the Northern lights
To make an appearance in the sky.
A glowing glimmering shimmering in the sky.
It doesn't happen.

Every night:
Nothing.
Not even the faintest glow.

I think:

Nature doesn't always comply
With our wishes.
Nature just is.
Nature also doesn't work
In metaphors
Like leaking boats,
Or bitter fruit.
It just is.

And here,
On my self-imposed island,
I connect with the universe.
And the universe tells me:
"You are an idiot."

It's a very simple equation:
You are not happy.
You can be happy.
There is an echo
And it repeats
"You are not happy.
You can be happy."

And so
I resolve
To make myself happy.
And the only way to do that
Is simple.
And nautral.
No metaphors.

I sleep that night
Like never before.

The next morning,
I rise,
And make jam again.
This time with better berries.
I fix the hole in the boat,
And even try a yodel.

And...

I write a dozen postcards.
My first communication
With the outside world
In a week.
I let my hand guide me
As I write
And sign each card with my
New name.
I look at the handwriting.
My teacher would not have approved.

Graceful swirls,
Expansive ascenders,
Crosses with curls.

My writing is not
Like a girl's,
Or like a boy's,

Hannah before/Hannah after:

It is mine.
It is free.
Free.
Glimmering
Shimmering
Northern Lights.

Hannah before:
Northern lights.

Hannah after/Hannah before:

Northern lights.
And I go home
As one.

[The End.]

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Performances of this opera must be licensed by the publisher.

All rights of any kind with respect to this opera and any parts thereof, including but not limited to stage, radio, television, motion picture, mechanical reproduction, translation, printing, and selling, are strictly reserved.

License to perform this work, in whole or in part, whether with instrumental or keyboard accompaniment, must be secured in writing from the Publisher. Terms will be quoted upon request.

Copying of either separate parts or the whole of this work, by hand or by any other process, is unlawful and punishable under the provisions of the U.S. Copyright Act.

The use of any copies, including arrangements and orchestrations, other than those issued by the Publisher, is forbidden.

To inquire about Grand Rights, or to rent or purchase materials, please contact:

The logo for Bill Holab Music features a stylized musical staff with a treble clef on the left. The name "Bill Holab Music" is written in a flowing, cursive script across the staff.

www.billholabmusic.com