

LAMENT FOR THE STOLEN (1938) FOR WOMEN'S CHORUS: A COLLABORATION
BETWEEN HARL MCDONALD AND KATHERINE CHAPIN WITH HISTORIC
PERSPECTIVE AND MUSIC ANALYSIS

by

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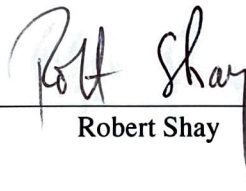
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Abstract

Harl McDonald's 1938 work for women's chorus and orchestra entitled *Lament for the Stolen*, with poetry by Katherine Garrison Chapin, is a piece of music with rich history and enlightening social context. As a result of several factors, the work has been all but forgotten in the history of twentieth-century music.

The goal of this document is to generate an awareness of the creators of *Lament for the Stolen* (Sophie Drinker, Katherine Garrison Chapin, Harl McDonald), their context as important artists and philanthropists in 1930s America, the tumultuous narrative regarding the conception and composition of the work, and the public reception of the music—both prior to and after its premiere. In addition, this document features an analysis of the musical structure, harmonic language, and motivic development of the work, and how McDonald's music expresses the themes of Chapin's poetry. Following the musical analysis is a discussion of necessary considerations regarding a contemporary performance of the work.

Finally, this document concludes with an exploration of perspectives regarding the relevance of this piece of music—one that was very indicative of 1930s America—almost one century after its premiere.

Dedication

To my wife, Molly, for agreeing to uproot our midwestern lives and follow me around the nation in pursuit of my dream, moving through Colorado en route to Los Angeles, and for the endless support (both financially and emotionally) along the way.

To Dr. John Jost and Dr. James Stegall, two mentors who have in different ways ignited my passion for choral music and are the two primary reasons I decided to pursue a D.M.A. in choral music.

To Prof. Anna Wheeler Gentry, for the original seed of an idea from which this project was born, and for much advice and guidance as I embarked upon research.

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To Dr. Gregory Gentry, who has been endlessly supportive of my activities and projects for three years at CU Boulder and has shown true, genuine investment in my success and in my future as a choral director.

To Peter and Carol Wessler, who are undoubtedly the reason I ever got involved in music in the first place.

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CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL FRAMING

The desire of the girl for womanhood, the instinctive loyalty of mothers; the grief of women in war time; their joy at the safe return of the soldiers—these are motives which command the respect of everyone; and yet composers have passed them by in silence and have chosen instead trivial texts about angels, fairies, the bevy of young girls, or the most sentimental aspect of the Madonna and the Child. Composers . . . “wrote down” to women, and frequently ignored possibilities for the women’s chorus in its legitimate field.

Sophie Drinker, quoted in *New York Herald Tribune*¹

Philadelphia socialite Sophie Drinker and her attorney husband Henry were avid, enthusiastic patrons of music during a tumultuous time in American history. Having married in 1911, the early decades of their marriage coincided with World War I, Prohibition, the Great Depression, and the looming threat of Hitler’s invasion of Poland, which would initiate World War II. Drinker’s social status and familial wealth shielded her from experiencing the economic burden of the Great Depression in her own home during the 1930s; in fact, her domestic life saw an abundance of recreational travel, social events, and musical activity during the decade. However, she no doubt witnessed the decimating effects of the period upon American society, and upon the nation’s women in particular, at a time during which she felt a burgeoning interest in amateur musicology.

As the nation emerged from World War I in the 1920s, countless mothers grieved the loss of their sons who had been shipped off to military service in Europe and killed in battle; not long after, as Hitler assumed power in 1933, anxieties of further violence on the horizon occupied the

¹ Lawrence Gilman, “A Lament for the Stolen,” *New York Herald Tribune* (1926-1962), New York, N.Y., December 18, 1938: E6.

minds of mothers whose sons were coming of conscription age. The Depression itself fractured families as well:

The Depression disrupted people's lives. The expectations and actualities of female self-sacrifice resulted in conflict between parents and daughters, between husbands and wives, among members of doubled-up households, and between "unattached" women and their children and siblings. Although families changed their form and structure and increased their responsibilities, they also fell apart from the strains of the Depression.²

Trends in employment during The Depression actually saw a rise for women, while men's employment rates declined. At this time in history, employers typically assigned particular jobs to one gender or the other. Jobs primarily associated with men, such as manufacturing and steel production, suffered the majority of layoffs, while those associated with women, in service industries and clerical work, continued to thrive.³ As a result, women for the first time found themselves as "breadwinners" for their families, amplifying strained domestic relations and stress levels, as they were burdened with employment in addition to traditional homemaking duties:

The additional burden of a woman's paid job strained some marital relations, and among married women of both races the breakup of marriages was a widespread phenomenon. Separations and desertions multiplied. Divorces declined in the early 1930s because of the expense, but by 1936 the divorce rate had surpassed its previous high in the late 1920s and continued to grow. Lack of money and the husband's unemployment often precipitated the split-up.⁴

² Lois Rita Hembold, "Beyond the Family Economy: Black and White Working-Class Women During the Great Depression," In *Women and Minorities During the Great Depression*, ed. Melvyn Dubovsky and Stephen Burwood, 224-250, New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990, 224.

³ Ibid., 234-235.

⁴ Ibid., 238.

Reliance on a mother's small salary was a burden for women and their families, but also acted as a small spark of empowerment that would grow in subsequent years: as the 1930s ended and conscription once again claimed husbands and sons for the American military effort in World War II, women continued to expand their activities outside traditional gender roles, taking on manufacturing jobs and aiding in the national effort, expressed in popular culture by the mascot "Rosie the Riveter."⁵ This trend of feminine empowerment, unfolding from the troubled experience of women throughout the Depression and two world wars, was an important development in gender relations as America progressed through the middle decades of the twentieth century.

In 1930, during the early years of The Depression, Sophie Drinker joined a small women's chorus called the Montgomery Singers and immediately asserted control, moving rehearsals to her house and developing strict dual criteria for choosing repertoire: 1) it must have been written for women's chorus (not originally for full or men's chorus and alternately arranged for women) and 2) it must express what she considered to be genuinely feminine sentiment.⁶ As she witnessed the complex web of burdens, emotions, and responsibilities put upon women throughout this period of American history, she inevitably felt the need to give it musical voice. Then, in 1932, a tragic event occurred that would dominate the consciousness—and news cycle—of the nation for over four years and add further anxiety to the already-burdened experience of American women: the infant son of world-famous military officer and aviator Charles Lindbergh was kidnapped for ransom.

⁵ Janet E. Gardner, "Rosie the Riveter," *Salem Press Encyclopedia*, July 31, 2021.

⁶ Ruth Solie, "Afterword." In *Music & Women: The Story of Women in their Relation to Music*, by Sophie Drinker, 325-368, 2nd Ed. New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1995, 334.

Six years later, the Philadelphia Orchestra premiered *Lament for the Stolen*, a 30-minute, single-movement work for women's chorus and symphony orchestra, with music by Harl McDonald, poetry by Katherine Garrison Chapin, and commission by Sophie Drinker.⁷ Here was a musical work written for a chorus of women, with original poetry reflecting the anxieties, fears, burdens, and hopes of women and mothers in America at a time when those feelings were at a boiling point.

The only known research on *Lament for the Stolen* exists in Wayne Shirley's article in a 1994 issue of *American Music* that focuses on William Grant Still's choral ballad *And They Lynched Him on a Tree*.⁸ Katherine Garrison Chapin was the lyricist for both works, and the story behind *Lament for the Stolen* directly influences *And They Lynched Him on a Tree*, with a distinct possibility that the latter would not have been conceived without the former. Shirley briefly explores *Lament* from such a perspective and in his references alludes to an interesting story existing behind the work, noting that the Katherine Garrison Chapin papers in the Library of Congress are "useful in tracing the tribulations of *Lament for the Stolen*."⁹ That story, however, has remained in the annals of Chapin's cataloged correspondence, untold until now, and the musical work itself has been neglected by history.

⁷ Concert Program. The Philadelphia Orchestra. Eugene Ormandy. Philadelphia: Academy of Music, December 30-31, 1939. Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

⁸ Wayne D. Shirley, "William Grant Still's Choral Ballad 'And They Lynched Him on a Tree,'" *American Music*, 12/4 (1994): 425-461, accessed 20 December 2021 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3052342>.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 456.

Lament for the Stolen was premiered by the Philadelphia Orchestra, under the baton of Eugene Ormandy, on back-to-back concerts on the evenings of December 30 and 31 of 1938.¹⁰ The work was performed again shortly after, on May 15 of 1940, by the Brico Junior Symphony Orchestra at White Plains High School in New York.¹¹ Since then, no evidence of any other performance of the work exists.

Composed during the Great Depression and as a reaction to the tragic kidnapping of infant Charles Lindbergh, Jr., *Lament for the Stolen* reveals historic contexts from a significant era. Further, the events and struggles in America during the 1930s may not be as foreign to contemporary events and struggles as we think; perhaps it is an appropriate time to re-evaluate this all-but-forgotten choral masterwork.

¹⁰ Concert Program. The Philadelphia Orchestra. Eugene Ormandy. Philadelphia: Academy of Music, December 30-31, 1939. Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

¹¹ Concert Program. The Brico Junior Symphony Orchestra. Antonia Brico. New York: White Plains High School, May 15, 1940. Katherine Biddle Papers.

CHAPTER 2

THE CREATIVE TRIO

Harl McDonald (1899-1955)

For himself, he considers that music greatest which has the greatest universality of appeal, emotionally. His own works, he says, spring from compulsion to express in music his inner impressions of things from which he gets emotional reactions. Music is essentially an emotional language, he believes . . . Music should not be written objectively, but “from the inside out,” in his opinion. Only then does it have appeal and import for the listener.

Ronald F. Eyer, writing about Harl McDonald¹²

McDonald's Life

American composer Harl McDonald was born on a small ranch near Boulder, Colorado, where his father made a living as a stock farmer.¹³ Soon after his birth, the family moved to Southern California and settled in Redlands, where he spent the early years of his life and absorbed musical studies from his parents.¹⁴ Living in this part of the country, Harl was exposed

¹² Ronald F. Eyer, “Meet the Composer: Harl McDonald,” *Musical America*, 64/4 (March 1944): 7 and 25. Accessed 11 November 2022 at https://archive.org/details/sim_musical-america_1944-03-10_64_4/page/6/mode/2up, 7.

¹³ Eyer, “Meet the Composer: Harl McDonald,” 7.

¹⁴ Madeline Gross, *Modern Music-Makers: Contemporary American Composers* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1952), 303-304. Both of Harl's parents were accomplished musicians: his father played piano and horn while his mother was a singer Lied and music theorist. His mother also taught him lessons in piano and basic music theory. Harl proceeded to gain proficiency on a variety of instruments, including piano, organ, violin, cello, clarinet, and horn.

to Mariachi bands and the folk music of local cowhands, in addition to professional symphonies and operas during occasional trips to Los Angeles.¹⁵

Once he declared his intention as a teenager to pursue a career in music, Harl landed a job as a horn player with the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra, which earned him enough money to pay for his own musical education: he completed a B.A. in music from University of Southern California in 1918.¹⁶ He subsequently built a career as an independent musician in the Los Angeles area, performing as a pianist, teaching, and composing music for the likes of the Los Angeles Symphony and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Following a short tour in Germany on a grant, he settled in Philadelphia in 1925, marrying Eleanor Gosling and forming roots in the area.¹⁷

McDonald's career became more established in Philadelphia. In 1927 he was appointed head of the University of Pennsylvania's Music Department. He simultaneously took on directorship of several choirs, some at the University and some in the community. Most notably, for many years he was the director of the historic Mendelssohn Club, an organization still in existence.¹⁸ McDonald also aligned himself with the Philadelphia Orchestra, becoming the organization's manager in 1939 and fostering strong partnerships with its conductors, Eugene

¹⁵ Madeline Gross, *Modern Music-Makers: Contemporary American Composers* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1952), 303.

¹⁶ Ibid., 304.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 305.

Ormandy and Leopold Stokowski.¹⁹ In the early 1930s, Stokowski himself convinced McDonald to lighten his professional load and focus more on composition:

There was not much time left, during those busy days [directing several choirs] for composing. Leopold Stokowski, then conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra, felt that McDonald was making a serious mistake in side-tracking his creative work. “You should cut down your outside activities,” he told him. “Drop all the unimportant stuff and get back to your composition.”²⁰

As such, the late 1930s and early 1940s were McDonald’s most prolific years of composition. Most notably, his symphonies written during this era are his most well-known works. His First Symphony (*The Santa Fe Trail*), Second Symphony (*Rhumba Symphony*), and Third Symphony (*Lamentations of Fu Hsuan*) remain some of his most popular works and, as implied by their titles, represent a wide variety of styles and interests.²¹ While his music was a staple in the repertoire of his own Philadelphia Orchestra, McDonald also saw significant circulation of his music throughout the country: through an analysis of symphony concert programs, the journal *Musical America* ranked him as one of the ten most-heard contemporary composers of the 1942-1943 concert season.²² For a musician who specialized in working with choirs, he was less-known for his choral music than for his orchestral output.

¹⁹ Madeline Gross, *Modern Music-Makers: Contemporary American Composers* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1952), 311.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 306.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 306-307.

²² Ronald F. Eyer, “Meet the Composer: Harl McDonald,” *Musical America*, 64/4 (March 1944): 7 and 25. Accessed 11 November 2022 at https://archive.org/details/sim_musical-america_1944-03-10_64_4/page/6/mode/2up, 25.

McDonald spent the rest of his life in New England composing, teaching, and performing. He passed away at the age of 55 in March of 1955, suffering a sudden stroke in New Jersey while playing the piano for the filming of a musical commercial.²³

McDonald's Music

Barbara Renton notes that McDonald's music often follows a written program. She goes on:

. . . its style ranges from the Impressionist to the objective, employing by turns traditional tonality, contemporary dance rhythms, elements of black American and other traditional musics, extremely dissonant harmonies and harsh tone-colors. He preferred to write music that had an immediate emotional appeal, eschewing what he called "sterile, intellectual forms and idioms."²⁴

Indeed, emotional expression is an important element in McDonald's compositions. He considered music to be "essentially an emotional language"²⁵ and felt the greatest music was that which has "the greatest universality of appeal, emotionally."²⁶ McDonald was highly critical of music that he considered too concerned with those "sterile, intellectual forms and idioms," implying that he resisted the trend of serial composition²⁷ that was emerging during his years as

²³ "Harl McDonald" (Obituary), *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 31, 1955, 8.

²⁴ Barbara A. Renton, "McDonald, Harl," *Grove Music Online*, accessed December 4, 2022, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

²⁵ Ronald F. Eyer, "Meet the Composer: Harl McDonald," *Musical America*, 64/4 (March 1944): 7 and 25. Accessed 11 November 2022 at https://archive.org/details/sim_musical-america_1944-03-10_64_4/page/6/mode/2up, 7.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Paul Griffiths, "Serialism," *Grove Music Online*, Accessed February 6, 2023, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>. Paul Griffiths defines serialism as "A method of composition in which a fixed permutation, or series, of elements is referential (i.e. the handling of those elements in the composition is governed, to some extent and in some manner, by the

an active composer. In a profile of the composer for *Musical America* in 1944, Ronald Eyer wrote that McDonald believed “music should not be written objectively, but ‘from the inside out’ . . . only then does it have appeal and import for the listener.”²⁸

While the early twentieth century saw evolution in musical composition worldwide, it was a formative time for American music, as composers sought different ways to establish a sound unique to their own homeland. McDonald’s opinion regarding American music during his years as an active composer was that of patience: he considered the composition of American nationalistic music to be fairly young (around 40 years old), and noted it to be in a normal, healthy “state of ferment.”²⁹ American music, in his opinion, was still finding its way, and “it would be illogical for music to have found a settled, cut-and-dried course in this country at this stage of its evolution.”³⁰ At a time during which it was popular for symphonies to program “All-American” concert programs in an effort to champion new national music, McDonald discouraged the practice, as he considered the genre to not have as of yet the contrast of styles and sounds necessary to fill out a satisfying concert program. As such, he encouraged the

series).” Arnold Schönberg was a founding voice in developing the technique in the 1920s, feeling that composers had taken traditional tonality to its expressive limit and that a new paradigm in musical organization was necessary in order to further develop the art of composition. Serial techniques, such as twelve-tone composition and set class theory, appeared first in the works of composers from the “Second Viennese School”: Alban Berg, Anton Webern, and Schönberg. Following World War II, composers such as Milton Babbitt and Karlheinz Stockhausen further developed serialism.

²⁸ Ronald F. Eyer, “Meet the Composer: Harl McDonald,” *Musical America*, 64/4 (March 1944): 7 and 25. Accessed 11 November 2022 at https://archive.org/details/sim_musical-america_1944-03-10_64_4/page/6/mode/2up, 7

²⁹ Eyer, “Meet the Composer: Harl McDonald,” 7.

³⁰ Ibid.

programming of American composers alongside the likes of Russian, German, and French composers, all the more highlighting the unique features of American music.³¹

What, then, was McDonald's opinion on what American music *should* be? In an article he wrote for *Magazine of Art* in 1937 entitled "Problems of the American Composer," he illustrated his view that native³² music is the primary source of nationalistic flavor in the music of any country.³³ In his opinion, the titular "problem" with American music was that the source material was insufficient:

In the United States . . . the original inhabitants had a comparatively limited musical culture and it made no impression upon the European stocks until recent years, when a few native themes were incorporated in sugary and sentimental drawing-room songs. The musical utterances of the American negro, with a few notable exceptions, have suffered a fate almost as bad.³⁴

The popularity of concertized Negro spirituals in subsequent years may have made the composer eventually reconsider his thoughts regarding that particular genre, but his opinion at the time remains clear: native music was the tool with which American composers should craft a native sound.

. . . Jazz is our nearest approach to a completely native art. But our people are drawn from many races and the music of our country must be drawn from many sources . . . I would suggest that the composer who would benefit from native source material had best give his attention to the music of his locale or racial group. He need not necessarily be

³¹ Ronald F. Eyer, "Meet the Composer: Harl McDonald," *Musical America*, 64/4 (March 1944): 7 and 25. Accessed 11 November 2022 at https://archive.org/details/sim_musical-america_1944-03-10_64_4/page/6/mode/2up, 25.

³² The term "native" here refers to the North American indigenous peoples.

³³ Harl McDonald, "Problems of the American Composer," *Magazine of Art*, December 1937: 719.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

confined to it but he should remember that there are a surprising number of undiscovered gold mines in people's back yards.³⁵

And from Eyer's profile in *Musical America*:

. . . he (McDonald) considers it logical and proper that American composers should make use of the so-called folk music of various types, including jazz, cowboy, Negro and hill-billy idioms, etc., and that each should employ them as his individuality dictates.³⁶

Not once does McDonald suggest any compositional approach to the crafting of American music other than borrowing from native genres. This would find him in alignment with the philosophies of Antonin Dvořák and George Gershwin, and at odds with what Richard Taruskin considers the movement of Americanism in music in the early twentieth century. Taruskin cites McDonald's contemporary Roy Harris as the father of Americanism, an approach to composition that strove to express a national sentiment without borrowing from native genres—a technique that Harris thought to express artificiality—but rather through a more natural musical expression of the atmosphere, ideals, and sentiments of America.³⁷

Regardless, McDonald's expression of Americana through native genres is evident in his catalog, featuring titles for instrumental works such as *Mojave*, *Mississippi*, *The Legend of the Arkansas Traveler*, *The Santa Fe Trail*, and *Quartet on Negro Themes*.³⁸ Otherwise, when he was not expressing Americana in his composition through use of native music, McDonald relied on

³⁵ Harl McDonald, "Problems of the American Composer," *Magazine of Art*, December 1937: 719.

³⁶ Ronald F. Eyer, "Meet the Composer: Harl McDonald," *Musical America*, 64/4 (March 1944): 7 and 25. Accessed 11 November 2022 at https://archive.org/details/sim_musical-america_1944-03-10_64_4/page/6/mode/2up, 7.

³⁷ Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century: The Oxford History of Western Music*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 695.

³⁸ Madeline Gross, *Modern Music-Makers: Contemporary American Composers* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1952), 312-313.

that quality of immediate emotional appeal, which he championed in his philosophy, and which was a primary element of his approach to *Lament for the Stolen*.

Katherine Garrison Chapin (1890-1977)

If we have failed—lynchings in Georgia,
Justice in Massachusetts undone,
The bloody fields of South Chicago—
Still a voice from the bruised and battered
Speaks out in the light of a free sun,

Saying, “Tell them again, say it, America;
Say it again till it splits their ears:
Freedom is the salt in our blood and its bone shape;
If freedom fails, we’ll fight for more freedom—
This is the land, and these are the years!
When freedom’s a whisper above their ashes
An obsolete word cut on their graves,
When the mind has yielded its last resistance,
And the last free flag is under the waves—

“Let them remember that here on the western
Horizon a star, once acclaimed, has not set;
And the strength of a hope, and the shape of a vision
Died for and sung for and fought for,
And worked for,
Is living yet.”

Katherine Garrison Chapin, excerpt from *Plain Chant for America* (1941)³⁹

Born in Waterford, Connecticut in 1890, Katherine Garrison Chapin was a poet, playwright, translator, reviewer, and lecturer who spent her entire life on the East Coast. She began writing poetry early in her schooling, and after her studies in anthropology and sociology

³⁹ Stephen Sieck and Phillip Swan, “William Grant Still: *Plain-Chant for America*,” Program Notes for Lawrence University Choirs, *Speaking Out*, Stephen Sieck and Phillip Swan, conductors, Friday, November 11, 2016, Lawrence Memorial Chapel, Appleton, WI, accessed 17 December 2022 at <https://www7.lawrence.edu/mw/161111choirs.pdf>.

at Columbia University,⁴⁰ Katherine married Philadelphia lawyer Francis Biddle in 1918.⁴¹

Francis would go on to hold several important positions under the presidential administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, most notably that of U.S. Attorney General in 1941 and as a judge during the famous Nuremberg trials.⁴² As such, much of Katherine and Francis' married life took place residentially between their Philadelphia home and Francis' work in Washington, D.C., and they rubbed shoulders with the elite in the field of politics and the art of that era.⁴³

While Katherine legally took on the Biddle surname, she maintained her maiden name in her writing as a professional strategy, as her poetry began to be widely published in the 1920s.⁴⁴ In Alberta Turner's entry about Chapin in 1979's *American Women Writers: a Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present*—published only two years after the poet's passing—she describes Chapin's poetic style:

⁴⁰ Laurie Dennett, *An American Princess: The Remarkable Life of Marguerite Chapin Caetani*, Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016, 128.

⁴¹ Maxine Block, "Chapin, Katherine Garrison," Ed. Anna Rothe, *Current Biography*, New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1944: 121.

⁴² Dennett, *An American Princess: The Remarkable Life of Marguerite Chapin Caetani*, 262.

⁴³ Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C. Chapin's correspondence reveals close connections with the likes of Alain Locke (writer, philosopher, and "Dean" of the Harlem Renaissance), Charlotte Osgood Mason (philanthropist), Max Eastman (writer), Rachel Crothers (playwright and theater director), Maxwell Struthers Burt (poet), Edmund Wilson (writer and literary critic), Eleanor Roosevelt (first lady), and Henry Bainbridge McCarter (modernist illustrator and painter).

⁴⁴ Block, "Chapin, Katherine Garrison," 122.

In her poems C. [Chapin] shows that she is an aware member of her world, has an appropriate and dignified concern for its defects and possibilities, and indulges in no self-pity. In the words of Allen Tate, “Miss Chapin’s poems . . . will not give the reader the shock he has come to expect from our present ‘cult of experience.’” But they will give him or her a feeling of calm, the kind of calm that results from witnessing an educated, intelligent woman face an intractable universe with no help but her own resolution and her skill with tested tools.⁴⁵

Chapin’s “dignified concern for [the world’s] defects and possibilities”⁴⁶ is present in the themes of her most well-known works, catapulted to fame by their musical settings by African-American composer William Grant Still. She wrote the original poetry for two of Still’s choral/orchestral works: *And They Lynched Him on a Tree* (1940) and *Plain-Chant for America* (1941). Written by Chapin in back-to-back years, neither text was intended as pure poetry; both were written with the explicit intent of musical setting (as was *Lament for the Stolen*). Furthermore, both poems explore issues of social unrest in America.

And They Lynched Him on a Tree quasi-operatically dramatizes the aftermath of the lynching of a black man: the white mob’s furor, the victim’s family’s sorrow, and a Greek-chorus-like epilogue lamenting the permanent, ugly stain on American history that is the practice of lynching. Still utilizes narration, sound effects, and the juxtaposition of two choirs—one intended to be made up of white singers, one of black singers—to set Chapin’s poetry, essentially

⁴⁵ Alberta Turner, “Katherine Garrison Chapin,” In *American Women Writers: a Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present*, edited by Lina Mainiero, 335, New York: Ungar, 1979, accessed 11 November 2022 at <https://archive.org/details/americanwomenwri01main/page/334/mode/2up>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

creating a musical version of a lynching drama⁴⁷ to shine an unflinching, disturbing artistic light on a violent act that was all too common in the early decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁸

Chapin once again put America on trial with *Plain-Chant for America*: she wrote it as the country was entering into World War II and refers to the tragedies of “lynchings in Georgia, justice undone in Massachusetts (Sacco and Vanzetti trial), and the bloody racial violence in Chicago in 1919, among other clear violations of justice.”⁴⁹ While *And They Lynched Him on a Tree* is fairly dark and pessimistic (save for an interesting, last-minute lyric alteration made shortly before the premiere performance, allowing for some optimism because of the conductor’s personal politics, and still existing in some editions of the work),⁵⁰ *Plain-Chant for America* expresses Chapin’s interest in America’s “defects and possibilities,” referring to the

⁴⁷ “. . . the work [*And They Lynched Him on a Tree*] possesses the characteristics of the lynching drama. The lynching drama, or lynching play, a theatre genre which began in the early twentieth century, was born as a reaction to the realities of lynchings. All such dramas are based upon the premise of lynching, reflect the stance of those who support lynching as well as those who are against it, and are written largely by American playwrights and have been produced in all regions of the country. Additional characteristics include a focus on daily routine, the use of poetry and/or music, and the story told through the viewpoint of a woman.” Harlan Zackery Jr., “A Reception History and Conductor’s Guide to William Grant Still’s ‘...And They Lynched Him on a Tree’” (Doctoral Thesis, University of Southern Mississippi, 2016), 6.

⁴⁸ Wayne D. Shirley, “William Grant Still’s Choral Ballad ‘And They Lynched Him on a Tree,’” *American Music*, 12/4 (1994): 425-461, accessed 20 December 2021 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3052342>.

⁴⁹ Stephen Sieck and Phillip Swan, “William Grant Still: *Plain-Chant for America*,” Program Notes for Lawrence University Choirs, *Speaking Out*, Stephen Sieck and Phillip Swan, conductors, Friday, November 11, 2016, Lawrence Memorial Chapel, Appleton, WI, accessed 17 December 2022 at <https://www7.lawrence.edu/mw/161111choirs.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Shirley, “William Grant Still’s Choral Ballad ‘And They Lynched Him on a Tree,’” 442.

aforementioned social issues but also “[celebrating] the idea of America and [calling] us to more fully realize ‘the dream unfinished.’”⁵¹

Following these projects, Chapin looked to be further exploring similar ground, collaborating with Samuel Barber in 1942 on a lyrical poem set to music entitled *Between Dark and Dark*. Composed during Barber’s years in the military, the text expresses a sentiment of tranquility and peace, but with a brooding undercurrent of inevitable violence (ambiguously referring to the early stages of World War II). The work may have not made it to performance, as a manuscript for it was discovered in a dumpster in New York City in 2015 and now resides at the Library of Congress, Music Division.⁵²

Chapin expresses the raw, emotional subject matter of her work through a direct poetic style. Alberta Turner elaborates on Chapin’s technique:

In poetic technique C. is barely influenced by modernist poets. Her lyrics are chiefly in rhyme and meter, controlled but not exceptionally tight or brilliant, and in no way innovative. Though she does use some free verse, its freedom consists mostly in varied line lengths. It is still largely iambic, often metrical, and employs frequent rhyme. Throughout, her imagery tends to be traditional and the metaphoric structures simple.⁵³

⁵¹ Stephen Sieck and Phillip Swan, “William Grant Still: *Plain-Chant for America*,” Program Notes for Lawrence University Choirs, *Speaking Out*, Stephen Sieck and Phillip Swan, conductors, Friday, November 11, 2016, Lawrence Memorial Chapel, Appleton, WI, accessed 17 December 2022 at <https://www7.lawrence.edu/mw/161111choirs.pdf>.

⁵² Barbara B. Heyman, *Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, 244.

⁵³ Alberta Turner, “Katherine Garrison Chapin,” In *American Women Writers: a Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present*, edited by Lina Mainiero, 335, New York: Ungar, 1979, accessed 11 November 2022 at <https://archive.org/details/americanwomenwri01main/page/334/mode/2up>.

As such, when writing about social issues of such immediacy in her time, Chapin chose not to allow the technique of her poetry to overshadow the reality her subject matter. Her lyric expression is traditionally poetic, formal, and attractive, but not florid, inventive, or avant-garde in a way that would distract from the grounded emotional gravitas of something such as the lynching of an innocent black man, the xenophobic condemnation of innocent immigrants, or the theft of an infant from the safety of its bedroom.

While Chapin wrote poetry addressing the social ills of her home country, her own personal life was not without its own tragedy. Katherine and Francis had two sons, Edmund and Garrison. On November 22 of 1930, the younger of the two, Garrison, passed away at the age of seven.⁵⁴ Francis channeled his grief into his work, but Katherine used poetry as her outlet, writing and publishing a work entitled *Bright Mariner* as a tribute to her boy. In Chapin's traditional manner, utilizing simple-but-effective metaphor and clear imagery, she paints a lyrical portrait of her metaphorical mariner, seeing him off from his home shores much earlier than expected, but wishing him eternal freedom as he sails into the unknown, aided by the strongest of new sails she herself made for him out of shining silken fabric.⁵⁵ Understandably, as we will see, reference to *Bright Mariner* appears at times in Chapin's correspondence with her colleagues throughout the conception of *Lament for the Stolen*.

⁵⁴ Laurie Dennett, *An American Princess: The Remarkable Life of Marguerite Chapin Caetani*, Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016, 193.

⁵⁵ "Bright Mariner – by Katherine Garrison Chapin," Poetry Nook, Plum White Press, accessed 17 December 2022 at <https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/bright-mariner>.

Sophie Drinker (1888-1967)

In 1965, near the end of her life, Sophie Hutchison Drinker wrote a memoir for her children and their descendants. The final chapter describes her busy schedule, even in her seventies, as a writer and popular lecturer; of these activities she says: “my theme is ever the same: the repression of women by the patriarchal culture pattern.” . . . Her patronage—or “matronage,” as she would surely prefer us to say—encouraged ordinary people, especially women, to participate in music-making; she underwrote a lifelong campaign to inform the wider world about women’s achievements in the history of culture, and to persuade modern women to reclaim those roles.

Ruth Solie, writing about Sophie Drinker⁵⁶

Sophie Drinker is considered one of the founders of gender studies and feminism in the field of musicology. In addition, she and her husband Henry Drinker were champions of amateur music-making: as wealthy patrons of the arts, they concentrated much of their time and energy less toward professional musical events and more toward participatory, social music-making by non-professionals.⁵⁷

Born in Philadelphia in 1888, Sophie enjoyed a life of privilege almost immediately; while her family was not wealthy, her familial connections garnered her an elite status; her sister-in-law Catherine Drinker Bowen later described her as “cousin to half of well-bred Philadelphia.”⁵⁸ She casually learned the piano as a child, and after finishing school, declined to

⁵⁶ Ruth Solie, “Afterword.” In *Music & Women: The Story of Women in their Relation to Music*, by Sophie Drinker, 325-368, 2nd Ed. New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1995, 325.

⁵⁷ Ruth Solie, “Women’s History and Music History: The Feminist Historiography of Sophie Drinker,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 5/2 (1993): 8-31, accessed 30 November 2022 at <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh/2010.0261>, 18.

⁵⁸ Catherine Drinker Bowen, *Family Portrait*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1970, 62.

attend college, even after having been accepted to Bryn Mawr College.⁵⁹ Indeed, as musicologist and Sophie Drinker scholar Ruth A. Solie notes in her afterword to the 1995 edition of *Music and Women*, there exists a mild paradox in Drinker's life: a conflict between the feminist ideals she would come to champion, disparaging a traditional "woman's role" in society, and the nature of her own early life and acceptance as a formally uneducated housewife/hobbyist:

One of the preoccupying questions for anyone who studies Sophie Drinker is her ambiguous understanding of social class . . . Attempts to match her published writing to her private life bring to light a persistent tension between egalitarian assertions and the assumption of privilege. Nor does she seem to have thought very deeply about the complex interactions of class and gender even as she herself experienced them . . . For five years after her graduation from finishing school, she endured the stifling life of a "young lady" at home with her mother, a life enlivened only by parties and by participation in the expected round of volunteer service activities, before she met and married Harry Drinker.⁶⁰

Sophie's marriage to Henry Drinker in 1911 ignited her musical passion: a lawyer by trade, Henry was a passionate hobbyist musician, known to rent pianos in his hotel rooms when traveling on business.⁶¹ He became well-known in the musicological world for his translations of cantata and German *lied* texts, he organized many concert and recital series around Philadelphia, and whenever he and Sophie traveled in Europe they made a point to meet and form relationships with prominent musicologists.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ruth Solie, "Afterword." In *Music & Women: The Story of Women in their Relation to Music*, by Sophie Drinker, 325-368, 2nd Ed. New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1995, 326.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 326-327.

⁶¹ Ibid., 327.

⁶² Ibid., 328-329.

Even more so than their public activities, Henry and Sophie made their home a center of music-making. They played recreational chamber music at home with their daughters, often hiring musicians from the Curtis Institute or the Philadelphia Orchestra to play with them. Eventually their musical activity focused into a passion for amateur participation, turning their attention to the promotion of large-scale participatory music-making.⁶³ As Sophie wrote in her diary in 1933:

. . . our ideas about music have diverged considerably from the accepted point of view. Most people regard it as ART, something held apart, sacred for professionals who perform with varying ability to a more or less critical audience. Musical education concentrates on two phases, ability to perform and ability to create. Whereas we regard music as a language, as a means of self-expression to be enjoyed by the amateur and to be an integral part of life.⁶⁴

As the Drinkers' philosophy developed, they ceased hiring musicians to play with them at their home and—after moving into a much larger house—began a thirty-year tradition of hosting singing parties: social events in which swaths of music lovers came to their home to read choral literature in a recreational atmosphere. In keeping with the principles of nonprofessional, participatory activity, the repertoire was intentionally not rehearsed or performed: simply read/sung by all participants. Professional musicians from the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Curtis Institute were known to attend these gatherings, but no longer for any pay; simply out of their own enjoyment. Over the years, possibly three-thousand people attended these parties.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ruth Solie, "Afterword." In *Music & Women: The Story of Women in their Relation to Music*, by Sophie Drinker, 325-368, 2nd Ed. New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1995, 329.

⁶⁴ Sophie Hutchison Drinker Papers, carton 1, addendum 84-M96, folders 3-6, Schelsinger Library, Radcliffe College, MA, diary entry, 16 June 1933.

⁶⁵ Solie, "Afterword," 330.

Catherine Bowen often recounted a story in which an unfamiliar man arrived at one of these parties and proceeded with the group to sight-read Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Mass in G*, only to identify himself later, over dinner, as the composer himself.⁶⁶

Ruth Solie further explores an element of hypocrisy in the Drinker's lifestyle and musical philosophy in relation to their hosting of these parties:

Nothing captures the Drinkers' paradoxical musical politics better than the organization of the singing parties . . . On one hand, their quasi-populist dedication to general participation led them to devote the gatherings purely to sight-reading , to invite anyone (regardless of talent) . . . On the other hand, their personal conservatism and aristocratic assumptions assured that attendance was by invitation only, and their financial underwriting of the entire operation was intended . . . to assure their total control over the repertoire and the operation of the group.⁶⁷

According to Solie, the nature of the Drinker's parties further amplifies a conflict between their philosophy of service to the general population and their unwillingness to shed some of the luxuries of elite social status. The story behind *Lament for the Stolen* reveals similar elements of Sophie's personality, an elite stubbornness to relinquish control versus a sense of true collaboration or social understanding.

In 1930, Sophie joined and took charge of the Montgomery Singers, as referenced in the first chapter. It was then she discovered that most music for treble voices was written for children or boys, and music that was written for women was often in poor textual and musical quality.⁶⁸ This activity, combined with a 1931 hysterectomy that supposedly ignited her interest

⁶⁶ Ruth Solie, "Afterword." In *Music & Women: The Story of Women in their Relation to Music*, by Sophie Drinker, 325-368, 2nd Ed. New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1995, 332.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 334.

in gender issues,⁶⁹ further encouraged her to study the history of women's involvement in music for two decades, and to eventually publishing her findings in a 1948 book: *Music and Women*.

Music and Women has influenced feminist musicology in the decades since 1948; but at the time of its publishing, the book flew under the musicological radar.⁷⁰ Sophie herself was an amateur musicologist, which lent little weight to her authorship. Her lack of formal studies and—according to Solie—her anger also informed her research methods, which were “wholly unmodulated by customary practices of disciplinary musicology or by traditional academic commitments to objectivity and personal distance.”⁷¹ As an additional result to her outsider status, however, some of her ideas were ahead of their time. For instance, *Music and Women* essentially argues gender roles to be a social construct; Sophie notes that women will “behave according to the expectations their societies have for them.”⁷² This concept is certainly not controversial in the twenty-first century, but in the 1930s and 1940s, “people still thought largely in terms of ‘naturally’ gendered behavior and capabilities.”⁷³

⁶⁹ Ruth Solie, “Women’s History and Music History: The Feminist Historiography of Sophie Drinker,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 5/2 (1993): 8-31, accessed 30 November 2022 at <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh/2010.0261>, 20.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Wood, “Preface,” in *Music & Women: The Story of Women in their Relation to Music*, by Sophie Drinker, vii-ix, 2nd Ed. New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1995, vii.

⁷¹ Ruth Solie, “Afterword.” In *Music & Women: The Story of Women in their Relation to Music*, by Sophie Drinker, 325-368, 2nd Ed. New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1995, 334.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 334.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 335.

As such, Sophie Drinker's passionate attempt to find quality repertoire for women's chorus that expressed a true women's voice was at its height in the 30s and 40s. In Lawrence Gilman's 1938 article publicizing the upcoming premiere of *Lament for the Stolen*, she offered a thorough outline of her ideas:

. . . although a vast quantity of material is available [for women's chorus], the quality of it is manifestly inferior to the great works for mixed chorus, or to the religious music intended for liturgical choirs of men and boys. The reasons why really great music has not been written for women seem to be to be based upon much more profound causes than the usual excuses of the natural limitation of women's voices.

For one thing, the texts selected by composers are not related to the noblest aspects of women's lives . . . because of the attitude of the church toward women. In the Middle Ages every artistic impulse found its outlet in the worship of the Holy Mother and her Child Jesus, and every composer used the church service as his medium of expression and for the development of art forms . . . women were denied participation, their places in the choir being taken by boys and castrati. The Magnificat, the Ave Maria, and the Stabat Mater, expressions of the deepest emotions of women, which should be the basis of a rich, classical literature for women's voices, have always been sung by men and boys. And when the creative imagination of musicians was finally turned into secular channels, the social status of women had been firmly established by centuries of repression. Themes of grandeur and nobility did not seem appropriate for creatures who perhaps had no souls, and certainly did not enjoy minds.

The desire of the girl for womanhood, the instinctive loyalty of mothers; the grief of women in war time; their joy at the safe return of the soldiers—these are motives which command the respect of everyone; and yet composers have passed them by in silence and have chosen instead trivial texts about angels, fairies, the bevy of young girls, or the most sentimental aspect of the Madonna and the Child. Composers . . . “wrote down” to women, and frequently ignored possibilities for the women's chorus in its legitimate field.⁷⁴

So, in the early 1930s, during the beginning stages of Drinker's efforts to identify repertoire that expressed deep emotions unique to women, a catastrophic event that would affect the nation—and the anxieties of women in particular—was about to happen.

⁷⁴ Lawrence Gilman, “A Lament for the Stolen,” *New York Herald Tribune* (1926-1962), New York, N.Y., December 18, 1938: E6.

CHAPTER 3

THE LINDBERGH TRAGEDY: INSPIRATION FOR THIS CHORAL WORK

Charles Lindbergh (1902-1974) was a world-famous military officer and aviator who, at the age of 25, changed the course of aviation when he flew his airplane *The Spirit of St. Louis* from New York to Paris in history's first nonstop solo flight across the Atlantic on May 20-21 of 1927.⁷⁵ In his book *The Case That Never Dies: The Lindbergh Kidnapping*, Lloyd Gardner quotes Lindbergh's description of the scene upon his landing in Paris:

When he finally landed at Le Bourget airport thirty-three hours after takeoff, crowds engulfed his plane, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, and "parts of the ship began to crack from the pressure of the multitude." Lindbergh started to climb out of the cockpit, "but as soon as one foot appeared through the door I was dragged the rest of the way without assistance on my part . . . For nearly half an hour I was unable to touch the ground, during which time I was ardently carried around in what seemed to be a very small area, and in every position it is possible to be in. Everyone had the best of intentions but no one seemed to know just what they were."⁷⁶

If the description seems reminiscent of how massive crowds of fans treat rock stars, such a comparison is not far from the truth. Charles and his wife Anne Morrow Lindbergh (1906-2001) enjoyed celebrity status in America, and when their infant son Charles Augustus Lindbergh Jr. was kidnapped for ransom from their home on the evening of March 1, 1932, the resulting series of events inevitably became a national news story.⁷⁷ The American public was

⁷⁵ Lloyd Gardner, *The Case That Never Dies: The Lindbergh Kidnapping*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2004, 5.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Patrick Ranfranz, "Charles A. Lindbergh Jr. Kidnapping, March 1, 1932," Charles Lindbergh: An American Aviator, accessed 11 November 2022 at <http://www.charleslindbergh.com/kidnap/index.asp>.

inundated with headlines the likes of “Lindbergh Baby Kidnapped From Home of Parents on Farm Near Princeton; Taken From His Crib; Wide Search On,” “Father Searches Grounds For Child,” “Four States Join Hunt,” “Lindbergh Hopeful, Is Ready To Ransom Son,” and “Kidnapping Arouses Sympathy Of Nation.”⁷⁸

In discovering the child’s absence, the family found a ransom note demanding \$50,000 in return for the baby, as well as obvious evidence of a break-in. New Jersey State Police assumed charge of the investigation, and the day after the kidnapping, J. Edgar Hoover offered the services of the FBI to the investigation. Lindbergh proceeded to use his own connections in an attempt to communicate with the criminal underground for clues or a direction to the kidnapper. As further ransom notes followed, retired school principal Dr. John Condon offered in a newspaper article to act as liaison between the kidnapper and the Lindberghs, which the kidnapper accepted. A method of communication between the parties was thus established: the kidnapper through ransom notes, and the Lindberghs through Condon’s newspaper/periodical columns.⁷⁹

Negotiations between the parties proceeded in stops and starts; several times, Dr. Condon met with a man who went by the name of “John,” who supposedly represented the real kidnapper and gave Condon instructions, as well as tokens to prove possession of the baby (such as Charles Jr.’s sleeping suit and thumb guard). Finally, a handoff was arranged: on the evening of April 2, 1932, Dr. Condon met with “John” and gave him the ransom money (with serial numbers of the bills recorded by the FBI). In return, “John” gave Condon instructions regarding where to find

⁷⁸ Patrick Ranfranz, “Lindbergh Articles from The New York Times,” Charles Lindbergh: An American Aviator, accessed 6 February 2023 at <http://www.charleslindbergh.com/ny>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

the baby—on a boat named “Nellie” near Martha’s Vineyard in Massachusetts—and walked away. Subsequent searches of that location did not result in locating Charles Jr.⁸⁰

On May 12, 1932, a truck driver discovered the body of infant Charles Jr. on the side of a road in Mercer County, New Jersey; the body was partially buried, badly decomposed, and mutilated. Americans read the headline: “Lindy Baby Found Murdered; Skull Crushed By Blows; Body Buried In Brush.”⁸¹ Autopsies determined the child to have been dead for roughly two and a half months—identifying the potential time of death to be very soon after the date of the kidnapping itself. The day after this discovery, President Herbert Hoover doubled down on J. Edgar Hoover’s offer of FBI assistance by assigning all investigative government agencies to place themselves at the disposal of the State of New Jersey, and ordered that the FBI should serve as a coordinating agency for all federal investigations of this case.⁸²

For the next two years, the FBI kept the Lindbergh case open and active, ordering banks and merchants to monitor their registers in pursuit of the ransom bills and following every lead. Thousands of leads came across the FBI’s desk, and authorities had to take every one into account, regardless of source. Inevitably, as the media frenzy around the event grew, a deluge of misinformation from publicity seekers and frauds wasted a large portion of the FBI’s time and resources. However, extensive, intricate tracking of the ransom money in combination with Dr.

⁸⁰ Patrick Ranfranz, “Charles A. Lindbergh Jr. Kidnapping, March 1, 1932,” Charles Lindbergh: An American Aviator, accessed 11 November 2022 at <http://www.charleslinbergh.com/kidnap/index.asp>.

⁸¹ Patrick Ranfranz, “Lindbergh Articles from The New York Times,” Charles Lindbergh: An American Aviator, accessed 6 February 2023 at <http://www.charleslinbergh.com/ny>.

⁸² Ibid.

Condon's physical description of "John" led to the apprehension of Bruno Richard Hauptmann in September of 1934. Hauptmann was a German immigrant with a criminal record.⁸³

Following Hauptmann's apprehension, investigators uncovered overwhelming circumstantial evidence that Hauptmann was the sole individual guilty in the kidnapping. He was convicted in February of 1935, sentenced to death, and executed in April 1936. The Lindbergh tragedy alone spurred Congress to pass the Federal Kidnapping Act—casually known as the "Little Lindbergh Law"—declaring transportation of a kidnapping victim across state lines to be a federal crime.⁸⁴

On top of the overwhelming grief that consumed Charles and Anne Lindbergh following the 1932 kidnapping, the suffocating media presence in their lives in America was enough to drive the couple to exile in Europe in 1935. They returned to the states in 1939, three years after Hauptmann's execution.⁸⁵ The catastrophic event, and the effect that it had on the anxieties of women and mothers throughout America, would serve as the point of inspiration for Sophie Drinker's commission of *Lament for the Stolen*.

⁸³ Patrick Ranfranz, "Charles A. Lindbergh Jr. Kidnapping, March 1, 1932," Charles Lindbergh: An American Aviator, accessed 11 November 2022 at <http://www.charleslindbergh.com/kidnap/index.asp>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

A HISTORY OF *LAMENT FOR THE STOLEN*

A Commission

The first evidence of *Lament for the Stolen*'s conception is in a letter written from Sophie Drinker to Katherine Garrison Chapin dated January 27, 1935. In it, Drinker notes that she had commissioned Edith Braun to compose an original work for her women's chorus, but as usual, in her opinion, the text did not rise to the level of sophistication that she felt a women's chorus deserved. She laments to Chapin:

. . . where are the Magnificats for women's voices, or where are the emotions so poignantly expressed by you in *Nancy Hanks*? . . . The music she composed is good. Harry thinks so, and Sam Barber thinks so—so I am more than anxious to sing it—but never will with those words . . . The music is light and gay and charming—not sad at all—and any words pertaining to someone's beloved garden, or to a woman's playing baby, or to a young girl's escape for authority—simply pleasure in a lovely day—anything at all but written for a woman's point of view.⁸⁶

Since Drinker knew Chapin's poetry to be suitable for a choral work written from a sophisticated women's point of view, she goes on in the letter to ask if Chapin would perhaps be interested in adapting some of her own existing poetry to music.⁸⁷ The next indication of progress is on a page of notes Chapin wrote to herself at an unknown time, hastily outlining the history of the work. One line reads, "Jan 1936: gave me idea. Mch [March?] finished poem—she [Drinker?] sent it to McD."⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Drinker to Chapin, Jan 27, 1935, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Chapin's notes to herself, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

Lacking correspondence between January 1935 and March 1936 and thus any details, we can propose some assumptions: Drinker and Chapin perhaps spent 1935 attempting to select a pre-existing Chapin poem to be set to music and at some point selected Harl McDonald as the composer—someone with whom they would both be familiar, as Drinker and McDonald were both associated with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Chapin was active in the local arts scene. Then, in January 1936, Sophie proposed the aforementioned idea: an original poem, addressing the anxieties of motherhood at a time that the threat of child kidnapping was looming over the nation. It would certainly make sense for the team to be interested in such an idea at such a time, as late 1935 and early 1936 were during the height of national media fervor regarding the Lindbergh tragedy: Bruno Hauptmann was convicted in February 1935 and executed in April 1936, and 1935 was the year that drove Charles and Anne Lindbergh to exile in Europe.⁸⁹

Sophie sent the completed poem to McDonald in March of 1936 (as implied by Chapin's notes), and McDonald confirmed his interest and intent to compose the music throughout the next two months. Chapin sent Drinker a new draft of the poem on March 18, along with some thoughts regarding ideas for the musical setting, a request for any alterations Drinker may suggest, and a hope that McDonald was still interested.⁹⁰ On March 26, McDonald wrote to Drinker, expressing his prior skepticism of "the subject of Anne Lindbergh for a women's chorus text"⁹¹—confirmation of the Lindbergh tragedy as the seed for the idea—and his change of heart

⁸⁹ Patrick Ranfranz, "Charles A. Lindbergh Jr. Kidnapping, March 1, 1932," Charles Lindbergh: An American Aviator, accessed 11 November 2022 at <http://www.charleslindbergh.com/kidnap/index.asp>.

⁹⁰ Chapin to Drinker, March 18, 1936, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

⁹¹ McDonald to Drinker, March 26, 1936, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

after reading “Mrs. Biddle’s . . . magnificent work.”⁹² He intended to let Chapin know of any minor changes necessary for “singability,” but otherwise expressed an interest in getting started immediately.⁹³ On May 27, McDonald wrote to Chapin requesting that she refrain from publishing the poem until after he finished work on the music; he planned to have the score completed by the end of the summer.⁹⁴ For all intents and purposes, in the spring of 1936, *Lament for the Stolen* was on track for completion and performance within the year.

A Creative Battle of Wills

From May of 1936 to January of 1937, there is another absence of available correspondence. However, from Chapin’s correspondence beginning in January 1937, it is clear that late 1936 featured budding dispute between the creative trio regarding *Lament for the Stolen*. In notes to herself written October 1937, Chapin recalls that McDonald had mentioned to her in autumn of 1936 an idea to include men’s voices at some point in the work. She wrote that she was “disappointed” about this, but not “horrified”; she did not consider it a “breach of faith.” Rather, she respected his choice as a creative artist in the collaboration, and it did not occur to her to tell Drinker.⁹⁵ As we will come to see, she certainly regretted her choice to keep that information to herself.

⁹² McDonald to Drinker, March 26, 1936, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ McDonald to Chapin, May 27, 1936, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

⁹⁵ Chapin’s notes, October 25, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

In a letter to McDonald January 12, 1937, Chapin referred to “very distressing news” regarding a conversation between McDonald and Drinker, and that she was upset over the “possessive attitude” anyone would assume over a creative project.⁹⁶ Indeed, as further correspondence reveals, Drinker was unhappy with the creative direction in which McDonald wanted to take the project and claimed authority over several of his choices due to her role as commissioner of the work. The project, having shown promise in early 1936 of quick completion and performance, was now skidding to a halt.

Chapin and McDonald stayed in touch throughout early 1937, continuing to discuss ideas for *Lament* and how they might possibly continue the project in a way the Drinker may find satisfactory. February of 1937 saw a significant development. In Chapin’s notes hastily outlining the history of the work, she writes:

Feb 1937—she (Drinker) heard he (McDonald) wanted men’s voices—flew at him in a rage. Felt I’d double-crossed her. Got him to sign a statement saying how it was to be done and threatened him with a lawsuit.⁹⁷

It is unclear as to whether this particular altercation occurred in February of 1937 or during our “blind spot” that is the last half of 1936 (and that Chapin only became wholly aware of it in February of 1937). Clearly there were creative differences between McDonald and Drinker before 1937, as per Chapin’s January 1937 correspondence, whether or not it was over the involvement of men’s voices. Regardless, by February of 1937, the primary disagreement between Drinker and McDonald was just that: Drinker’s intention with the commission was the creation of a work solely for women’s voices, expressing a wholly feminine perspective, and

⁹⁶ Chapin to McDonald, January 12, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

⁹⁷ Chapin’s notes (date unknown), Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

McDonald was intent to sully that concept with the inclusion of men's voices in the work. Furthermore, Sophie's lawyer husband intimidated McDonald with the threat of legal action were he to insist on taking her commission in a direction opposite her intentions, forcing his signature on a statement legally binding him to abide by her creative choices.

Chapin and McDonald stayed in touch through September of 1937, indicating their shared desire to find a solution, along with their shared belief in Drinker's unreasonably "possessive" attitude toward the project.⁹⁸ On October 8, 1937, McDonald wrote to Drinker, officially resigning from his involvement in the project, citing his busy schedule as the reason:

The possibilities of doing any writing during the winter season are so slight that I doubt that I shall have a chance of finishing the sketches this season. I know how anxious you and Mrs. Biddle are to have the work completed and I think, in view of all the circumstances, that it would be best to have some other musician do it.

I'm sorry it hasn't worked out more satisfactorily for me, for it is an exciting subject for a composer and I hope that it will turn out well for someone else.⁹⁹

Despite McDonald's stated reasons for abandoning the project, the unspoken rationale was clear: he took deep offense to Drinker forcing his creative hand, and here was his way out of the commission. Drinker was all too ready to move on, forwarding McDonald's letter of resignation to Chapin on October 11, along with a suggestion that they approach Samuel Barber to take over the project.¹⁰⁰ At this point, feeling stuck in between warring factions and feeling that McDonald had truly been mistreated, Chapin felt the need to take ownership of the situation. On October 14, Chapin wrote letters to both McDonald and Drinker, not content to be a passive

⁹⁸ McDonald to Chapin, March 10, 1937 and McDonald to Chapin, September 14, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

⁹⁹ McDonald to Drinker, October 8, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

¹⁰⁰ Drinker to Chapin, October 11, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

observer, and essentially refusing to consider the subject closed until she herself heard directly from McDonald of his intent to resign the commission.^{101 102}

McDonald's written response to Chapin on October 21 reveals his true feelings. Indeed, he was confident in his creative choices, felt that Drinker was out of line, and regardless of his interest in the project he simply did not feel like continuing to invest his time in the frustrating exchange when he had other projects on the docket (voicing some passive-aggressive language toward Drinker in the process):

I am sorry that there is no possibility of my attempting another setting of the *Lament*. While I appreciate Mrs. Drinker's enthusiasm for women's choral literature, I am afraid that my first plan of attack on the subject, which was to give the maternal lines of the poem to women's voices and to combine men's and women's voices at the climax, would be for me the only honest approach to the work. Mr. Drinker told me very frankly that, if necessary, he would take legal steps to prohibit any performance of a setting which did not conform to the original plan which was to be a work for women's voices only.

Honestly, my interest in the whole scheme and whatever value my first sketches may have had, do not warrant a continuation of the discussion. Just now I am committed to several plans that will occupy all the time I can find in the next year or two. There are new compositions to be done for Heifetz, Stokowski, Ormandy and Koussevitzky and none of them has shown a disposition to tell me how to write the music. Under the circumstances I think it best to forget the whole scheme. I am sorry that your very fine and exciting text didn't produce the results that it deserves and I hope that another person may produce a setting that will be satisfactory to both you and Mrs. Drinker.¹⁰³

On October 25, Chapin wrote a slew of notes to herself, seemingly organizing her thoughts, reflecting on the prior few months, her role, and her strategy in expressing her feelings to Drinker. She recalled Drinker's original proposition and her own immediate emotional connection to it due to her feelings for Anne Lindbergh, as well as her shared interest that it

¹⁰¹ Chapin to McDonald, October 14, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰² Chapin to Drinker, October 14, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

¹⁰³ McDonald to Chapin, October 21, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

would be a work for a chorus solely made of women. However, Chapin recognized that her own interest in the women's chorus aspect was "not a fetish"¹⁰⁴—implying her feeling that Drinker's connection to that element was unreasonable. She noted as well that no money had passed between anyone; there was no official evidence of ownership, and as such, her and her husband's threats of legal action were absurd.¹⁰⁵

In general, she clearly felt that Drinker's sense of pride was overshadowing artistic merit. In Chapin's opinion, this should be about music and art, not solely about feminism, going as far as to say that Drinker should "get someone else to write her feminist propaganda in art."¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, she accused Drinker of not understanding anything about creators. Drinker may have had the idea, but once she handed it off to the poet and the musician, it grew into something larger, more universal, in ways Drinker's possessive attitude could not comprehend: "Sophie, can't you be proud that you started something that great, so big it outshipped you—if you're not an artistic creator, aren't you a mother. Aren't you glad to have a child grow beyond you?"¹⁰⁷ Chapin further expressed in these notes her own personal connection to the project, noting the feelings she poured into the poem and that, "... in order to write that, I had to go into myself and suffer all over again the agony of that thing and the death of my own child."¹⁰⁸ Surely, if she

¹⁰⁴ Chapin's notes, October 25, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Chapin's notes, October 25, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Chapin's notes, October 25, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

herself could compromise some of the original creative direction of the project after such deep, tragic, personal investment, Drinker should be able to as well.

November of 1937 saw a bevy of communication between Chapin and Drinker. Chapin communicated to Drinker on November 3 her aforementioned feelings, culminating in a request that Drinker recuse herself from further creative process of the project and allow it to grow and develop as a collaboration between two artists: poet and musician. She assured Drinker that she shared her goals for the work, and asked for her trust in working with McDonald—or any composer that will agree to the project—to bring them to fruition to the best of any collaborative ability.¹⁰⁹

The two women proceeded to write back and forth for the next two weeks, Drinker emphasizing the importance to her of a woman-only chorus¹¹⁰ and Chapin reassuring her of her own mutual desire, but with a reasonable understanding of creative flexibility.¹¹¹ On November 17, Chapin wrote in her notes to herself of a conversation with the potentially committed conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra premiere of the work, Eugene Ormandy. Ormandy, she wrote, aligned himself with McDonald, refusing to suggest another composer because he felt McDonald had been wronged. He guaranteed a performance of the work only if McDonald were the composer and hoped to gain an apology from the Drinkers. Ormandy stood in line with

¹⁰⁹ Chapin to Drinker, November 3, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

¹¹⁰ Drinker to Chapin, November 4, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

¹¹¹ Chapin to Drinker, November 10, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

Chapin's perspective that Drinker's unreasonable, possessive attitude was blocking an expression of true art that was destined to grow out of her original idea.¹¹²

Chapin seems to have met personally with Drinker within the next few days and on November 19 recorded notes of their meeting. Chapin elaborated on all of her thoughts, going as far to propose to Drinker that "a few men in the climax [of the musical work] only brings out the feature of women."¹¹³ When Drinker became disagreeable, Chapin thoroughly chided her, expressing frustration in her selfish, possessive attitude, her threats of legal action that she herself knew to be unfounded, and her shameful treatment of an established, honorable musician, particularly as someone who was such a patron of music and had musicians in her house on a regular basis. Chapin ended her notes writing to herself that "Her (Drinker's) ideas are often good, but . . . it's her snobbish leisure class patronizing attitude of mind that spoils it all."¹¹⁴

Chapin's unguarded, straightforward language with Drinker at this meeting seems to have spurred some action. The next few days in November saw frequent, overlapping communication between Drinker, Chapin, and McDonald. Sometime in November, Chapin wrote to her friend and Philadelphia harpist Edna Rosenbaum, noting that Drinker had "given up her possessiveness of last year"¹¹⁵—a sign of potential compromise. In late November, Chapin opened up communication with McDonald, hoping to convince him to come back onto the project after having softened Drinker's perspective, and McDonald told her that Drinker had called him to

¹¹² Chapin's notes, November 17, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

¹¹³ Chapin's notes, November 19, 1937. Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Chapin to Edna Rosenbaum, November 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

talk about a “different approach to the matter” and “to see what might be done.”¹¹⁶ Chapin wrote in her notes that she hoped to connect with McDonald in expressing that they both had been wronged by Drinker (him through Drinker’s shameful threat of legal action, her through her poetry being denied artistic fruition through Drinker’s stubbornness), that they two were the ones destined to bring this project to life, and that the potential beauty and artistic impact of this project was too important to abandon because of petty creative differences.¹¹⁷ On November 22, Chapin wrote McDonald with directions to her house, in preparation for a meeting to take place on November 30.¹¹⁸

It seems, however, that Drinker and McDonald came to some kind of agreement as early as November 20. On November 28, Henry Drinker (acting as legal counsel on behalf of his wife) wrote to McDonald, “summarizing the arrangement we discussed on November 20th”:¹¹⁹

You will set to music Mrs. Biddle’s poem “Lamentation for the Stolen,” for Orchestra and Women’s Voices. While the form and length of the composition are, of course, in your discretion, it is to be what we know as a major work, and the chorus and any soloist or soloists are to be women exclusively, the chorus occupying a major position. The work will be finished and ready for rehearsal by October 1, 1938.¹²⁰

Details are unfortunately missing regarding conversations between McDonald, Drinker, and Chapin throughout the month of November 1937. However, evidence shows that Chapin’s

¹¹⁶ Chapin’s notes, November 20, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Chapin to McDonald, November 22, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

¹¹⁹ Drinker (Henry) to McDonald, November 28, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

steadfast commitment to find some kind of solution encouraged Drinker and McDonald to reconvene for discussion, to forego their mutual stubbornness, and to open their minds. By the time McDonald met Chapin for their November 30 meeting, the resolution was all but decided; in the end, Drinker got her way with a work exclusively for women's voices, and McDonald had arrived at creative peace with the idea. Further correspondence between McDonald and Chapin in December of 1937 confirms their shared relief that the issue had been resolved and that they were now free to proceed on the project.^{121 122}

Preparation, Rehearsal, and Publicity

Creative differences between collaborators having wrapped up at the end of 1937, McDonald seems to have begun serious composition of *Lament for the Stolen* in early 1938. No correspondence exists until July and August of 1938, when an influx of letters between McDonald and Chapin indicates the composition being in its final stages, along with some discussion of slight lyric changes and ideas of musical direction. They also discuss the prospects for their planned next collaboration, based on Chapin's newly written "lynching poem:" a project that would eventually become William Grant Still's *And They Lynched Him on a Tree*.¹²³

¹²¹ Chapin to McDonald, December 11, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

¹²² McDonald to Chapin, December 15, 1937, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

¹²³ Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C. In these July/August 1938 letters, McDonald and Chapin make repeated reference to a "lynching poem," which is of great historical interest. While discussing finishing touches for *Lament*, the two artists were simultaneously making plans for their next project following *Lament for the Stolen*. As if continual reference to a "Lynching Poem" were not enough, the fact that both of them quote the first line of what modern choral musicians know as the beginning of William Grant Still's *And They Lynched Him on a Tree*

By late October, chorus rehearsals for *Lament* were in progress.¹²⁴ The chorus consisted of a combination of three choirs: University of Pennsylvania Women's Chorus, Mendelssohn Club Women's Chorus (neither of which were actually "women's choruses," but rather the soprano and alto sections of their respective SATB choruses), and College of Chesnut Hill Women's Chorus (of which Sophie Drinker was a member).¹²⁵ McDonald was director of the first two groups, and assumed the position of chorus master for the project. Throughout October and November, Chapin and McDonald contacted various media outlets, encouraging publicity for the December premiere of the work, and Chapin in particular wrote to the editor of *Poetry* magazine, establishing her intent at the time to publish the poem through their periodical.¹²⁶ Though *Poetry* published a review of the premiere, the poem was eventually published through Centaur Publishing.¹²⁷

In late November 1938, Chapin felt moved to write to Elizabeth Morrow, the mother of Anne Lindbergh (the exact nature of their relationship is unclear, but it is possible they became acquainted, both of them members of the New England social elite). Chapin sent Morrow a draft

reveals that, indeed, Harl McDonald was Chapin's originally intended composer to set her poem to music, and sketches may possibly exist for McDonald's vision.

¹²⁴ McDonald to Chapin, October 28, 1938, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

¹²⁵ Concert Program. The Philadelphia Orchestra. December 30-31, 1939. Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

¹²⁶ Chapin to George Dillon, November 10, 1938, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

¹²⁷ Chapin to McDonald, December 10, 1938, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

of the poem, along with a letter alluding to their shared experiences of loss (mentioning her own *Bright Mariner*, the poetic tribute to the son she lost) and details regarding the project:

My dear Mrs. Morrow – A little time ago Katharine Harvey asked us for a copy of my poem “Bright Mariner” to send to you. On the strength of a mutual friend, I am taking the liberty of sending you another poem, under separate cover . . . “Lament to the Stolen” was written for a chorus of women’s voices. It is being given its premiere by the Philadelphia Orchestra . . . The composer is Harl McDonald, director of music at the University of Pennsylvania, an American composer, whose work I am sure you probably know. When you read the poem, you will understand its inception and why and with what deep appreciation I am sending it to you.¹²⁸

Morrow wrote back to Chapin on December 8th, thanking her for the sentiment and expressing her deeply-felt emotions regarding the project:

It would mean so much to me that I would be afraid to hear it sung—but I hope the beautiful words and music together may help to bring about a safer world for all little children. The essence of your poem lies for me in the lines—“shoulder to shoulder, the wide world over, we suffer this thing.”¹²⁹

Throughout early December, chorus rehearsals proceeded, with small revisions to the score occasionally being made; Chapin attended rehearsals as she was available.¹³⁰ As publicity began to appear for the December 30/31 premiere, McDonald and Chapin began to notice a trend they had not anticipated: the media was emphasizing the connection to the Lindbergh tragedy more than they would like. Indeed, as explored, the Lindbergh story was the seed upon which Drinker and Chapin developed their idea. But the final musical work was not intended to be “about” the Lindbergh story, and the media latching onto this element as the primary intent of

¹²⁸ Chapin to Elizabeth Morrow, November 26, 1938, Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

¹²⁹ Morrow to Chapin, December 8, 1938, Katherine Biddle Papers.

¹³⁰ Margaretta Wright to Chapin, December 1, 1938, Katherine Biddle Papers.

the work was discouraging to the creators. Indeed, articles appearing in various news outlets featured titles the likes of “Kidnapping Inspires Composer,” “Harl McDonald’s Fantasia for Chorus with ‘Lindy’ Theme Set for Premiere,” and “Orchestral Music Based on the Lindbergh Case.”¹³¹

Chapin wrote to McDonald on December 10, acknowledging that the publicity was unfortunately highlighting the Lindbergh story, and suggesting that the two of them in interviews and in program notes unify their approach that the work was *not* a specific dramatization of the Lindbergh tragedy. As a rule, Chapin suggested a statement akin to: “Although the poem is profoundly a tribute to the courageous personality of Anne Lindbergh, the theme belongs in possibility at least to the lives of contemporary American women.”¹³²

Chapin and McDonald found an appropriate vessel for their message in Lawrence Gilman, who published a preview article for the premiere of *Lament* in the *New York Herald Tribune* on December 18. The article is a strong, thorough exploration of the conception of *Lament*, quoting extensive statements from Drinker regarding her desire to see fitting music written for women’s choruses. In addition, the article states the theme of the work as “a voicing of the universal maternal protest against kidnapping,” not once mentioning the name

¹³¹ Various clippings, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

¹³² Chapin to McDonald, December 10, 1938, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

Lindbergh.¹³³ As such, Gilman was eventually chosen to write the program notes for the work's premiere, as well as for the other works on the concert.¹³⁴

Possibly as a result of Lindbergh-heavy publicity, *Lament* suffered some premature criticism, with some news outlets accusing the creators of exploiting a national tragedy. In particular, the *Philadelphia Record* published an editorial entitled *A Terrible Thing*, expressing such a perspective about the upcoming premiere. The editorial made its way to the *New York Evening Post* as well, reaching more individuals with its questions of *Lament*'s good taste. Defenders of *Lament* came out of the woodwork, taking the papers to task for disparaging a work yet to be heard. Fellow New England composer Mary Howe wrote to the editor of *Philadelphia Record*, defending the thematic intent of the work and further accusing the paper of hypocrisy regarding the Lindbergh tragedy:

I cannot express a pre-natal opinion of Harl McDonald's composition and I marvel at the prescience of your editorial writer who knows what to think before the work has been presented. But I have had the honor of reading the poem. I was impressed alike with the dignity and simplicity of its beauty and that impersonal universal quality that should make the true complement of music, which it was intended. Naturally, the press would prefer oblivion for the history of the Lindberg kidnapping and the part they played in it, but I would rather remember, with the Lindberghs, within the dignified compass of an impersonal work of art, than forget with The Record, which condemns the conception of the work before its birth.¹³⁵

¹³³ Lawrence Gilman, "A Lament for the Stolen," *New York Herald Tribune* (1926-1962), New York, N.Y., December 18, 1938: E6.

¹³⁴ Lawrence Gilman, "*Lament for the Stolen*: for Chorus of Women's Voices and Orchestra: Poem by Katherine Garrison Chapin; Music by Harl McDonald," program notes for Philadelphia Orchestra, *Twelfth Pair*, Eugene Ormandy, conductor, Friday, December 30 and Saturday, December 31, 1938, Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA.

¹³⁵ Clipping from Philadelphia Record, December 20, 1938, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

In response to the *New York Post*'s printing of the editorial, Chapin's well-known husband Francis wrote in to that particular publication:

The editorial was admittedly written without knowledge of the music, and was based on the doubt that kidnapping was a proper subject for a work of art. Apparently the writer's view was that the cruel notoriety which had been given to the Lindbergh case by the American press foreclosed the treatment of this tragedy in terms of art—a tragedy repeated in other American homes and essentially American in its scope and horror.

But, is not any national art based on such themes, and called into play by events which we cannot forget, because they threaten our children and cast a shadow on our homes? Art has its passionate, dark approach, if it is to reflect suffering as well as our joys; and if it is not merely to coat pleasant unrealities, it must occasionally speak from the depths of a national feeling, expressing, as here, a universal protest.

It is so easy to talk about "bad taste;" particularly before you have read the poem or heard the music.¹³⁶

As the population of New England read contrasting opinions about *Lament* in their daily periodicals, chorus rehearsals continued. Margaretta Wright, good friend of Chapin and a singer in the chorus for the premiere, wrote extensively to Chapin throughout the months of November and December, and her letters are a strong source of information regarding McDonald's rehearsal process with the chorus. On December 1, Wright wrote to Chapin:

[McDonald noted] that the writing of this music was one of the most vital experiences he had ever had. That *you* had not treated the subject theatrically or emotionally . . . he called his work a Fantasia in the Elizabethan style. That we, the chorus, were the interpreters and creators of the mood. That there were three spheres of emotional experience: physical, intellectual, and the spirit, and the last was the most important . . . he even went so far as to say that the spiritual experience he had had while writing the music was more important than anything else that had concerned his existence.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Francis Biddle to New York Post, December 17, 1938, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

¹³⁷ Margaretta Wright to Chapin, December 1, 1938, Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

Further elaborating on the rehearsal experience, in an undated letter, Wright described McDonald's approach to teaching the chorus how to appropriately perform the moments of *sprechstimme* and the dramatic moment that requires the women's chorus to "shriek":

. . . he talked to us about the proper way to do the *sprechstimme* as a Greek chorus, supplicating and shrieking an appeal to Zeus . . . it was a cry from women, not a woman. He told us to raise the pitch of our voices, not to let them pale at the end of a line or word; he hoped we would lose our self-consciousness and if one voice could be so pitched that it raise above the others that was fine, spoke of how excited women got at football games, etc.

We all worked hard mostly at that and screamed as hard as possible. I really think fundamentally he is right and I only hope we can get the words across so that they are distinguishable.

Sophie was all smiles as of course that is what she wants.¹³⁸

Chapin and McDonald continued to publicize the premiere throughout December. At some point, Chapin performed a live reading of her poem on a radio broadcast.^{139 140} In addition, the prestigious Cosmopolitan Club of Philadelphia (of which Margaretta Wright was in charge) sponsored an event on the afternoon of December 20th, wherein Chapin performed a reading of her poem and McDonald played some excerpts from the musical score of *Lament* on piano.¹⁴¹ Most importantly on this occasion, Chapin gave a short talk before her reading, in which she summarized her (and McDonald's) feelings regarding the unjust preemptive treatment of the work by the media. After expressing her sincere gratitude to the people in the room for sponsoring the event and honoring the upcoming premiere, she spoke out (the weight of such a

¹³⁸ Wright to Chapin, unknown date, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

¹³⁹ Martha Rowland to Chapin, December 22, 1938, Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴⁰ Marie Stevenson to Chapin, December 21, 1938, Katherine Biddle Papers.

¹⁴¹ Clipping, Katherine Biddle Papers.

statement very significant in her eyes, illustrated by the fact that she wrote several drafts of the talk):

I'm sorry that Philadelphia felt it had to condemn a work of art before it had been given a hearing.

"Lament for the Stolen" is not a narrative of descriptive poem that tells the story of any particular individuals in any particular kidnapping. It is a lyrical cry of the heard. It is a lament of the women of the world, especially of American women, expressing an emotion that is deep in all of us.

You know, the great choruses, a mass of people singing, can only express one or two great emotions, either joy or sorrow, either exaltation or protest. Death and tragedy may not be as soothing [or] mellow to the ear, but they strike a deeper chord. The tragedy of the stolen child belongs in the folk history of American. It is a theme so deep in our national life that when they even hear of it people rush to identify it with something in their own experience. It is because it is so real to them, they say it is in bad taste. Surely Art is never in bad taste because of its subject matter. Doesn't it depend on the approach to it, the conception of it? After all, a crucifixion isn't a parlor subject.

To be healthy, to have vigor and reality, art returns to the life of the people.

As you know, a few years ago a wave of kidnapping swept this country. And even now, what woman, with a child, doesn't wonder as she puts it to bed, or leaves it to play, whether she will find it safe when she returns. That lurking fear is there. As one woman wrote me, "I hope your poignant words and the music may help to bring about a safer world for all little children."¹⁴²

As we know from her correspondence, what Katherine Garrison Chapin kept in her heart was that the "one woman" to whom she referred was Elizabeth Morrow, grandmother of the famously kidnapped and murdered infant. While her poem *Lament for the Stolen* was meant as a collective expression of sorrow and anxiety of women throughout America, she *avoided publicly acknowledging the work's connection to her own personal grief over the loss of her son Garrison*. That she kept only to herself and to those closest to her that shared such intimate, personal, tragic experience.

¹⁴² Chapin's notes, December 20, 1938, Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

Performance and Reception

Lament for the Stolen premiered as planned, on back-to-back nights December 30 and 31, by the Philadelphia Orchestra and women's chorus, under the baton of Eugene Ormandy. The work was the centerpiece of the program: the first half consisted solely of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 (*Pathétique*) in B minor, McDonald's *Lament* opened the second half, and Weber's Overture to *Der Freischütz* closed the program (a program in line with McDonald's philosophy of the time that American works should be programmed alongside works from the European canon).¹⁴³ Harl McDonald was present as chorusmaster and composer and Sophie Drinker sang in the choir. Chapin, however, missed the first night due to an illness that went through her household.¹⁴⁴ She did recover enough to attend the second performance, in a seat next to wealthy Harlem Renaissance philanthropist Alain Locke.¹⁴⁵

Both performances were successful in general, though Margaretta Wright could not help but gossip to Chapin in a letter following the concert about several things: she overheard that Koussevitsky (current director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra) was upset with McDonald that Ormandy got to premiere the work instead of him, and that Ormandy had forgotten a cue on the first night and thus led the choir with more vigor on the second night. In addition, Wright claimed that Drinker supposedly paid a number of individual singers in the chorus (otherwise

¹⁴³ Concert Program. The Philadelphia Orchestra. December 30-31, 1939. Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴⁴ Chapin to McDonald, date unknown, Katherine Biddle Papers.

¹⁴⁵ Alain Locke to Chapin, January 18, 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers. Alain Locke was the first African-American Rhodes Scholar, and became known as the "Dean" of the Harlem Renaissance. He taught at Howard University and in 1925 published an anthology titled *The New Negro*, a collection of essays, poems, and stories that aimed to change stereotypes and insist that African-Americans demand civil rights.

made up of volunteers), who sang badly on the first night and did not show up for the second night.¹⁴⁶

Following the premiere, Chapin connected with a variety of people. She wrote to Charlotte Mason, a wealthy but reclusive philanthropist whom her friends and colleagues called “Godmother,”¹⁴⁷ telling her that, even though she was not at the premiere, she “felt her presence.”¹⁴⁸ Chapin received a congratulatory letter from Eleanor Roosevelt herself, who was not at the premiere, but to whom she had sent a copy of the poem.¹⁴⁹ She stayed in contact with Alain Locke, who praised her poetry—if not necessarily the music—and proposed the possibility of a New York premiere of the work, pending some revisions.¹⁵⁰ Several other individuals besides Locke entertained the idea of a New York premiere, and Chapin wrote to Ormandy petitioning as such, including the names of over a dozen supporters who had written to her regarding the idea (Ormandy was planning a series of New York concerts with the Philadelphia Orchestra for the coming year).¹⁵¹ Ormandy, however, quickly turned Chapin down, referencing the fact that his repertoire for the coming New York concerts were already planned, also noting that including

¹⁴⁶ Wright to Chapin, date unknown, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴⁷ Shirley, Wayne. D, "William Grant Still's Choral Ballad 'And They Lynched Him on a Tree,'" *American Music*, 12/4 (1994): 425-461, accessed 20 December 2021 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3052342>, 425.

¹⁴⁸ Chapin to Charlotte Mason, January 1, 1939, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

¹⁴⁹ Eleanor Roosevelt to Chapin, January 9, 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵⁰ Locke to Chapin, January 2, 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers.

¹⁵¹ Chapin to Eugene Ormandy, January 19, 1939, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

Lament in his Philadelphia season itself involved a lot of logistical shuffling.¹⁵² Plans for a New York premiere never proceeded any further.

Chapin connected once again with Elizabeth Morrow after the premiere, apologizing for the publicity that put the Lindbergh name and story on front pages once more. Noting that she was “powerless to stop it” and that the publicity was “further dragging out of such a painful thing,” she told Morrow that “in these days when I was quite frantic about it, your letter was my only consolation. Of course, I meant my poem to speak for all lost children. This thing was a ghastly stupidity.”¹⁵³ That letter, again, was the one that contained the phrase, “I hope your poignant words and the music may help to bring about a safer world for all little children.” Morrow responded, acknowledging the unfortunate nature of publicity and the fact that things can “get away from control.” She finished by saying:

I am very glad to learn through your letter that the performance was moving, dignified, and beautiful. Let us think of it only as that. I am dreadfully sorry that you had to bear anxiety about it and could not hear your lovely poem and the music with a free mind.¹⁵⁴

Professional critical response to the premiere generally praised Chapin’s poetry, but had lukewarm things to say about McDonald’s musical setting. *TIME* magazine’s review was brief and uncomplimentary:

. . . Braced as they were for composer McDonald’s shocker, the audience found the neoprimitive chorus and agitated orchestra less terrible than they had anticipated. Aside from a screech or two, composer McDonald has concocted his score with ingredients that recalled the work of several old masters. Press pundits, long critical of McDonald’s lack

¹⁵² Ormandy to Chapin, January 23, 1939, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵³ Chapin to Morrow, date unknown, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers.

¹⁵⁴ Morrow to Chapin, March 13, 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

of originality, loudly assured their readers that the title of his work, “Lament for the Stolen,” did not refer to McDonald’s familiar-sounding themes and harmonies.¹⁵⁵

Genevieve Taggard of *Poetry* reviewed the premiere in less dismissive language. She noted that the response from the audience was “moderate” and, while acknowledging that the “music and words seemed about evenly matched,” she felt conflicted with the nature of the setting overall:

. . . What I admire most in this poem is the boldness and simplicity of the phrasing. A lighter touch or an oblique attack would have been mannered and silly—unworthy of the theme . . . Those who wish to do what Miss Chapin has done will have to learn the courage of this simplicity . . . When I read the lines I feel the defect of this virtue. Such phrases as “The wide world over” seem out of place in this context because they carry the tone of an Irish ballad, not a lament in stark figures. And we consider such phrases too worn with use for excellence in modern writing. I began to wonder if Miss Chapin had discovered that we must remove our taboo on certain rhymes, phrases, and cadences.¹⁵⁶

As important as the published reviews were those reactions from Chapin’s and McDonald’s friends and colleagues. Mrs. Edward Becker thought the *Lament* was “lovely—very impressive and at times sweet—I could not keep the tears back.”¹⁵⁷ Chapin’s friend Amber Cheston wrote to her:

Your poem is so stunning, and the music was unbelievably a part and parcel of it. Suddenly cold shivers gathered on my spine—which was very startling to me, for I knew the poem almost by heart, and was unprepared to be struck by the horror from the musical sound.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Unknown, “Music: Terrible Thing,” *Time*, January 9, 1939, Accessed 20 December 2021 at <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,771316,00.html>.

¹⁵⁶ Genevieve Taggard, “News Notes,” *Poetry*, 53/5 (1939): 285-287. Accessed 20 December 2021 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20581660>.

¹⁵⁷ Mrs. Edward Becker to Chapin, January 2, 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵⁸ Amber Cheston to Chapin, date unknown, Katherine Biddle Papers.

Well-known American philanthropist Gertrude Ely also had nothing but good things to say to Chapin: “I want to tell you how very much I liked the whole performance and each part of the whole of the Lament—it feels to me a real achievement of all concerned.”¹⁵⁹

As mentioned, however, most reactions to McDonald’s music were less complimentary. Chapin’s friend Melanie Avery claimed to have “liked the music, [but] couldn’t feel it quite equaled [Chapin’s] poem.”¹⁶⁰ Mary Howe was unable to attend the premiere, but obtained a chorus score. From a reading, she felt the fugue passage looked “awfully good” and that “the shriek must be blood-curdling.”¹⁶¹ She did take issue with McDonald’s restructuring of some of Chapin’s poem;¹⁶² however, Chapin herself notes in Lawrence Gilman’s program notes that “The poem is rather loose in form, with a simple rhyme-scheme and lines which may be repeated and reused without destroying in any way the structure of the whole.”¹⁶³ A woman named Phoebe (last name unintelligible) wrote to Chapin:

I’m not sure that I approve of Harl McD’s ‘primitive wails,’ although they doubtless appealed to him for choral possibilities. They didn’t seem to suit the spirit of your poem,

¹⁵⁹ Gertrude Ely to Chapin, January 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

¹⁶⁰ Melanie Avery to Chapin, January 4, 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers.

¹⁶¹ Howe to Chapin, January 5, 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Lawrence Gilman, “*Lament for the Stolen: for Chorus of Women’s Voices and Orchestra: Poem by Katherine Garrison Chapin; Music by Harl McDonald,*” program notes for Philadelphia Orchestra, *Twelfth Pair*, Eugene Ormandy, conductor, Friday, December 30 and Saturday, December 31, 1938, Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA.

as I felt it . . . I thought it was the sort of musical composition one should hear several times before judging it.¹⁶⁴

Alain Locke, as mentioned, praised Chapin's poetry more than McDonald's music. In writing to Charlotte Mason immediately after the premiere, on January 1 of 1939, he wrote:

The poem . . . is truly great—in its simplicity—and deep universality . . . McDonald's music does not rise to the full strength of the words. In places it is beautifully developed . . . [but] the music missed the quiet tragedy in important places and the elemental quality so necessary for a proper translation of the emotion into music . . . too much of his *Lament* was voiced in shrill almost hysterical (unintelligible) of actual grief instead of in the lone self-contained agony of pity and compassion . . . when he pictured the serenity of the household and childhood in the introduction and in the concluding section there is a beautifully quiet singing quality to the music. It just isn't epic and elemental enough in the critical places.¹⁶⁵

Locke and Mason's mutual thoughts—that Chapin's poetry was exemplary and that McDonald's music did not serve it properly—spurred an idea. Feeling that Chapin's poetry was ideal for choral/symphonic setting by a potentially different composer, they commissioned her for a project that eventually became William Grant Still's *And They Lynched Him on a Tree*.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Phoebe (last name unintelligible) to Chapin, January 7, 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

¹⁶⁵ Locke to Mason, January 1, 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers. Knowing that Chapin and McDonald were working on a "Lynching Poem" project as early as summer of 1938, we can presume that Locke and Mason approached her to propose a commission, Chapin mentioned this "lynching" project in the works with McDonald, and Locke/Mason suggested they go forward with that idea, but involve an African-American composer rather than McDonald for such a racially charged project. McDonald's surrendering of the project is possibly alluded to in a letter from Chapin to McDonald written at an unknown time after the premiere of *Lament*, in which she writes, "I really feel as if something had died—having you give up my other poem!" Thus, thanks to Alain Locke's attendance at the premiere of *Lament for the Stolen*, a work originally intended to be the second McDonald/Chapin collaboration became a William Grant Still choral ballad, an important staple in the repertoire of twentieth century choral music.

¹⁶⁶ Wayne D. Shirley, "William Grant Still's Choral Ballad 'And They Lynched Him on a Tree,'" *American Music*, 12/4 (1994): 425-461, accessed 20 December 2021 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3052342>.

As noted, *Lament for the Stolen* was performed once again shortly after the premiere, on May 15 of 1940, by the Brico Junior Symphony Orchestra at White Plains High School in New York—this time alongside works by Gluck, Mozart, and Rimsky-Korsakov.¹⁶⁷ Since then, however, no evidence of any performance of the work exists. The lack of a subsequent New York performance of the work, the mediocre reception of the premiere, and possibly even the denial of a McDonald/Chapin follow-up collaboration on the “Lynching Poem”—the success of which may have shone favorably on *Lament* or encouraged a revisit—collectively buried the piece in the annals of history, especially as the world moved swiftly into the culture shift of World War II.

¹⁶⁷ Concert Program. The Brico Junior Symphony Orchestra. Antonia Brico. New York: White Plains High School, May 15, 1940. Katherine Biddle Papers.

CHAPTER 5

THE MUSIC OF *LAMENT FOR THE STOLEN*

Musical Analysis¹⁶⁸

Harl McDonald characterized the musical structure of *Lament for the Stolen* as “a fantasia in five episodes to be played without pause.”¹⁶⁹ Here is McDonald’s description of the structure, in his own words:

- (a) The first episode is built on two contrasting themes which reappear throughout the composition. They suggest “the long, cold winds of the terrible Spring” and “the harmless, innocent circle of light.” Both orchestra and chorus treat these themes in a variety of ways and, after a disturbed and agitated climax, a dozen measures of diminuendo lead to—
- (b) an abrupt *fortissimo* in the orchestra at bar 139. The whole chorus, unaccompanied, announces fear and shock in a series of neo-primitive wails, punctuated by a shriek. The orchestra is agitated, and, over a wailing figure alternating between orchestra and contraltos, the soprano section speaks the words, “This is a terrible thing to be done in our time.” The orchestra carries forward in *crescendo* after the chorus has ended its lines. A passage in reduced orchestra leads to—
- (c) a monotone chant over orchestra at bar 209 (“the heart stands still for the empty room, the empty bed”). The orchestra reiterates in amplified form the agitated music of Episode I and then is united with the chorus in a fugato on the lines “Woman to woman, the wide world over, our hands reach out to her side.” At measure 322 the monotone chant reappears at the lines “Dumb with compassion, dumb with pity,” which leads to a climax on the lines “But grief and horror time cannot mend wait at the vigil’s end.”
- (d) An orchestral interlude and the lines “Now it is ended” introduce the solo choir’s “So frail to suffer death” and the dirge in full chorus, “Let the earth cover in silence deep.”

¹⁶⁸ Harl McDonald, *Lament for the Stolen (manuscript)*, Pennsylvania: Theodore Presser, 1938.

¹⁶⁹ Lawrence Gilman, “*Lament for the Stolen*: for Chorus of Women’s Voices and Orchestra: Poem by Katherine Garrison Chapin; Music by Harl McDonald,” program notes for Philadelphia Orchestra, *Twelfth Pair*, Eugene Ormandy, conductor, Friday, December 30 and Saturday, December 31, 1938, Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA.

- (e) Abruptly the orchestra introduces the chorus in the spoken lines “Woman to woman.” The major climax of the whole work is heard on the lines “Not vengeance but justice, not destruction but peace.” There is a brief restatement of the original thematic material; orchestra and chorus bring the work to a close on the lines, “that childhood shall sleep in peace.”¹⁷⁰

Figure 1 outlines both McDonald’s delineation of the text between the five episodes and his choice of text setting in comparison to the structure of Chapin’s original poem. There are some notable changes between Chapin’s original structure and McDonald’s eventual setting; it is reasonable to assume that the two artists collaborated on such changes, as they exchanged opinions regarding the composition of the music throughout the summer of 1938—though none of that correspondence directly refers to textual changes. However, even if McDonald’s poetic alterations were of his own accord, Chapin never went on any public or private record in objection, and we recall her acknowledgement in Gilman’s program notes that the poem had a loose form, able to withstand restructuring without losing its overall intent. While no evidence exists of McDonald’s rationale for alterations he made to the poem, we can surmise some reasons.

¹⁷⁰ Lawrence Gilman, “*Lament for the Stolen: for Chorus of Women’s Voices and Orchestra: Poem by Katherine Garrison Chapin; Music by Harl McDonald,*” program notes for Philadelphia Orchestra, *Twelfth Pair*, Eugene Ormandy, conductor, Friday, December 30 and Saturday, December 31, 1938, Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA.

Figure 1

Katherine Garrison Chapin's poem	Harl McDonald's setting
<p>This is a terrible thing to be done in our time This is a terrible thing! Woman to woman, shoulder to shoulder, The wide world over, Stand and look at this thing. Evil, out of the night betraying, Evil, the hand that stole, the slaying Hand reaching out of the night, Into the sheltered circle of light, Into the harmless innocent circle of light, This is a terrible thing!</p> <p>Ah, the heart stands still for the empty room, The empty bed, There is fear in the open window, fear unspoken, unsaid, Ah, the cold fear unsaid.</p> <p>Ah pity, ah anguish, ah pain, ah despair! The search goes out over the waves of the air, On the electrical waves of the air, as night closes down, And the long cold winds of the terrible spring blow on!</p> <p>Woman to woman, our hands reach out to her side,</p> <p>Dumb with compassion, dumb with pity, strong only in pride Pride for the silent courage, the tears unwept And the long endless vigilance kept, The vigilance kept.</p> <p>Shoulder to shoulder the wide world over, We suffer this thing.</p> <p>The breathless suspense, the torment, the waiting, Hope in the heart abating, abating, But grief and horror time cannot mend Wait at the vigil's end, The vigil's end.</p>	<p>Episode 1</p> <p>Into the sheltered circle, Into the harmless, innocent circle of light, As the long cold winds of the terrible spring blow on,</p>
	<p>Episode 2</p> <p>This is a terrible thing to be done in our time. This is a terrible thing! Woman to woman, shoulder to shoulder, The wide world over, Stand and look at this thing. Evil, out of the night betraying, Evil, the hand that stole, the slaying Hand reaching out of the night, Into the sheltered circle of light, Into the harmless, innocent circle of light, This is a terrible thing!</p>
	<p>Episode 3</p> <p>Ah, the heart stands still for the empty room,</p> <p>There is fear in the open window, fear unspoken, unsaid, Ah, the cold fear unspoken, the fear unsaid,</p> <p>Ah pity, oh anguish, oh pain, ah, despair, The search goes out over the waves of the air,</p> <p>As the long, cold winds of the terrible spring blow on!</p> <p>Woman to woman, the wide world over, our hands reach out to her side, Dumb with compassion, dumb with pity, strong only in pride, Pride for the silent courage, the tears unwept, And the long endless vigilance kept, The vigilance kept.</p> <p>Ah, the breathless suspense, the torment, the waiting, Hope in the heart, abating, But grief and horror time cannot mend, Wait, at the vigil's end, The vigil's end.</p>

<p>Now it is ended, Hope is suspended, Nothing comes after. So frail to suffer death. In innocent breath The innocent light laughter Is stilled.</p> <p>Quick gentle heart broken, The tender words unspoken, Tender hopes unfulfilled.</p> <p>Let the earth cover In silence deep The wounds and the wounded In a long sleep Let the earth cover . . . in a long sleep But woman to woman the watch shall keep!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Episode 4</p> <p>Now it is ended,</p> <p>So frail to suffer death,</p> <p>The innocent, light laughter Is stilled.</p> <p>Quick, gentle heart broken Tender words unspoken, Tender hopes unfulfilled,</p> <p>Let the earth cover In silence deep The wounds and the wounded In a long sleep Let the earth cover . . . in a long sleep But woman to woman the watch shall keep!</p>
<p>Woman to woman, where there is love, is pity Will cry these wrongs to an answering height. From hillside to farm, from village to city Break the heart in anger, shatter the night! Reach for the evil with merciless hand, Wipe the long blood stains from a trampled land! Not vengeance, but justice, Not destruction, but peace, Wipe the long blood stains, wipe the long blood stains, That childhood shall sleep... in peace... in peace.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Episode 5</p> <p>Woman to woman, through love with pity, Will cry these wrongs to an answering height. From hillside to farm, from village to city Break the heart in anger, shatter the night! Reach for the evil with merciless hand, Wipe the long blood stains from the trampled land! Not vengeance, but justice! Not destruction, but peace, Wipe the long blood stains That childhood shall sleep, shall sleep in peace.</p>

McDonald did not invent any of his own poetry; any lines or words in his setting that do not appear in analogous spots of the original poem are borrowed from other sections.

McDonald's reorganizing of aspects of the poem is evident, and probably for musical reasons; for example, the fugue in Episode 3 is set to the words "Woman to woman, the wide world over, our hands reach out to your side." "The wide world over" is not part of that particular statement in Chapin's original poem, but appears several lines later; McDonald may have moved that small phrase in order to create a more extensive line on which to craft his fugue.

There are a few deleted phrases as well; McDonald preserved the vast majority of Chapin's poem, but chose to omit several short lines. Included in the removed lines are "on the electrical waves of the air, as the night closes down," "the empty bed," and "Hope is suspended, nothing comes after." The former two phrases come close to precise reference to child kidnapping (or the Lindbergh tragedy itself, referring to media with the term "electrical waves"), and McDonald may have wanted to err closer to the side of subtlety. The latter phrase is simply dark and pessimistic. The verse in which that line appears in Chapin's poem expresses the sorrow and acceptance of tragedy, so the line is appropriate; but McDonald may have wanted to avoid too dark of an aesthetic at that moment to allow for the forthcoming optimism.

The most noticeable alteration McDonald made to Chapin's poetic structure is his choice regarding the beginning of the work. Chapin's poem launches into tragedy at the outset, declaring "This is a terrible thing to be done in our time," and elaborating on the collective grief of women at the sight of such evil. McDonald makes the choice to set a different tone at the beginning of his composition, taking lines from later in the poem to place at the beginning in order to establish an atmosphere of a proverbial calm before the storm: "Into the sheltered circle, into the harmless, innocent circle of light, as the long cold winds of the terrible spring blow on." As we will see, beginning the work with such text allows McDonald to utilize a framing device, beginning and ending the work with a musical aesthetic of peace and serenity. Had he begun his composition with Chapin's opening lines, this mirrored structure would have been difficult.

McDonald refers to two primary musical motives introduced in Episode 1, which are developed throughout the work and represent contrasting ideas of looming danger vs. naïve peace: one symbolizing "the long, cold winds of the terrible spring" and one symbolizing "the harmless, innocent circle of light." Nowhere does McDonald actually identify the themes, but the

opening of the work clearly features a sense of alternating between two musical ideas—one deep and sinister, one melodic and lilting.

The opening measures of the work feature the motive of an oscillating half-step, a long note that builds to an accented half-step ascent (or descent) that immediately returns to the original note, best exemplified in the cello/bass of mm. 5-8 (Figure 2). This motive's featured appearance throughout the work, and especially throughout Episode 1, suggests it to be McDonald's "long, cold winds of the terrible spring" motive (hereafter referred to as the "winds" motive).

Figure 2: cello/bass mm. 5-8, "winds" motive



Several appearances of the "winds" motive in mm. 1-22 give way to a change of affect in m. 23, in which the musical aesthetic shifts to that melodic, lilting sound. Here McDonald brings to the forefront the "harmless, innocent circle of light" motive (hereafter referred to as the "circle" motive): a short stepwise passage that moves up two steps and descends back down to its starting point, on a rhythm of one quarter note followed by four eighth notes, best exemplified in its first appearance in violin 1 at m. 24 (Figure 3). As McDonald proceeds develop this motive, the nature of half and whole steps in the motive is never consistent, but the melodic contour set to that particular rhythm remains indicative of the motive.

Figure 3: violin 1, m. 24, “circle” motive



McDonald’s harmonic language is largely tertian but without strict adherence to any given tonality. He begins the work without a key signature and features extensive chromaticism as the music develops and shifts between key centers. As McDonald emphasizes certain key centers, he applies key signatures to aid in readability, but the work does not seem to be in any one set tonality.

For the first 40 measures, McDonald alternates between the sinister “winds” motive and the serene “circle” motive. At m. 41, he establishes a key of B major as he develops the two motives, pitting them against each other in creative ways. Note the strings in mm. 60-67 (Figure 4): violin 1 and cello 1 iterate the “circle” motive in m. 61 and 66 respectively, while extensive half-step motion in the other parts recalls the “winds” motive, which cello 1 expresses overtly in mm. 64-65 (oscillating between B-natural and B-flat). An F# in the bass proceeds to ground the B major tonality with a dominant pedal, and the harmony lands on a V chord in B major on the downbeat of m. 71, introducing the entrance of the women’s chorus on a B major chord.

Figure 4: strings, mm. 60-67

Figure 4 displays the musical score for the string section (Violins I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabasso) from measures 60 to 67. The score is written in B major and 4/4 time. The dynamics range from *pp* (pianissimo) to *sfz* (sforzando). The string section is marked *con sordino* (with mutes) and *divisi* (divided). The Viola part features a *three soli* marking. The Violoncello and Contrabasso parts include a *tutti* marking. The score shows a variety of musical textures, including sustained notes, moving lines, and dynamic shifts.

This entrance (labeled “solo chorus”) begins in B major, harmonically shifts through half-step motion in a single voice at a time, and lifts into a bright-but-distant C-sharp-major chord on the word “light” (Figure 5). Identification of McDonald’s “circle” motive is confirmed by its use on the word “circle” in this phrase (actually written in contrary motion between two parts as a voice exchange), and while the “winds” motive is not featured, the overt use of half-step motion is reminiscent of the established motive.

Figure 5: mm. 71-76

Figure 5 displays the musical score for the vocal section (Soprano and Alto) from measures 71 to 76. The score is written in 4/4 time. The lyrics are: "In-to the shel-tered cir-cle In-to the harm-less, in-no-cent cir-cle of light". The dynamics range from *pp* (pianissimo) to *sfz* (sforzando). The harmonic changes are indicated below the staff: B major, B minor, D augmented, D major, A7, and C# major. The score shows a variety of musical textures, including sustained notes, moving lines, and dynamic shifts.

The solo chorus continues, featuring similar musical material. The full chorus enters on the words “as the long cold winds of the terrible spring blow on,” as McDonald continues to use the two motives against each other in the orchestral writing. An orchestral interlude beginning at m. 103 follows, building urgency through harmonic development, rising melodic motion, and textural complexity/imitation—often featuring the “circle” and “winds” motives. When the music reaches a peak of intensity, it proceeds to relax once again, settling into themes from the beginning—only to be interrupted by the beginning of Episode 2.

Episode 2 begins, as McDonald notes, with “an abrupt *fortissimo* in the orchestra at m. 139.” Here, a fully diminished D chord with a fermata halts the forward motion, and the women’s chorus enters on the first of McDonald’s “neo-primitive wails” (Figure 6).

Juxtaposition of duple and triple subdivision lends the wail an improvisatory, “raw” sound. In addition, the rhythmic nature of this first wail, with the “snapping” motion of the initial sixteenth note followed by dotted-eighth note, will become important (we will hereafter call that rhythmic gesture the “wail” motive). The first wail continues, the chorus splitting into parts and singing chords in parallel motion, as McDonald begins to prepare F minor with a dominant pedal that resolves to F minor at m. 152. Here is the next “neo-primitive wail,” in a more relaxed triple meter, which leads to the much-discussed “shriek” at m. 157 (Figure 7). The buildup to the shriek also features the sinister “winds” motive, rumbling underneath in the bassoon/cello/bass.

Figure 6: mm. 140-143, “Wail” motive

Figure 7: mm. 155-157

Following the vocal shriek, the orchestra launches into an agitated six measures of chromatic harmonic development that arrives on another climactic *fortississimo* on a half-diminished seventh chord with a fermata at the end of m. 163. Voices and orchestra alternate iterations of the “wail” motive until a shift to compound time (6/8, sometimes 9/8) at m. 169, now in G minor.

Shortly after, at m. 173, the first non-wailing lyrics appear for the first time since Episode 1; the long sections of wailing have been building to this moment. A solo soprano voice enters above more wailing, in *sprechstimme*, on the words Chapin originally chose for the beginning of the poem: “This is a terrible thing to be done in our time” (Figure 8). The rhythmic motive on the word “terrible”—which we will call the “terrible” motive—is an essential mirror image of the

“wail” motive, with a rhythm of dotted eighth followed by sixteenth note. McDonald continues to use both motives throughout the work.

Figure 8: mm. 172-176, “terrible” motive

The full score marks the *sprechstimme* entrance as “solo voice.” However, McDonald’s program notes state that the words are to be spoken by the “soprano section.” It is possible that, in rehearsal, McDonald and others decided that a solo voice was insufficient or awkward, and that having the entire section speak the line was more appropriate. No evidence exists in correspondence regarding which choice was made for this section, and lack of a recording of the premiere also prohibits any confirmed answer.

Regardless of this particular unknown, the full chorus joins at m. 183, featuring further *sprechstimme* text against wailing, moving through D minor, and leading to a climactic moment in which the full chorus in unison expresses the “terrible” motive on the text in *sprechstimme*, “This is a terrible thing!” at m. 197. The orchestra echoes the “terrible” motive and embarks on a short postlude, relaxing in dynamic and texture, eventually morphing into a dominant preparation in F minor, wrapping up Episode 2.

McDonald’s harmony lands on F minor at m. 209 to begin Episode 3. The “monotone chant” in the chorus, in octaves, expresses an emotional numbness—the octave chant is

interspersed with soft wails that express the half-step “winds” motive in contrary motion in the voice parts (Figure 9). The chorus chants through the initial text of Episode 3, while the strings softly pulsate and the winds decorate with short motives from earlier in the work. At m. 239, the orchestra reprises the music of building urgency from m. 103, again featuring those “circle” and “winds” motives. However, this time, instead of a decrescendo leading into a subsequent section, McDonald allows the music to build and boil over to an arrival of A minor at m. 264, transitioning into a fugue on the text “Woman to woman, the wide world over, our hands reach out to her side” (Figure 10).

Figure 9: mm. 209-216

S. *<f* *p* Ah, the heart stands still for the empty room, mm, um - ah - mm. *p* *f*

A. *<f* *p* *p* *f*

Figure 10: mm. 264-270

ff Wo-man to wo-man the wide world over, our hands reach out to her side,

The rhythmic nature of the fugue subject is borne out of the wails from earlier in the work, as the text setting—in particular each iteration of the word “woman”—features the snapping rhythmic motion of the “wail” motive. In addition, the musical setting of the words “over, our

hands” can be interpreted as an inversion of the “circle” motive, and all throughout the fugue, the bass instruments iterate variations on the half-step “winds” motive.

McDonald’s fugue is short and not technically involved; he splits the choir into three voices (alto 2, alto 1, soprano) and moves on after one statement of the subject by each voice (one may prefer to classify it as a *fugato*). However, he builds texture, dynamics, and melodic interest in the orchestra throughout the short section, leading to more development as the fugue ends at m. 290. The music builds, and in mm. 300-309, features repetitions of the chorus singing the “wail” motive in octaves on the text “woman to woman,” the orchestra punctuating with *sforzando* eighth notes on downbeats. Finally, a climactic moment featuring a high B-flat in the first soprano leads to a decrescendo and sudden thinning of texture to chorus and strings on a final iteration of the text “our hands reach out to her side,” on a long suspended dominant chord in E-flat minor that finally resolves into m. 322.

Measure 322, now in E-flat minor, reprises the monotone chant and pulsating strings from m. 209, this time on the text “Dumb with compassion, Dumb with pity, strong only in pride.” McDonald continues in this aesthetic as the text progresses, building into intensity on the words “grief and horror” set to music echoing mm. 300-309, with those stark octaves in the chorus punctuated by orchestral eighth note chords. He brings Episode 3 to a close with the text “wait at the vigil’s end,” featuring the same thinning of texture, relaxation of dynamic, and suspended dominant (this time in F-sharp minor) that led into m. 322.

Episode 4 is the shortest of the five; McDonald begins in his prepared F-sharp minor on the phrase “Now it is ended” and then immediately changes the color of the music by shifting back to solo chorus, accompanied only by solo violin and oboe for 24 measures, starting at

m. 417. The solo violin plays variations on the “circle” motive as the solo chorus sings some of the most intimate, reflective text thus far: “so frail to suffer death, the innocent light laughter is stifled, quick gentle heart broken, tender words unspoken.” The composer brings full chorus back and thickens the orchestral texture for the text “Let the earth cover in silence deep the wounds and the wounded in a long sleep.” Then, finishing Episode 4, the text “But woman to woman the watch shall keep” features the “wail” motive again on each iteration of the word “woman,” as the F-sharp harmonic foundation continues with a dominant preparation for the beginning of the final Episode 5 at m. 476.

The final, climactic episode begins with a return to *sprechstimme*, as sopranos speak the first lines of the episode over wailing in the altos (the score is labeled “solo” for soprano and “half-chorus” for alto from mm. 480-483, with full chorus on both parts entering at m. 484, but whether the work was performed to those specifications is unknown). At m. 490, the altos take over in *sprechstimme* as the sopranos wail and the music/orchestration intensifies. Measure 498 sees a return of the “terrible” motive in the orchestra, punctuating with the rhythmic figure as the full chorus wails, building to a sudden, *forte* unaccompanied statement by the chorus on the text “not vengeance, but Justice!” that morphs from B-flat minor to B-flat major (Figure 11). The orchestra continues to iterate the “terrible” motive, while the chorus continues to refute it, with statements of “not vengeance” on duplet eighth notes in 6/8 time alternating with the orchestra’s “terrible” motives (Figure 12). McDonald identifies this moment as the primary climax of the work.

Figure 11: mm. 510-514

Not ven-geance, but Jus - tice!

Bb minor Bb augmented Bb major

Figure 12: mm. 519-521

ven-geance! ven-geance! ven-geance!

ff fff

divisi

ff fff

ff fff

divisi

ff fff

ff fff

Following the chorus's passionate *forte* cry of “not vengeance, not destruction,” on a held B-flat-minor added-sixth chord in high range, a few weak strokes of timpani represent the orchestra's surrendering to the chorus; the chorus enters again after two measures of silence on that same chord, but an octave lower on the text “but peace.” The chorus alternates between the

B-flat-minor added-sixth chord and a D-flat-major chord while the strings present a gentle accompaniment (including the “terrible” motive, indicating an ever-present threat).

To close the work, McDonald reprises music from the beginning—this time, however, choosing not to emphasize the sinister “winds” motive, but featuring more of the “circle” motive. The musical material originally sung on the text “Into the harmless, innocent circle of light” is now sung on the text “Wipe the long bloodstains that childhood shall sleep in peace” by the solo chorus, brightened by its transposition up one whole step from the beginning. The “circle” motive remains present, in its original state in first soprano and inverted in second alto (Figure 13). However, in the final measures of the work, McDonald brings in the full chorus on a neutral syllable, on progressions that suggest the ever-present nature of threat with the half-step motion of the “winds” motive within the fabric of the harmony in first soprano (Figure 14).

Figure 13: mm. 557-563

Figure 13 shows musical notation for measures 557-563. It features two staves: Soprano (S.) and Alto (A.). The Soprano staff has the lyrics "Wipe the long blood - stains, that child-hood shall sleep, that child - hood shall sleep in peace, that". The Alto staff has the lyrics "Wipe the long blood - stains, that child-hood shall sleep, that child - hood shall sleep in peace, that". Both staves feature a "Circle" motive in the Soprano and an inverted "Circle" motive in the Alto. The motives are circled and labeled with red text: "Circle" and "Circle (inverted)".

Figure 14: mm. 572-578 (end)

Figure 14 shows musical notation for measures 572-578 (end). It features two staves: Soprano (S.) and Alto (A.). The Soprano staff has the lyrics "Ah, hm - ah - mm, Ah, hm - ah - mm, hm". The Alto staff has the lyrics "Ah, hm - ah - mm, Ah, hm - ah - mm, hm". Both staves feature a "p" (piano) dynamic and a "sfz" (sforzando) dynamic. The motives are circled and labeled with red text: "p" and "sfz".

Performance Considerations

On the title page of his full-score manuscript, Harl McDonald notes that *Lament for the Stolen* is scored for “Chorus of women’s voices S.S.A.A. with a solo choir (optional off-stage) S.S.A.A.”¹⁷¹ We have identified the three moments in the score intended for solo choir: mm. 71-87 (“Into the sheltered circle, into the harmless, innocent circle of light”), mm. 417-441 (“So frail to suffer death, etc.”), and the reprise of the opening material at mm. 550-566 (“Wipe the long bloodstains, etc.”). McDonald’s note implies some flexibility regarding these moments. An off-stage chorus may necessitate more than a true solo choir of four individual voices to be heard, but an on stage solo choir may function more practically with such forces, since the orchestral texture is thin at these spots. The intention at these moments is to project intimacy, and a conductor would do well to determine the nature of the solo chorus with regard to practicality in the performance space and performing forces.

Further choices regarding vocal forces are present in the moments of *sprechstimme*. As noted, it is unclear whether some of the moments of *sprechstimme* were intended for solo voices or for the section in unison: mm. 171-182 and mm. 480-483 have the spoken lines marked as “solo voice” in McDonald’s full score (the latter section accompanied by “half-chorus” wailing in the alto section), but his program notes indicate the former section to be a unified chant in the soprano section. Again, as may have been the case with the premiere, a contemporary conductor may choose to experiment in rehearsal in order to determine what choice in these cases serves the aesthetic of the music in the best way.

¹⁷¹ Harl McDonald, *Lament for the Stolen* (manuscript), Pennsylvania: Theodore Presser, 1938.

While McDonald scores the work for SSAA divisi, he quite often indulges in three-part writing within the choir. In addition, at these three-part moments, he is not consistent with regard to his method of division: at times he divides sopranos but leaves altos in unison, and at times divides the altos and leaves sopranos in unison. This may imply intention on his part in terms of which vocal parts should be stronger; for instance, if he felt the alto line needed to be present in the sound, he may have made the choice to divide sopranos. Regardless, a director might choose to re-voice the chorus into an equal split of three parts for these moments; the short fugue in particular may call for equal voicing.

McDonald's writing for the chorus is also challenging at moments. As much as Sophie Drinker was a champion for amateur music-making, *Lament for the Stolen* is not suitable for an average amateur women's chorus. The voice-leading itself is not difficult; however, the non-traditional harmonic shifts in some of the writing necessitate a skilled musical ear, regardless of the stepwise nature of the vocal lines. Rhythmic precision is important, particularly in the first wailing section (mm. 140-143, Example 4). As noted before, the section oscillates between duple and triple subdivision; unifying a chorus of voices on such a rhythmic line poses a challenge.

The vocal ranges introduce challenges as well. The alto line sits in a suitable range, except for its entrance at the fugue, which begins on an E5. However, the alto statement of the subject is the very beginning of the fugue, necessitating a strong entrance, while other parts are *tacit*; a conductor may choose to supplement the alto part here with some soprano voices as the sopranos wait for their own entrance. Indeed, written in pencil in McDonald's full score at the alto entrance are the words "tutti except first sop."

The first soprano line often reaches as high as A5 and B-flat5: however, the composer does sopranos the courtesy of primarily setting their high notes on a wailing "ah" syllable or a

similar vowel sound. The writing for sopranos may betray an intention for singability, particularly on the climactic phrase “Not vengeance, but Justice!” of mm. 510-514 (Example 9). Sopranos sustain a B-flat⁵ for the word “not” (“ah” vowel), but descend to F-sharp⁵ and F⁵ for the word “justice”—a word with vowel sounds more challenging for that range. McDonald could have made a musical choice to intensify the music and keep the soprano range heightened for the climactic word “justice,” but may have decided through the lens of vocal stamina to bring sopranos down and keep the intensity high through other means.

Regarding orchestral forces, McDonald’s score calls for extensive instrumentation:

3 Flutes (3rd doubles piccolo)
 2 Oboes and English horn
 3 Clarinets in B-flat
 2 Bassoons and Contra-bassoon
 4 Horns in F
 4 Trumpets in B-flat
 3 Trombones and Tuba
 Snare drum; Cymbals and bass drum
 Timpani
 1st and 2nd Violins; Violas; Cellos and Contrabass¹⁷²

As such, a proper performance of *Lament for the Stolen* is not one for the chamber music hall or for a choral concert with a few hired instrumentalists: a full symphony orchestra is required, at least until a scholar creates an edition for smaller forces (which may be difficult, considering the dramatic nature of the writing). In addition, a performance with solely piano accompaniment is not yet possible either. McDonald’s vocal score of *Lament* does include a piano reduction, but only for moments that accompany the voices; orchestral interludes are represented as long periods of rest.¹⁷³ Presently, anyone wishing to stage a performance of

¹⁷² Harl McDonald, *Lament for the Stolen* (manuscript), Pennsylvania: Theodore Presser, 1938.

¹⁷³ Harl McDonald, *Lament for the Stolen* (vocal score), Free Library of Philadelphia, Fleisher Collection, U-5853.

Lament for the Stolen will need considerable resources: a full symphony orchestra and a skilled four-part treble chorus.

CHAPTER 6

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF *LAMENT FOR THE STOLEN*

Lament for the Stolen is interesting as a historical artifact: the trio of personalities in Drinker, Chapin, and McDonald, its connection to a well-documented national tragedy, the storied, tumultuous narrative of its conception and composition, and its connection to Still's *And They Lynched Him on a Tree* all make for absorbing study. However, outside of its historical relevance, what value does the work have today? Is a performance of *Lament for the Stolen* practical or relevant in the twenty-first century?¹⁷⁴

Consider first the lackluster reception of the music upon its premiere. Elements of criticism ranged from *TIME* magazine's accusation of McDonald "aping old masters"¹⁷⁵ to Genevieve Taggard of *Poetry* speaking more to an overall mismatch of tone.¹⁷⁶ However, the primary criticism thrown at *Lament* following the premiere was offense at its overt dramatics: Phoebe (last name unknown) noted that she did not "approve of Harl McD's 'primitive wails'"

¹⁷⁴ Availability of the music is not a limiting factor, as the score and parts (in handwritten-but-clear manuscript form) are easily available to rent through Theodore Presser Publishing.

¹⁷⁵ Unknown, "Music: Terrible Thing," *Time*, January 9, 1939, Accessed 20 December 2021 at <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,771316,00.html>.

¹⁷⁶ Genevieve Taggard, "News Notes," *Poetry*, 53/5 (1939): 285-287. Accessed 20 December 2021 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20581660>.

and that they “didn’t seem to suit the spirit of [the] poem,”¹⁷⁷ and Alain Locke felt the work was “voiced in shrill almost hysterical (unintelligible) of actual grief.”¹⁷⁸

Locke himself, though, also admitted that the music “in places [is] beautifully developed.”¹⁷⁹ Following her criticism, Phoebe mentioned that she felt it to be a composition “one should hear several times before judging it.”¹⁸⁰ Taggard admitted that “a lighter touch or an oblique attack would have been mannered and silly—unworthy of the theme,” defending its overt dramatics.¹⁸¹ And lest we forget, Chapin received letters from people who were moved and affected by the work, such as Amber Cheston, who claimed to have known the poem by heart by the premiere and felt a strong emotional response to experiencing the musical setting.¹⁸²

As such, the critical response to *Lament for the Stolen* paints the portrait of a work of art with true redeeming value, but containing some dramatic elements that may have been too eccentric, too overt, too unconventional for patrons of the era used to hearing a certain type of music from their cherished Philadelphia Orchestra. Lacking a recording of the premiere, we cannot truly pass judgment on the premiere performance—and that performance (rather, two of

¹⁷⁷ Phoebe (last name unintelligible) to Chapin, January 7, 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

¹⁷⁸ Locke to Mason, January 1, 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers.

¹⁷⁹ Locke to Mason, January 1, 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸⁰ Phoebe (last name unintelligible) to Chapin, January 7, 1939, Katherine Biddle Papers.

¹⁸¹ Genevieve Taggard, “News Notes,” *Poetry*, 53/5 (1939): 285-287. Accessed 20 December 2021 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20581660>.

¹⁸² Amber Cheston to Chapin, date unknown, Katherine Biddle Papers.

them back-to-back) is what determined the staying power of the work (discounting the small, regional performance by the Brico Symphony in 1940). Margaretta Wright claims that McDonald prepared the chorus to shriek at m. 157 in such a way that the women all “screamed as hard as possible.”¹⁸³ If the chorus truly executed this moment as such at the premiere, is it possible that even a contemporary audience in the twenty-first century may be turned off to the work overall by such a shocking, overtly dramatic choice? And consider the year of its premiere, 1938: atonal and serial music were in full swing, but classical music had yet to reach the vocal eccentricities the likes of György Ligeti’s *Le Grand Macabre*. One can assume that, for attendees at the premiere performances of *Lament for the Stolen*, the unconventionally dramatic nature of some of the music cast a shadow over the quality of the work as a whole.

Even considering the lackluster response to the premiere, one speculates how history may have changed for *Lament for the Stolen* had there been a high-profile follow-up performance (again, the small Brico Symphony performance notwithstanding). The work was of high enough quality that many individuals joined Chapin in pushing for a New York performance which, as we discovered, did not materialize primarily because of logistical issues and programming schedules. But the opportunity to present the work to a new audience, possibly one more prepared for the dramatics of the music due to its reputation from the premiere, may have resulted in more favorable response and a place in the canon for the work. Edward Elgar’s oratorio *The Dream of Gerontius* had a famously terrible premiere performance in 1900, but due to a successful second showing in Düsseldorf in 1901 gained momentum toward an eventual

¹⁸³ Wright to Chapin, unknown date, Katherine Garrison Chapin Papers, MMC-3429, Box 4, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

reputation of one of the greatest English oratorios ever written.¹⁸⁴ *Lament for the Stolen* may not have ever had a chance of being named one of the greatest choral works of all time, but a second performance may have done it wonders.

Lastly, what relevance does *Lament for the Stolen* have in today's world? For any number of reasons, child kidnapping for ransom is not a social issue in the way it was during the 1930s and 1940s. However, as noted, Chapin's poem lacks any overt specificity to a particular event or physical act. Read in the most general sense, the text speaks to a unified outpouring of grief from women after a terrible, violent tragedy that robbed them of a child (reference to loss of a child is itself ambiguous, but mention of "the empty room" and its context tends to specify the tragedy in that direction). Even in its time, one could interpret *Lament for the Stolen* as an expression not of child kidnapping specifically, but of a son drafted into the military and killed in action. And now, in the twenty-first century, one needs only to look at the news cycle on a weekly basis to understand how a mother's tragic loss of a child, due to an avoidable, violent tragedy that draws heavy media coverage, is still relevant today.

Lament for the Stolen is a surviving relic of Sophie Drinker's dream of a repertoire for women's chorus that expresses feelings true and specific to women. What, then, has become of her dream in a general sense?

Drinker was arguably ahead of her time in many respects with regard to her musicological opinions and philosophies. As years have passed, scholars have acknowledged and explored the neglect of a true "woman's voice" in choral music. Regardless of composer gender, the canon of choral music expresses a masculine perspective far more than the opposite. And when creators of choral music have attempted to express a feminine perspective, it has often

¹⁸⁴ Dennis Shrock, *Choral Repertoire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 541.

resonated as novelty or, worse, as sexist and demeaning. In the chapter “Must We Sing of Women Only as Men Have Sung?” in her book *Wisdom, Wit, and Will: Women Choral Conductors on their Art*, Joan Catoni Conlon explores the problematic gender roles and representation of women in choral music from the canon: works that modern choirs casually sing without a second thought of gender representation often describe socially acceptable/whimsical violence toward women or antiquated, misogynistic gender norms. Fortunately, she goes on in the chapter to identify and present some texts written by historical women poets that express mature, sophisticated women’s viewpoints, proving that proper material for such choral music does indeed exist: she introduces the reader to poems from the likes of St. Catherine of Siena, Marie de Ventadour, and Sibylle Schwarz, all of which express different types of female empowerment.¹⁸⁵ Conlon proceeds to challenge contemporary choral scholars to seek out music featuring text by women poets with such qualities, and to encourage new compositions based on those poems not yet set to music:

In addition to being mindful of texts in choral works, today’s conductors should be aware of recognizing the many powerful compositions and texts by women. The assignment is not an easy one. Poems by women, although an abundant resource, have been underused by both male and female composers throughout the centuries. Male composers either have not known about them, or they have not sought out these poetic works because women’s contemplations and experiences were suspected of being too narrow and limited in scope to fully reflect the human experience.

When the voices of the women poets could avoid being tempted by patriarchy, they spoke with extraordinary insight and sensitivity. Their astute observations might have been omitted in early anthologies very nearly in a ratio inversely proportional to the amount that women have written. The world of today does not really know the extent of women’s writings, a body of literature that has gone unrecognized until recently. The now-recognized abundant body of literature by women authors should serve as a much-appreciated repository for today’s composers.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Joan Catoni Conlon, “Must We Sing of Women Only as Men Have Sung?” In *Wisdom, and Will: Women Choral Conductors on their Art*, ed. Joan Catoni Conlon, 41-64, Chicago: GIA Publications, 2009.

¹⁸⁶ Conlon, “Must We Sing of Women Only as Men Have Sung?,” 60-62.

In addition, scholars are re-evaluating historical musical works that have long been experienced through the male perspective and are finding themes of feminine empowerment. Schumann's widely performed song cycle for solo voice *Frauen-Liebe und Leben* famously expresses the perspective of a woman throughout her life and marriage, "declaring her inferiority and subservience" to her husband throughout the work. In an article in *Music & Letters*, Elissa Guralnick acknowledges that culturally-conditioned impressions tend to cause listeners to understand the story of *Frauen-Liebe und Leben* from the male perspective. However, she offers a reading of the work that highlights its feminist subtext, exploring the poem as a journey in which the female protagonist grows more independent and spirited than she herself knows, and in which the male character (representing Schumann's own anxieties) expresses fears of disappointing or injuring the woman he loves.¹⁸⁷

Regarding Drinker's desire that these musical works featuring genuine women's voices be applied to women's choruses: to a certain extent, modern gender philosophies have undercut the concept of the women's chorus overall. Ensembles previously labeled "women's choruses" have been reimagined as treble choruses, in an effort toward inclusivity of male-identifying treble singers and of non-binary individuals. While Drinker's gender-based musicological studies were certainly ahead of their time in one sense, they are a relic of a past in their assumption of generally binary gender roles. As the choral discipline has seen a growth in works written specifically for soprano/alto chorus since the 1950s—a trend Drinker would appreciate—Drinker's desire for a movement of women's chorus music that expresses women-specific themes has not

¹⁸⁷ Elissa Guralnick, "'Ah Clara, I Am Not Worthy of Your Love': Rereading 'Frauenliebe und Leben', the Poetry and the Music," *Music & Letters*, 87/4 (2006): 580-605, accessed 26 December 2022 at www.ml.oxfordjournals.org.

come to much fruition, possibly because of the evolving nature of gender philosophy. New developments in choral music may be avoiding gender-specific themes in favor of universality and inclusion. Certainly, as stated, scholars are uncovering and composing more choral music that features an empowering women's voice—but in the twenty-first century, to follow Drinker's desire that these works be written for a chorus exclusively made up of women is to cater to a shrinking population.

The story behind *Lament for the Stolen* begs a question: did Sophie Drinker commission any other musical works? Interestingly, studies of her life and work make no mention of *Lament*; one can only discover her involvement in the project through archived personal correspondence and newspaper/magazine articles from 1939. However, for someone with her distinct, unique philosophies and passions, it is hard to believe that *Lament* was Drinker's only foray into commissioning musical works for women's chorus. Further study in this area could possibly reveal other forgotten works of music.

In the end, it is easy to assume that Harl McDonald's *Lament for the Stolen*, a work written in 1938 around specific social and gender issues of that time, could not fit into the social atmosphere of the twenty-first century. Its universal themes, however, are such that any choral singer or attentive listener, regardless of gender, sex, or age, may connect with them, as they may with any musical work, painting, film, or book that expresses deep emotion through a creative, artistic lens. As Katherine Garrison Chapin put it succinctly in her talk to the Cosmopolitan Club shortly before the premiere of *Lament*:

“ . . . what woman, with a child, doesn’t wonder, as she puts it to bed, or leaves it to play, whether she will find it safe when she returns. That lurking fear is there. As one woman (Elizabeth Morrow, mother of Anne Lindburgh) wrote to me, ‘I hope your poignant words and the music may help to bring about a safer world for all little children.’”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Chapin’s notes, December 20, 1938, Katherine Biddle Papers, GTM-GAMMS250, Box 44. Georgetown University Manuscripts, Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Washington, D.C.

Appendix A: Cover and First Page of Full Score

Lament for the Slaves
Text by Katherine Garrison Chapin

Set for
Chorus of Women's Voices S.S.A.A.
with a solo choir (optional off-stage)
S.S.A.A.

and
Full Orchestra

3 Flutes (3^d doubles piccolo)
 2 Oboes and English horn
 3 Clarinets in B flat
 2 Bassoons and Contra-bassoon
 4 Horns in F
 4 Trumpets in B flat
 3 Trombones and Tuba
 Snare-drum, Cymbals and Bass-drum
 tympani
 1st and 2^d Violins; Violas; Cellos and Contra-bass

Harlow
July - August, 1938

Score

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 1716 Sanson Street
 Philadelphia, Pa.

Moderato Lamentoso ; Rubato ma con Moto

1. 2
flute

1. 2
bassoon

1. 3
trombone

tympani
A, C, E

1st Violin
con Sordino

2nd Violin
con Sordino

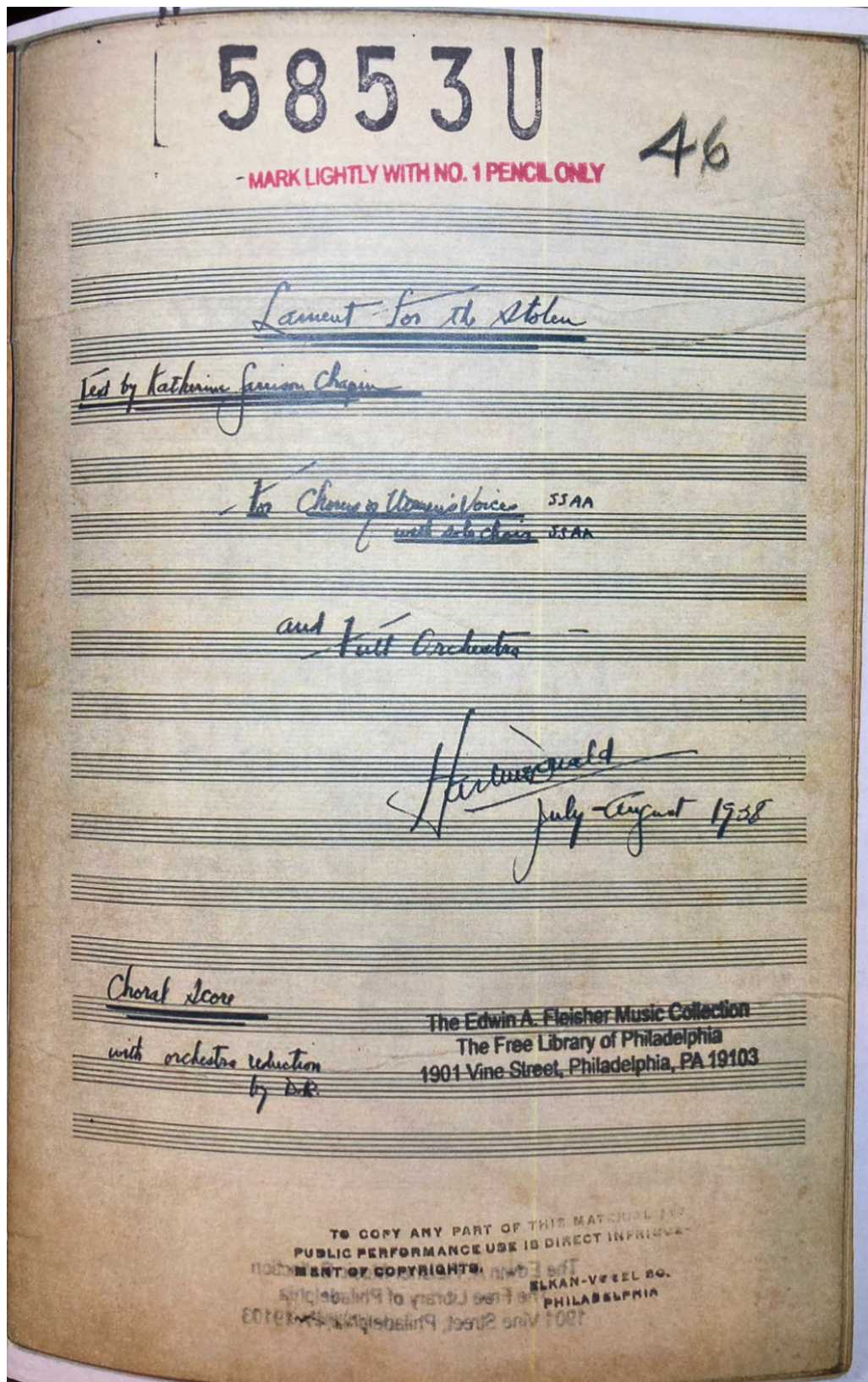
Viola
con Sordino

cello

contrabass

Handwritten musical score for a symphony, page 6. The score is written on ten staves. The instruments listed on the left are Flute, Bassoon, Trombone, Tympani, 1 (Violin I), 2 (Violin II), Va (Viola), Cello, and C.B. (Double Bass). The music is in 4/4 time, indicated by the 'C' time signature. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, dynamics (pp, sfz, f), and articulation marks. A large, stylized signature is visible on the right side of the page, near the bottom staves.

Appendix B: Cover and First Page of Vocal Score



58 / 64

Orchestra

4 horns alone

3 Solo Celli

Solo Chorus

Solo cho In-to the shut-tered

Solo S. cir-cle In-to the harm- less, in- no- cent cir- cle of

chorus A.

light

pp In-to the shut-tered cir-cle of

orchestra

1st Violin Solo

The Edwin A. Fleisher Music Collection
The Free Library of Philadelphia
1901 Vine Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103

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"Lament for the Stolen" (1938) for Women' Chorus: A Collaboration Between Harl McDonald and Katherine Chapin with Historic Perspective and Music Analysis

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

Abstract

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Name & Title

"Lament for the Stolen" (1938) for Women' Chorus: A Collaboration Between Harl McDonald and Katherine Chapin with Historic Perspective and Music Analysis

Thesis title

Dr. Gregory Gentry

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Harl McDonald's 1938 work for women's chorus and orchestra entitled Lament for the Stolen, with poetry by Katherine Garrison Chapin, is a piece of music with rich history and enlightening social context. As a result of several factors, the work has been all but forgotten in the history of twentieth-century music.

The goal of this document is to generate an awareness of the creators of Lament for the Stolen (Sophie Drinker, Katherine Garrison Chapin, Harl McDonald), their context as important artists and philanthropists in 1930s America, the tumultuous narrative regarding the conception and composition of the work, and the public reception of the music—both prior to and after its premiere. In addition, this document features an analysis of the musical structure, harmonic language, and motivic development of the work, and how McDonald's music expresses the themes of Chapin's poetry. Following the musical analysis is a discussion of necessary considerations regarding a contemporary performance of the work.

Finally, this document concludes with an exploration of perspectives regarding the relevance of this piece of music—one that was very indicative of 1930s America—almost one century after its premiere.