

## **URCO Fall 2019 Proposal**

Laurana Wheeler Roderer, Student, Department of Music

Kirsten Barker, Student, Department of Music

Robert Davies, co-mentor, Department of Physics

Rebecca McFaul, co-mentor, Department of Music

Christopher Scheer, co-mentor, Department of Music

### **Project**

#### **Chamber Opera: On the Art of Becoming**

### **Proposal Narrative**

In the Caine College of the Arts, we have been inspired by artists using their mediums to convey important aspects of sustainability. Some of these include the Crossroads Project by our string quartet-in-residence, the Fry Street Quartet, and the more recent student project titled “Plastic Ocean.” We wish to continue this conversation of sustainability using music as a method of communication, through an original composition. We want our work to focus on energy transformations, in parallel with the personal transformations required to live sustainably.

In discussing musical mediums, we felt that a chamber opera would be a particularly compelling way to communicate these ideas. A chamber opera is an opera which requires a smaller cast and orchestra, in this case three voices and a string quartet. Since the concept of energy is not particularly tangible, communicating a story through opera brings these issues to life. In addition, an opera can capture the dramatic aspects of personal transformation. Instead of berating audiences for everything they are lacking, we wish instead for this work to showcase what each of us can become, together with our environment.

The plot of this work follows the journey of the main character, Alma, as she strives to fulfill her deep sense of commitment as a steward of the earth. The setting is the present day, in a fictional town modeled after Page, Arizona. Page was founded in the 1950’s in conjunction with the construction of the Glen Canyon Dam, and a coal fired power plant exists close to the town. We felt a setting like this would give the main character a chance to feel the conflict of energy use as it currently exists. There is a concept introduced by environmental activist Joanna Macy which we wished to highlight throughout the work. In talking about changing systems, she outlines three stages: slowing the damage, stopping the damage, and best of all, reimagining the systems which are causing the damage. Set in three 10-15 minute scenes with a short prologue, the rough outline for the plot is as follows.

#### **Prologue**

Alma wakes up from a nightmare, where she has heard the voice of the earth crying out. She realizes that someone must speak for the earth, and understands that she must take this responsibility.

#### **Scene 1**

Alma, who now knows she is steward of the earth, is frustrated with her failure to take care of the earth. She is in a dysfunctional relationship with a domineering Mr. Huxley, and this relationship represents our current relationship with non-renewable and unsustainable resources (e.g. fossil fuels). Mr. Huxley is focused on exploiting the earth, and when Alma expresses her

desire to take care of the earth, he tries to convince her that she is taking care of the earth, by providing energy, wealth, and power. When she expresses a desire to change, he displays the manipulative aspect of the relationship, telling her that she can never change because things have always been this way and will always continue to be this way. There is an emphasis on darkness in this scene, both physically (it is implied that this is due to pollution) and emotionally as Alma feels a lack of direction in how to move forward.

### Scene 2

Alma meets with an old woman, Greta, who she visits in an attempt to escape her relationship with Mr. Huxley and “slow the damage.” Her relationship with Greta represents our relationship with natural but limited resources, like hydroelectric power. Greta is tired and has reached her physical limitations, like we have reached our physical limits with hydroelectric power. Greta is old enough to remember the town before the dam was built, and she sings about the beauty of the river in its unhampered state. Alma expresses that some of the filth has been washed away, although her vision is still cloudy. At the end of the scene, the old woman tells Alma that in order to progress as steward of the earth, she will have to leave the town completely, thus cutting off her relationship with both Mr. Huxley and Greta and “stopping the damage.”

### Scene 3

Alma begins the third scene alone, which highlights the uncomfortable and sometimes isolated nature of personal transformation. She realizes that she is not totally alone, as she has the sun and wind, which have been all around her all the time. In this scene, she realizes that she needs to “change the systems causing the damage.” There is finally an emphasis on brightness, both physically from the sun and also because Alma feels her path forward is clear.

Why do we feel it is necessary to commission a work for this project? We think that contemporary music can be tailored to fit contemporary needs in a more complete way than simply trying to fit a pre-existing piece to convey the message you are going for. By being a part of the whole creative process, from writing the libretto to commissioning a composer to rehearsing with the ensemble to giving the performance, the work can take on its own life and can inspire personal transformation in the lives of the artistic team. If we can be so intimately tied to this process, we are far more likely to present something which is equally compelling to our audience.

The composer we are looking to commission this work from is a woman named Emma Cardon. She is also a student, currently attending another university across the country, but originally from Cache Valley. It was important to us to have a composer who has been local to this area, because we want the work to feel connected to this particular region in the way it discusses the beauty of the earth. She has experience writing for both voice and string quartet, and is highly interested in using music as a way to communicate to audiences about the environment.

One of the goals of this project is to engage an audience outside of the traditional group of people who would be interested in watching a contemporary chamber opera. We are especially interested in presenting this work to lawmakers in Utah, who have the power to make laws which affect our environment more than personal life changes can. In order to get more attention on this project, we are interested in engaging someone (perhaps another student) to be in charge of public relations for this project. One of the other groups we are interested in

targeting are children. We do not want this work to be a children's opera, but we want it to have something which they can find meaning in and relate to, while continually having deeper layers of meaning.

The outcome of this work would obviously be to perform the work. We plan to give the premiere of the work at Utah State University, and to give additional performances or partial performances at Research in the Arts Day at USU, Utah Research on Capitol Hill, and Posters on the Hill in Washington, D.C. In addition, we would like to produce a video of the work which can be more widely distributed, particularly to young adult audiences. The more important outcome is the effect we want this work to have on the audience. We have seen other musical works dealing with sustainability bring awareness and promote colleagues to action. We hope that audience members relate with our main character and feel after watching this production that they have the power to change their own lives and fulfill their responsibility as stewards of the earth.

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### **Project**

Chamber Opera: On the Art of Becoming

We anticipate the following educational outcomes as a result of this project:

- We will learn how to engage in the artistic process required to present the premiere and several performances of an original work. This includes the logistics required to commission and fund a work in addition to collaboration with other artists.
- We will understand more about how to use art as a way to engage audience members on important contemporary world issues.
- We will gain experience in expanding the audience of an established musical genre in order to effectively communicate the necessity of engaging with contemporary world issues.
- We will learn how to create a compelling story that can be told through music and inspire an audience to take action on the issues being addressed.
- We will become more effective interdisciplinary communicators.

# PROPOSED URCO BUDGET & COMMITMENT

Project Title: On the Art of Becoming  
 Department: Music  
 Faculty Supervisor: Robert Davies, Rebecca McFaul, Christopher Scheer  
 1st Student Name: Laurana Wheeler Roderer 1st Student A#: XXXXXXXXXX  
 2nd Student Name: Kirsten Barker 2nd Student A#: XXXXXXXXXX

Primary Student Email: kirsten.barker.004@gmail.com  
*There may be up to four undergraduate students in a group. Only one Budget & Commitment form is required per proposal.*

## Expenses (Optional)

Each proposal may include an optional expenses budget of up to \$1,000 provided there is a 1:1 match (up to \$500/\$500).

### EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES/RESEARCH TRAVEL BUDGET

#### TRAVEL

Description of Items	Budgeted Amount
<b>Total Travel Budget</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>

#### SUPPLIES/EQUIPMENT

Description of Items	Budgeted Amount
<b>Total Supplies/Equipment Budget</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>

*By signing below, the mentor certifies that they have reviewed this proposed budget and find it to be reasonable for the project proposed. If funded, this budget is subject to review by the Office of Research & Graduate Studies to comply with URCO regulations.*

Mentor Signature \_\_\_\_\_

### EXPENSES MATCHING FUNDS COMMITMENT

*As part of the URCO program, a 1:1 match is required for this optional additional funding.*

The faculty mentor, department, college, or program that will commit to match the budget portion of this URCO grant is: \_\_\_\_\_

This support may come from any source, but RGS requires an **F&A or E&G fund** index number to transfer our matching funds to you. That index is: \_\_\_\_\_

*If this URCO application is approved, I authorize the Research and Graduate Studies (RGS) office to transfer 50% of this proposed budget to this index to match the 50% of available funding from this source. If this URCO application is approved these matching funds will be made available for this URCO project's expenses. **The faculty mentor's department will be responsible for overseeing the expenditures for this URCO project.** RGS's funds will be transferred to the department.*

Signature of Person with Direct Budget Authority \_\_\_\_\_

# Scholarship (Required)

## SCHOLARSHIP MATCHING FUNDS COMMITMENT

*As part of the URCO program, a scholarship match is required.*

The faculty mentor, department, college, or program that will commit to match the scholarship portion of this URCO scholarship is:

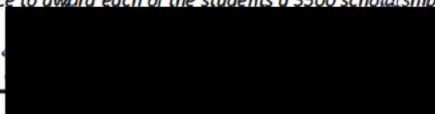
Caine College of the Arts

This support must be in the form of F&A or E&G funds. The index that these funds will come from is:



*If this URCO application is approved, I authorize the Research and Graduate Studies (RGS) office to transfer \$125 in funds for each student in this group from this index to match the \$375 in funds from the RGS office to award each of the students a \$500 scholarship.*

Signature of Person with Direct Budget Authority



# Total Budget

## Overall Scholarship Summary

*Scholarships are mandatory and require a match.*

First Student RGS Support	\$375.00
First Student Matching Support	\$125.00
Second Student RGS Support	\$375.00
Second Student Matching Support	\$125.00
Third Student RGS Support	0
Third Student Matching Support	0
Fourth Student RGS Support	0
Fourth Student Matching Support	0
<b>Total Scholarship</b>	<b>\$1,000.00</b>

## Overall Equipment/Supplies/Travel Summary

*Each proposal may include an optional expenses budget of up to \$1,000 provided there is a 1:1 match.*

Total Travel	\$0.00
Total Equipment/Supplies	\$0.00
<b>Total Equipment/Supplies/Travel Budget</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>

## Total

Total RGS Support	\$750.00
Total Matching Support	\$250.00
<b>Total Project Award</b>	<b>\$1,000.00</b>

