

2-24-2020

A Performance Guide to Kurt Erickson's Song Cycle Here, Bullet

André Yong Chun Chiang

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations



Part of the [Music Performance Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Chiang, André Yong Chun, "A Performance Guide to Kurt Erickson's Song Cycle Here, Bullet" (2020). *LSU Doctoral Dissertations*. 5155.

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/5155

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

A PERFORMANCE GUIDE TO KURT ERICKSON'S SONG
CYCLE *HERE, BULLET*

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

in

The School of Music

by

André Yong Chun Chiang
B.M., University of South Alabama, 2008
M.M., Manhattan School of Music, 2010
May 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all the wonderful people who guided this process! Professor Jesse, thank you for heading my committee and providing me with guidance and friendship before I was even officially your student. You set the example for professional performance and great teaching. I am proud to be your student and your friend. Professor Sosnowsky, I enjoyed all the classwork and the discussions involving the state of the not-for-profit world. Seeing things from the theatre side opened my eyes to many new possibilities. Dr. Sims, thank you for putting up with all my questions regarding the science behind this art-based world and for allowing me to teach such great and excited students. Professor McDonough, thank you for giving me the opportunity to explore five unique roles while studying at LSU. Dr. Nam, thank you for being a part of this process and for your notes on this document. Thank you also to Dr. Bade, Professor Patrick-Harris, Dr. Hendrickson, and Professor Borowitz for the advice, recommendation letters, coaching, and teaching help.

Thank you to Brian Turner and Kurt Erickson who created a tremendous new work and who were both incredibly helpful and insightful into their processes. Continued thanks to Liliia Oliinyk for her collaboration at the piano on this great cycle as well as her knowledge of song collaboration and additions to the project.

I want to thank all my students and colleagues for providing me something to strive toward and engaging me to be a better performer, teacher, and friend. Thanks Mom and Dad for pushing me down this road. And of course, thanks to Olivia for always supporting me and being a steady hand when I start to go on a loose tangent.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE. KURT ERICKSON'S LIFE AND WORKS.....	3
Biographical Information.....	3
Works and Career.....	5
Compositional Process.....	8
CHAPTER TWO. BRIAN TURNER'S LIFE AND WORKS.....	11
Biographical Information.....	11
Works and Career.....	14
Creative Process.....	16
CHAPTER THREE. THE <i>HERE, BULLET</i> SONG CYCLE.....	18
Commissioning and Consortium Process.....	18
Kurt Erickson's Interaction with Brian Turner.....	21
The Poetry from <i>Here, Bullet</i>	23
The Cycle: General Information.....	25
Poetic and Musical Connections.....	28
CHAPTER FOUR. ANALYSES OF POEMS AND SONGS, WITH PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS.....	36
"Here, Bullet".....	36
"Eulogy".....	48
"A Soldier's Arabic".....	57
"Curfew".....	66
CONCLUSION.....	76
APPENDIX A. TRANSCRIPT OF ELECTRONIC MAIL INTERVIEW WITH KURT ERICKSON.....	79
APPENDIX B. TRANSCRIPT OF ELECTRONIC MAIL INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN TURNER.....	87
APPENDIX C. TRANSCRIPT OF ELECTRONIC MAIL INTERVIEW WITH LILIIA OLIINYK.....	89

APPENDIX D. LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM KURT ERICKSON.....92

APPENDIX E. LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM THE PERMISSIONS COMPANY ON
BEHALF OF ALICE JAMES BOOKS PUBLISHING.....93

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....94

VITA96

LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example 3.1. Opening to "Here, Bullet" mm. 1-2.....	29
Example 3.2. E minor to D flat Major harmonies in "Eulogy" mm. 4-6.....	31
Example 3.3. LOVE/MILLER ciphers and "today" repetition in "Curfew" mm. 49-50.....	35
Example 4.1. Word painting of phrase and "leap" in "Here, Bullet" mm. 5-6.....	39
Example 4.2. Markings, <i>ostinato</i> , and gesture in "Here, Bullet" mm. 8.....	40
Example 4.3. "Explosives" in "Here, Bullet" mm. 20-21.....	42
Example 4.4. "Deeper" with optional note in "Here, Bullet" mm. 25-26.....	43
Example 4.5. Transition with optional octave in "Here, Bullet" mm. 29.....	44
Example 4.6. Note and structured improvisation in "Here, Bullet" mm. 30.....	45
Example 4.7. Ending and fade to nothing in "Here, Bullet" mm. 35.....	45
Example 4.8. <i>Hemiola</i> in the vocal line against the piano in "Eulogy" mm. 17-19.....	51
Example 4.9. Percussive piano, meter, and <i>tenutos</i> in "Eulogy" mm. 33-35.....	53
Example 4.10. Private Miller's <i>leitmotif</i> in "Eulogy" mm. 51-56.....	54
Example 4.11. Beginning of the chromatic build in "Eulogy" mm. 104-105.....	55
Example 4.12. Climatic ending for the vocal line in "Eulogy" mm. 108-112.....	56
Example 4.13. B natural/B flat, Arabic, and rocking piano in "A Soldier's Arabic" mm. 6-8.....	60
Example 4.14. Echoed with subtle change in "A Soldier's Arabic" mm. 25-31.....	61
Example 4.15. Word painting in the piano in "A Soldier's Arabic" mm. 35-37.....	62
Example 4.16. Polyrhythm and tone in "A Soldier's Arabic" mm. 45-48.....	63
Example 4.17. Recitation in "A Soldier's Arabic" mm. 65.....	64
Example 4.18. Grace note figure, dissonance, and marking in "Curfew" mm. 1-2.....	69

Example 4.19. Word painting the snake’s movement in “Curfew” mm. 7-8.....	69
Example 4.20. Vocal line interval and phrase in “Curfew” mm. 16-19.....	70
Example 4.21. Sgt. Gutierrez bastardized chorale in “Curfew” mm. 36-40.....	72
Example 4.22. “White birds” and repetitions in “Curfew” mm. 41-46.....	74
Example 4.23. “An obvious <i>portamento</i> ” in “Curfew” mm. 27-29.....	75

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this document is to supply a comprehensive performer's guide to American composer Kurt Erickson's *Here, Bullet*, a song cycle consisting of four songs for baritone and piano set to the poetry of American poet Brian Turner. Additionally, an overview of its unique consortium-based commissioning process will be included in examination of the entrepreneurial nature of its creation.

Here, Bullet focuses on the soldier's interaction with the bullet, suicide, foreign lands, and deployment in Iraq. The text comes from a book of poetry, which originated the song cycle's name, and was written during Turner's yearlong deployment to Iraq with the United States Army. The setting of the four pieces engages the singer and the listener in a visceral sound scape that draws out the obvious and underlying conflict in the poetry and presents a stark look at the cold realities of war. The baritone voice is used in all its facets and colors, and the piano acts as support, atmosphere, and an emotional character throughout the cycle.

Unique to the *Here, Bullet* song cycle is its commissioning consortium created by Erickson. Instead of having a single commissioner, Erickson disseminated music and compositional insight to different baritones over social media in exchange for promised performances within a year of its creation. Giving agency to the singer for performance and advertising, there are dozens of worldwide performances of the cycle throughout the season after its full creation in August 2019.

INTRODUCTION

The modern song cycle takes many forms and encapsulates different blends of genre and compositional technique. *Here, Bullet* is not unlike other song cycles about war, but with visceral, experiential language and unique compositional techniques, this song cycle is set apart. Kurt Erickson's experience writing for the voice and his love of the piano and literature honed his compositional style. He serves as the composer-in-residence for San Francisco's LIEDER ALIVE!, and his pieces have been commissioned and performed worldwide. His compositional style encompasses a wide array of composers from French Impressionists like Maurice Ravel to Minimalists like John Adams.

In the cycle *Here, Bullet*, Erickson sets poetry by Brian Turner, a living American poet and veteran. Turner has served seven years in the US Army and directs the Master of Fine Arts program at Sierra Nevada College in Lake Tahoe, Nevada. Turner has written *My Life as a Foreign Country: A Memoir* and two books of poetry: *Here, Bullet* and *Phantom Noise*. The poems used for the *Here, Bullet* cycle evoke deeply intimate and disturbing images for the soldier and the countries at war. Erickson and Turner's collaboration on this project is only the first in a possible series exploring new material.

Here, Bullet focuses on the soldier's interaction with the bullet, suicide, foreign lands, and deployment in Iraq. The text comes from a book of poetry, which originated the song cycle's name, and was written during Turner's yearlong deployment to Iraq with the United States Army. The setting of the four pieces engages the singer and the

listener in a visceral sound scape, that draws out the obvious and underlying conflict in the poetry, and presents a stark look at the cold realities of war. The baritone voice is used in all its facets and colors, and the piano acts as support, atmosphere, and an emotional character throughout the cycle.

The purpose of this document is as a comprehensive performer's guide to Erickson's song cycle, *Here, Bullet*. Additionally, an overview of its unique consortium-based commissioning process will be included in examination of the entrepreneurial nature of its creation.

Chapter One examines the composer's life, career, influences, works, and compositional process. Writer and poet Brian Turner's life, career, influences, works and creative process are discussed in Chapter Two. Chapter Three provides information about the *Here, Bullet* cycle regarding the consortium, composer and poet interaction, the poetry, general performance information on the cycle, and poetic and musical connections. Chapter Four includes individual analysis of each poem and song as well as performance suggestions in regard to musical, artistic, and technical choices. Before each piece, a summarization of characteristics is noted. Musical examples are interspersed to strengthen analyses of musical, performance, and singers' technical considerations.

CHAPTER ONE. KURT ERICKSON'S LIFE AND WORKS

Biographical Information

Kurt Erickson was born on January 27, 1970 in Fresno, California. From the start of his musical journey, the piano and his love of literature played integral parts in his development as a composer of song. At the age of four, Erickson showed his ability to “play by ear” by mimicking the song “Way Down Upon the Swanee River” on the piano after watching “The Lawrence Welk Show.”¹ This skill emulated his grandfather’s own ability and began his musical journey. His earliest studies on the piano started with “a very old school German *émigré* pianist named Phillip Lorenz – a disciple of the great Claudio Arrau who boasted a teaching lineage that stretched back to Franz Liszt, Beethoven, and Haydn.”² Erickson distinctly remembers his lessons enriching his life beyond the piano:

Lessons with him (life lessons, really) were like stepping back in time to a 19th Century salon, where photos, paintings, and personal effects of master artists like John Cage, Jean Cocteau, and Morton Feldman were either hung up or strewn around his apartment. I took in everything.³

His lessons with Lorenz gave him the push to endeavor for a successful international career in the arts. Lorenz passed away during Erickson’s junior year at California State University, Fresno, and though devastated by the loss of his teacher, Erickson

1 Rosemarie Kempton, “Napa Valley resident’s musical journey: Kurt Erickson named composer-in-residence for San Francisco Lieder Alive!,” *Napa Valley Register*, March 12, 2014, https://napavalleyregister.com/entertainment/arts-and-theatre/napa-valley-resident-s-musical-journey/article_2812f1c8-aa5d-11e3-937f-0019bb2963f4.html.

2 Kurt Erickson, E-mail interview with the author, October 8, 2019.

3 Ibid.

continued his piano studies privately at Stanford University and later with William Cerny at the University of Notre Dame while also advancing his composition studies with Pauline Oliveros and Alvin Curran at Mills College.⁴

Along with his love of the piano, Erickson was a voracious reader. Being the child of an elementary school teacher, he used the books and materials his parents would bring home and developed a love of reading that continues to this day. For Erickson, literature was both escapism and a firm driver of imagination and creativity in his art. He heard the music of the phrase when reading and was inspired to begin writing his songs and poetry.

Even from a young age, Erickson strove to meticulously improve his art and become a fully fleshed-out artist. In college at California State University, Fresno, he took a unique path to degree completion:

... I took a completely impractical approach to course selection – I'd search the catalogue for all the literature and humanities classes that interested me and simply enrolled, even if they in no way led to my degree completion. I had an idea in my head that I needed to become a complete artist, so feeding my intellectual curiosity became my highest priority. The idea of taking courses to complete a degree was nowhere on my radar – I simply (naively) enrolled in courses I thought would make me a more complete artist.⁵

Along with his classroom enrichment, Erickson began to write poetry. Discovering his voice in literature inferred and enhanced his own compositional prowess and sound scape. Having a hand in both aspects of song writing, he learned that there is a continuum within art creation.

4 Kempton, "Napa Valley resident."

5 Erickson, E-mail interview.

... I discovered that in finding my literary voice I was simultaneously developing and honing my composition voice. Both aspects of artistic creativity were cross pollinating with each other, and informing how the other progressed. It was fascinating to watch; as a miniature, I improvised on the piano shared traits with a short poem, and vice versa. I still to this day write poetry as an avocation – it opens me up if I'm feeling blocked musically and gets me into a kind of flow state.⁶

Throughout his development, Erickson has striven to connect poetry or text and music in an intimate and mutually beneficial way.

Works and Career

As an active composer, Erickson continues to stretch himself with compositions covering many styles. With numerous appointments through different organizations, Erickson has proliferated a large number of pieces in the choral, solo voice, chamber, piano, guitar, orchestra, and opera genres.

From 1999-2000, Erickson was the sacred music composer-in-residence at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral, St. Mary the Virgin, and Berkeley's St. Mark's; and from 2001-2003, he served a similar position at The National Shrine of Saint Francis of Assisi and wrote for *Schola Cantorum* San Francisco, a professional choral ensemble.⁷ From this period, he wrote *Christ, Look Upon Us In This City* for SATB chorus (premiered March 2000), *O Vos Omnes* for SATB chorus (premiered April 2001), *May the Lord Bless You and Keep You* for SATB chorus (premiered September 2002), *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence* for SATB chorus with four soloists (premiered September 2002), *Love Came Down at Christmas* for SATB chorus (premiered December 2002), and

⁶ Erickson, E-mail interview.

⁷ Kurt Erickson, "Biography," accessed August 26, 2019, <http://www.kurterickson.com/>.

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus for SATB chorus (premiered December 2003), with SATB chorus representing soprano, alto, tenor, and bass voice parts.⁸

The majority of his compositions fall into the Art Song category. Erickson currently directs the Neue Lieder Commissioning Program, is the composer-in-residence for LIEDER ALIVE! in San Francisco, and has served as the Director of the Composers Workshop at the Napa Music Festival.⁹ Some of his most successful compositions include *Chicago Songs* for orchestra/piano and soprano solo (premiered November 2008 by Marnie Breckenridge, soprano, and the Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera), *Jagermeisterlieder: A Song Set for Manly Men* – three songs for bass voice and piano (premiered June 2014 by Kirk Eichelberger, bass, and Kurt Erickson, piano, with LIEDER ALIVE!), *Four Andalusian Love Songs* – four songs for countertenor or mezzo soprano and piano (premiered in a series of 2013-2014 performances by Brian Asawa, countertenor, and Mark Salters, pianist), and *Ich und Du* – three songs for soprano and piano (premiered April 2014 by Heidi Moss, soprano, and Kurt Erickson, piano, with LIEDER ALIVE!).¹⁰

Other career highlights include opera commissions from the San Francisco Bay Area's Festival Opera and the Lone Star Lyric Theater Festival in Houston, TX, along with a unique Composer Institute program in 2006 with the Minnesota Orchestra (working with conductor Osmo Vänskä and composer Aaron Jay Kernis) and a

⁸ Kurt Erickson, "Works – Choral," accessed December 23, 2019, http://www.kurterickson.com/work_category/choral/.

⁹ Erickson, "Biography."

¹⁰ Kurt Erickson, "Works – Solo Voice," accessed December 23, 2019, http://www.kurterickson.com/work_category/solo-voice/.

composer fellowship at Yale University's Norfolk Chamber Music Festival and the Banff Centre for the Arts.¹¹ In the 2008-2009 season, Erickson's *Toccata for Organ*, an organ transcription of his *Toccata for Orchestra*, was premiered and recorded at the American Guild of Organists National Convention and broadcast nationwide on the radio show "Pipedreams."¹² Additional commissions have occurred with the San Francisco Girls Chorus, the Berkeley Community Chorus and Orchestra, and more vocal premieres with LIEDER ALIVE!¹³

Acclaim for Erickson's pieces come through critical reviews and continued commissions and residencies. Selected reviews for his work include: "Each intimate piece offered haunting and poetic musical lines for soprano that played against tightly focused and descriptive writing for strings and winds," by Edward Ortiz of the *Sacramento Bee* for a performance of *Chicago Songs*; "... captured the spirit of the poems and established a lineage of emotional tone painting that Erickson has inherited from the songs of Franz Schubert," by Rodney Punt of the *Huffington Post* for a performance of *Four Andalusian Love Songs*;¹⁴ "Widely awarded and even recorded, Erickson is clearly not only a major talent but a complete professional. I enjoyed his piece to the hilt," by Heuwell Tircuit of *San Francisco Classical Voice* for *O Vos Omnes*;¹⁵ "... the Angels score was gripping on first impression," by Octavio Roca of the

11 Erickson, "Biography."

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Erickson, "Works – Solo Voice."

15 Erickson, "Works – Choral."

San Francisco Chronicle for the ballet *Angels: Fallen & Otherwise*; and “And surely there’s a touch of rock in the sheer energy of Kurt Erickson’s lighthearted *Toccata for Orchestra*,” by Michael Anthony of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*.¹⁶

Compositional Process

Erickson initiates musical composition by examining the text or concept. He devours inspiration from the wider world around him and does not constrain himself to tropes for the sake of themselves. In art song literature, his approach is similar to the great *Lieder* masters like Schubert and Schumann. Word painting along with distinctive rhythmic and articulatory motives dot his pieces and give the performer and audience a template for singing and listening. Erickson’s compositional influences are wide reaching and not limited in scope. He wrote,

In terms of compositional influences from a musical standpoint, my tastes are fairly eclectic. Bach, Beethoven, and Chopin were the usual suspects of my formative musical education and have influenced me deeply. I just love the textures and harmonic language of the French Impressionists (Ravel especially). Benjamin Britten taught me (teaches me) that it is possible to effectively straddle the line between accessibility and complexity. I have a singular obsession with the French composer Albert Roussel and for the life of me can’t understand why he isn’t more popular. I love so much music from the time period around World War I – Prokofiev, Scriabin, Villa-Lobos, Poulenc, George Antheil, and Shostakovich are wonderful.¹⁷

His unique tastes are reflected in a variety of projects and commissions and the distinct colors he creates for each of them.

Beyond the influences of the Classical, Romantic, and Impressionist masters, Erickson composed with a love of more contemporary styles, specifically minimalism.

¹⁶ Kurt Erickson, “Works – Orchestra,” accessed December 24, 2019, http://www.kurterickson.com/work_category/orchestra/.

¹⁷ Erickson, E-mail interview.

The minimalist minds of Ingram Marshall, Steve Reich, and John Adams as well as the more experimental west coast composers like Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, and John Cage allowed Erickson's formal training in college to find even more flavors and styles for his songs and other compositions.¹⁸ Erickson said,

Minimalism is a great way to cut your teeth in composition, because it's so direct, and that kind of language is not totally out-of-place in a liturgical context. And [his church-connected employers] weren't asking me to write music they'd already heard. I could infuse their music with my own language, or use some of their elements within my language.¹⁹

One more contemporary genre that has manifested itself in the collaborative spirit of Erickson's songwriting is jazz. Erickson often provides structured improvisational sections in pieces and allows the singer space to spontaneously create in performance. Within the *Here, Bullet* cycle, there are many moments of individuality for the singer and the pianist. These instances allow each performance to be unique for each performer, even among different performances by the same performer. Though common in jazz, improvisation runs contrary to many of the composers in the Impressionist and Classical eras that influenced Erickson. Through this technique, Erickson's music often straddles different genres within each of his compositions. He strives to connect the form and function of the older eras with the more contemporary genres.

¹⁸ Erickson, E-mail interview.

¹⁹ Jeff Kaliss, "Composer Kurt Erickson Finds Fertile Ground in a Veteran's Poem," *San Francisco Classical Voice: Concerts. Artists. Critical Reviews.*, accessed January 2, 2020, <https://www.sfcv.org/events-calendar/artist-spotlight/composer-kurt-erickson-finds-fertile-ground-in-a-veterans-poem>.

While many composers have combined aspects of chronologically adjacent eras, Erickson looks to use all possible resources, examples, and influences from other likeminded composers to create cohesive and new art. “The American expatriate Frederic Rzewski is an example of an artist with an absolute mastery of both traditional techniques as well as those found on the fringes of the avant-garde,”²⁰ said Erickson about one of his compositional influences. Erickson’s compositional process creates pieces that are approachable and emotionally authentic.

²⁰ Kaliss, “Composer Kurt Erickson Finds Fertile Ground.”

CHAPTER TWO. BRIAN TURNER'S LIFE AND WORKS

Biographical Information

Brian Turner was born on February 12, 1967 in Visalia, CA. As a child Turner moved around the Central Valley and Sierra Nevada foothills, and in the early 1970s, he settled in Fresno but moved again to Madera, CA at age ten. Growing up in multiple extreme climate areas and locations, “a stretch of the Golden State known for scant precipitation, high crop yields, and desolate winter days stretching into weeks of dense tule fog,” Turner developed a discerning eye for finding signs of life in the valley.²¹ Living in mostly rural areas did not give Turner access to many visual pastimes like television. He looked to his parents for information, and his father, an avid reader, provided him books to read and absorb. Turner said, in reference to his budding creativity and imagination, “The books that moved through the house were the rivers that poured into the ocean.”²² He recalls his father reading novels while they were cleaning dishes like a serialized story, and for him, “that practice instilled a great sense of value to the work itself and to the importance of the imagination in our lives.”²³ His eye for detail and growing imagination helped guide his days as a soldier and writer.

Along with reading and writing, Turner grew up with music and played trumpet from elementary school into college. In his late teens, he started playing the bass guitar and joined The Dead Guys, a band that changed names and members often but held

21 Thomas G. McGuire, "Among the Lightning Trees: A Conversation with Brian Turner," *WLA; War, Literature and the Arts* 27 (2015), 1.

22 McGuire, "Among the Lightning Trees," 18.

23 McGuire, "Among the Lightning Trees," 19.

great joy for Turner.²⁴ One of the formative members of the band, Brian Voight, was the primary songwriter, guitar player, and best friend of Turner's. Turner said of Voight, "He was (and continues to be) one of the biggest artistic influences in my life."²⁵ To this day, Turner continues to play multiple instruments and finds them to be a great source of joy and inspiration.

In the late 1980s, Turner started studying poetry with Ernesto Trejo at Fresno City College; he earned a Bachelor of Arts in English literature at Fresno State University and studied under Phil Levine, Connie Hales, Chuck Hanzlicek, and Steve Yarbrough.²⁶ His studies concluded almost a decade later with a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Oregon working with T.R. Hummer, Dorianne Laux, and Garrett Hongo.²⁷ Through these mentors, teachers, and learned experiences, he fostered a desire to express himself in writing and specifically poetry.

Turner enlisted in the United States Army in 1998 and served numerous tours of duty over seven years. "He was an infantry team leader for a year in Iraq with the 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division. Prior to that, he deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina with the 10th Mountain Division (1999-2000)."²⁸ His time as a

24 McGuire, "Among the Lightning Trees," 20.

25 Ibid.

26 McGuire, "Among the Lightning Trees," 2.

27 Ibid.

28 Brian Turner, "Bio," accessed December 28, 2019, <http://www.brianturner.org/bio/>.

soldier was pivotal in the development of his art and voice. Beyond the balance of his time in the field and his writing, Turner was also led to a variety of occupations:

As well as an infantryman, Brian has worked as a machinist, a locksmith's assistant, a convenience store clerk, a pickler, a maker of circuit boards, a dishwasher, an EFL [English Foreign Language] teacher in South Korea, a low voltage electrician, a radio DJ [Disc Jockey], a bass guitar instructor, and more.²⁹

These jobs were formative in his understanding of the diverse middle class, and as a result, he wrote an unpublished volume of poems that explored the breadth of the wage class. Turner had also completed seven poetry collections that were never published before his book of poetry, *Here, Bullet*.³⁰

Through his life, Turner has lived and traveled around the world including Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Russia, Kuwait, Iraq, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Morocco, Turkey, Greece, Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Italy, Switzerland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Germany, France, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Ireland, and the United Kingdom.³¹ Turner's unique path through life seems to inform the style and commonality of his poetry. It helps his voice reach the emotional depths of the human experience, especially that of the soldier.

29 Turner, "Bio."

30 McGuire, "Among the Lightning Trees," 2.

31 Turner, "Bio."

Works and Career

In Turner's multi-faceted career history, three jobs stand out as anchors to his current focus: as an infantryman in the United States Army, as an author, and as the director of the Master of Fine Arts program at Sierra Nevada College in Lake Tahoe, NV. His writing has produced two books of poetry and a memoir: *Here, Bullet, Phantom Noise*,³² and *My Life as a Foreign Country* respectively.³³ From 2009 to 2010, Turner traveled the globe using an Amy Lowell Traveling Poetry Fellowship, and he wrote short pieces for Peter Catapano's *Home Fires* at the *New York Times*. Also during this period of time, he was given a challenge from Ted Genoways, editor at *Virginia Quarterly Review*, to expand his writing acumen by using the *haibun* form,³⁴ a combination of a prose poem and haiku popularized by the seventeenth century poet Matsuo Basho to trace a journey.³⁵ Turner sent about ninety pages of *haibun* material to Genoways for editing, which turned into a twenty-two page essay entitled "My Life as Foreign Country" published in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*.³⁶ The extension of this essay became his memoir of the same title.

32 Brian Turner, "Books – Poetry," accessed December 28, 2019, <http://www.brianturner.org/poetry/>.

33 Brian Turner, "Books," accessed December 28, 2019, <http://www.brianturner.org/books/>.

34 McGuire, "Among the Lightning Trees," 4.

35 Poetry Foundation, "Basho 1644-1694," accessed January 1, 2020, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/basho>.

36 McGuire, "Among the Lightning Trees," 5.

Praises for his books of poetry include: "... Turner has sent back a dispatch from a place arguably more incomprehensible than the moon—the war in Iraq—and deserves our thanks...", by the *New York Times* Book Review; "As a war poet, [Brian Turner] sidesteps the classic distinction between romance and irony, opting instead for the surreal," by the *New Yorker*; and "... Turner shows us soldiers who are invincible and wounded, a nation noble and culpable...He brings us closer to our own phantom guilt and speaks the words that we both do and do not want to hear," by the *Washington Post*.³⁷ His poetry has been translated into Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, and Swedish.³⁸ Turner has also worked as an editor for *The Strangest of Theatres*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Epiphany*, *The Cork Literary Review*, and *The Atlanta Review (Ireland)*.³⁹ Further accolades include:

His poetry and essays have been published in *The New York Times*, *National Geographic*, *Poetry Daily*, *The Georgia Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review* and other journals. Turner was featured in the documentary film *Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience*, which was nominated for an Academy Award. He received a USA Hillcrest Fellowship in Literature, an NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] Literature Fellowship in Poetry, the Amy Lowell Traveling Fellowship, a US-Japan Friendship Commission Fellowship, the Poets' Prize, and a Fellowship from the Lannan Foundation. His most recent book of poetry, *Phantom Noise*, was short-listed for the T.S. Eliot Prize in England. His work has appeared on National Public Radio, the BBC, Newshour with Jim Lehrer, Here and Now, and on Weekend America, among others.⁴⁰

37 Turner, "Books – Poetry."

38 Turner, "Bio."

39 Brian Turner, "Books – As Editor," accessed December 28, 2019, <http://www.brianturner.org/as-editor/>.

40 Turner, "Bio."

Creative Process

Turner's world travels and experiences fully influence his creative process. His poetry for *Here, Bullet* was written during his deployment and came through his direct experience in the Iraq war. Turner speaks of how he will "begin with an image that appears to me within a fragment of language that feels *right* in my body."⁴¹ The use of small phrases and ideas help him propagate a larger form. Because of the deployment, he wrote during sleeping hours using a red lens flashlight. Allowing his thoughts to continue to grow led him to find his own flow in language. Turner said of his process in general,

Normally, the neocortex seems to take over—and elements of story, and rhetorical intention, dominate my imagination. I often think cinematically, and so spatial and temporal details lead me in one sense, while the music of the poem, that which carries all else, is sounded within so that my body becomes attuned to the music—and will hopefully recognize when I drift from the composition.⁴²

Turner's consistent pairing of his writing and musical intent perfectly encapsulates what makes his poetry so engaging.

Since Turner is a musician himself, the connective tissue of rhythmic and metered word flow moved like music he would enjoy. His own playing of the flugelhorn helped inform Turner of the connection between music and poetry. He said,

41 Brian Turner, E-mail interview by the author, October 14, 2019.

42 Ibid.

In a more practical sense, playing the flugelhorn reminds me, as a poet, that the imagination is carried by the breath. The timing and spacing, the intonation and inflections of language, mirror the musician's craft. This is true whether the words are recited aloud or 'voiced' within us as we read silently to ourselves.⁴³

The flow of the syntax and the pulse of the phrasing lend themselves to a musical setting. Each poem Turner has written has been inspired by a new experience and created in a fresh fashion. The spontaneity of his creative process produces poetry of a diverse form, nature, and subject matter.

43 McGuire, "Among the Lightning Trees," 21.

CHAPTER THREE. THE *HERE, BULLET* SONG CYCLE

Commissioning and Consortium Process

The standard method for commissioning involves a performer or group financially supporting a new composition or set of compositions that is then produced and performed a set number of times by said composer or group. For Erickson, this particular method was “fundamentally an insufficient process.”⁴⁴ He said,

... it’s usually just one or a few different performances lined up for a piece. You work like crazy over a series of months, you’re researching, writing, rewriting, going to the rehearsal process, your emotions are up and down, and you finally get to the point where, with a little luck and a sympathetic performer, you have a great performance.⁴⁵

The inefficiencies of the current model of commissioning lead to one grand moment for the piece without any time and effort placed on assisting the commission in becoming more than a singular event that would have staying power in a crowded, burgeoning field. Erickson wanted his pieces to have a far greater reach in the musical community.

He decided to investigate reinventing the *status quo* by writing the piece for free and insuring a series of public performances in the 2019-2020 season through a performers’ consortium.⁴⁶ Erickson describes the agreement perfectly when he said of the process, “They get to personally commission a piece of music – most people don’t have that opportunity – and in return, I get a multiplicity of performances, in different

44 Kaliss, “Composer Kurt Erickson Finds Fertile Ground.”

45 Ibid.

46 Merriam-Webster defines consortium as “an agreement, combination, or group (as of companies) formed to undertake an enterprise beyond the resources of any one member.”

locales, to audiences I probably wouldn't have access to."⁴⁷ The success of the consortium can be measured in the dozens of planned performances around the world, and by the new paradigm it has generated for creators and performers. This access to the creative process and material is vital for all parties involved.

The specifics of contacting performers and creating the consortium relied heavily on social media. Erickson has spent eleven years, and counting, of his life as a composer-in-residence in the San Francisco Bay Area, and due to his experience, he knew he needed to use a platform that had great reach and connectivity. In order for this project to gain traction internationally, he turned to Facebook and specific groups to find baritone singers and organizations willing to participate. With his elimination of the advanced costs involved with typical commissions, he had the perfect product to offer singers, pianists, and organizations: a set of newly composed pieces with no commissioning fee.

With the format of the consortium and product distribution developed, Erickson used different classical singer Facebook groups to accomplish his goal. Posting in these groups in August 2018, he offered baritones the opportunity to be a part of the consortium by only signing an agreement document that detailed a schedule for when the pieces would be finished and distributed and a promise from the performer to program them in the 2019-2020 season. Many baritones from around the world responded and other singers even recommended people for the consortium. With agreements signed and performances lined up, the project was initiated. On February 11, 2019, Erickson created his own public Facebook group entitled "Kurt Erickson's

⁴⁷ Kaliss, "Composer Kurt Erickson Finds Fertile Ground."

Here, Bullet for Baritone and Piano” to help promote and disseminate information about the pieces and the project as a whole.

Erickson promised completion of the cycle by July 2019. He finished the pieces in August 2019, a year after he began the consortium, and sent the pieces over Facebook messenger to each participant. Along with the pieces, he had professionally recorded a video of the first piece with baritone Omari Tau and put SoundCloud links of the piano part for the other three songs to help in the learning process. According to a post from September 10, 2019 in “Kurt Erickson’s Here, Bullet for Baritone and Piano” Facebook group, performances of *Here*, *Bullet* have occurred at and in Sacramento’s Cosumnes River College; Nashville, TN; Biola University in Los Angeles, CA; the Fresh Voices Festival of New Works in San Francisco, CA; and upcoming performances are scheduled in Chicago, IL; San Francisco, CA; New York, NY; Berlin, BRD; Calgary, CDN; the University of California, Los Angeles; West Point Military Academy in West Point, NY; Philadelphia, PA; El Paso, TX; Sacramento, CA; New Orleans, LA; Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, LA; Boulder, CO; Fresno, CA; and Indianapolis, IN.

The entrepreneurial aspect of the project centers around exposure rather than direct financial gain. The composer uses the promise of many different performances to provide exposure for his work, which leads to local and possibly national press. In *Here*, *Bullet*’s case, Erickson will have articles published in *Classical Singer* and the *Journal of Singing*. This level of engagement has gathered momentum for the songs, and with winning the 2020 NATS Art Song Composition Award and a poster presentation at the 2020 National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) National Conference in

Knoxville, TN, Erickson is primed for greater recognition. This national coverage of *Here, Bullet* has garnered significant exposure which can turn into traditional commissioned projects for song or in larger art forms like opera.

The paradigm is shifted because the typical commission model leads to a few performances for an advanced fee, but with the removal of the fee and the promise from the performers to sing the pieces, the consortium has actually led to many more performances and a greater reach for the songs. As Erickson says in an upcoming January 2020 *Classical Singer* magazine featured article,

Taking the next step, why not really open it up and try out a completely new template for how a work could be commissioned and presented on a large scale? Removing the upfront commissioning fees lowers the bar to participation significantly for performers who might not otherwise budget for these expenses. I think as composers we get used to asking the question “Why not?” and Why not me?”⁴⁸

The goal was to, in his words, “front load interest by incentivizing performers to jump on board at the beginning of the writing.”⁴⁹ This new style of creation and dissemination on a much larger scale than single commissions could possibly change how commissions are otherwise done in the future for composers looking to broaden their audience.

Kurt Erickson’s Interaction with Brian Turner

Erickson has applied the Ezra Pound concept of “make it new” to his compositional ideas and projects.⁵⁰ He looks to advocate for new contemporary poetry

48 Erickson, E-mail interview.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

in his compositions to eschew the old, staid approaches for art song composers.⁵¹

Turner's *Here, Bullet* fit well with his dictum, and Erickson found Turner's poetry in a unique way. He said,

My wife first heard Brian Turner in an interview on NPR and was so swept up that she bought me his book as a gift. It sat on my dresser for about a year and when I finally went through the poetry it blew me away. The approach is certainly unique – a much lauded poet at the height of his powers writing about his first hand experiences in the Iraq War. But beyond the novelty, the poetry is strong, direct.⁵²

With stunning, new, contemporary material to set to music, Erickson decided to create the consortium and produce the pieces himself.

Erickson reached out to Turner, and through Turner's publisher, Alice James Books, the rights to the poems were granted for reproduction and use in the song settings. Both men had never met but had shared acquaintances in poetry circles. The compositional process started for Erickson, and Turner experienced the music for the first time through a video recording of the song *Here, Bullet*. Erickson said, "I confess I was nervous to send him the first video recording... 'What if the poet doesn't like it?!?' gnawed at my conscience."⁵³ Fortunately, Turner enjoyed the piece and sent a gratifying response to Erickson along with actively sharing the video on his own social media channels. As of October 2019, Erickson and Turner are planning a new collaboration based on either some of Turner's other work or a completely new creation.⁵⁴

51 Erickson, E-mail interview.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

The Poetry from *Here, Bullet*⁵⁵

Erickson chose four poems from Turner's larger collection *Here, Bullet* for his song cycle. The poetry is set word for word with a few text additions for emphasis in each piece. The poems are shown below and the textual additions and repetitions will be discussed in Chapter Four.

"Here, Bullet" by Brian Turner

If a body is what you want
then here is bone and gristle and flesh.
Here is the clavicle-snapped wish,
the aorta's opened valves, the leap
thought makes at the synaptic gap.
Here is the adrenaline rush you crave,
that inexorable flight, that insane puncture
into heat and blood. And I dare you to finish
what you've started. Because here, Bullet,
here is where I complete the word you bring hissing
through the air, here is where I moan
the barrel's cold esophagus, triggering
my tongue's explosives for the rifling I have
inside of me, each twist of the round
spun deeper, because here, Bullet,
here is where the world ends, every time.

"Eulogy" by Brian Turner

It happens on a Monday, at 11:20 A.M.,
as tower guards eat sandwiches
and seagulls drift by on the Tigris River.
Prisoners tilt their heads to the west
though burlap sacks and duct tape blind them.
The sound reverberates down concertina coils
the way piano wire thrums when given slack.

55 Brian Turner, "Here, Bullet," "Curfew," "Eulogy," and "A Soldier's Arabic" from *Here, Bullet*. Copyright © 2005 by Brian Turner. Used by permission of the poet and The Permissions Company, LLC on behalf of Alice James Books, alicejamesbooks.org. All rights reserved worldwide.

And it happens like this, on a blue day of sun,
when Private Miller pulls the trigger
to take brass and fire into his mouth:
the sound lifts the birds up off the water,
a mongoose pauses under the orange trees,
and nothing can stop it now, no matter what
blur of motion surrounds him, no matter what voices
crackle over the radio in static confusion,
because if only for this moment the earth is stilled,
and Private Miller has found what low hush there is
down in the eucalyptus shade, there by the river.

PFC B. Miller
(1980 – March 22, 2004)

“A Soldier’s Arabic” by Brian Turner

*“This is a strange new kind of war where you learn
just as much as you are able to believe.”*
—Ernest Hemingway

The word for love, *habib*, is written from right
to left, starting where we would end it
and ending where we might begin.

Where we would end a war
another might take as a beginning,
or as an echo of history, recited again.

Speak the word for death, *maut*,
and you will hear the cursives of the wind
driven into the veil of the unknown.

This is a language made of blood.
It is made of sand, and time.
To be spoken, it must be earned.

“Curfew” by Brian Turner

*The wrong is not in the religion;
The wrong is in us.”*
—Saier T.

At dusk, bats fly out by the hundreds.
Water snakes glide in the ponding basins
behind the rubble palaces. The mosques
call their faithful in, welcoming
the moonlight as prayer.

Today, policemen sunbathed on traffic islands
and children helped their mothers
string clothes to the line, a slight breeze
filling them with heat.

There were no bombs, no panic in the streets.
Sgt. Gutierrez didn't comfort an injured man
who cupped pieces of his friend's brain
in his hands; instead, today,
white birds rose from the Tigris.

The Cycle: General Information

The *Here, Bullet* song cycle is a set of four songs taken from the poetry of Brian Turner's book *Here, Bullet*. The specific poems taken, in song order, are "Here, Bullet," "Eulogy," "A Soldier's Arabic," and "Curfew." These four pieces form a cohesive, dramatic look at the soldier's experience in the Iraqi war zone. The poems switch between first, second, and third person, but they all maintain a similar sense of narrative structure that implies a singular view or speaker. The language is visceral, dramatic, and places the reader and listener in the moments that the speaker describes.

Structurally, the choice of four songs can be compared to the classical four movement symphony in regard to the general characteristics of the movements loosely following an *allegro*, *andante*, *minuet*, and *presto* tempo, as well as material connecting each part.⁵⁶ While *Here, Bullet* does not adhere to the theoretical and structural forms that the movements typically follow, the cycle seems to track with the stylistic ideas

⁵⁶ Laurence Elliot Libin, "Symphony," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed January 13, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/art/symphony-music>.

above with the exception of “Curfew” which shares a close feeling to “Eulogy” and the very end of “Here, Bullet.” This classical structure was not intended for the set, as Erickson said, “Four poems just felt right and for some unknown reason, I’ve always found myself attracted to pieces in sets of four (both my own and others).”⁵⁷ Material and themes are referenced throughout the cycle, and each piece, despite being able to stand on its own, is made stronger when performed together.

Erickson wrote *Here, Bullet* for the baritone voice ranging from an optional E₂ to an optional G₄ (with a written range of B₂ to F₄). The optional pitches occur in “Here, Bullet” to facilitate the dramatic intensity and upper and lower range extensions for different baritone performers. Erickson chose the baritone voice because it is “a kind of shorthand for the archetypal masculine character.”⁵⁸ He wanted to honor Brian Turner’s voice, and practically, he had not written too many compositions for the baritone voice.⁵⁹ The majority of the pitches lie within an A flat₃ to E flat₄ *tessitura* and is generally maintained within the middle voice with a few excursions into the upper and lower ranges. The baritone performer will need a full range of colorful, emotionally reflected tones and techniques to tackle the different musical sentiments, a strong middle and upper middle voice, acoustic resonance tracking and timbral strategies, and a theatrical speaking voice for “A Soldier’s Arabic” due to the recitation of the poem after it has been sung through. The cycle is approximately eighteen minutes in duration and the third and fourth pieces are connected with an *attacca* marking.

57 Erickson, E-mail interview.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

The piano accompaniment plays a vital role in setting the tone and character. Along with these elements, the cycle requires a collaborative pianist with dexterity in color and timbre. For the Baton Rouge, LA premiere within a lecture recital, the pianist, Liliia Oliinyk, said, "... this set requires great flexibility in touch and weight distribution to achieve necessary sound effects the music calls for. Overall, it focuses on the repetition of patterns as the main aspect of compositional development."⁶⁰ The created atmosphere in tandem with the singer is supremely important in art song because of its more intimate approach, sensibility, and text-first ideal. Physical endurance is also challenging for the pianist because of the consistent repetition of figures and the extension of the hand moving through different progressions. Overall, the set, while providing unique difficulties, is well thought out pianistically and would not give a well-prepared pianist too many troubles.

Another challenge for the cycle comes with regard to ensemble between the piano and singer. With the improvisatory sections for the voice and the repeating *ostinatos* in the piano, lining up the performance forces becomes more challenging. The goal in these segments is, as Oliinyk says, "sounding free yet not disturbing the texture of the work."⁶¹ Keeping the ensemble together and fluid while also having freedom requires both performers to carefully listen and plan within the improvisatory portions.

⁶⁰ Liliia Oliinyk, E-mail interview by the author, January 6, 2020.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Poetic and Musical Connections

The poetry in the book *Here, Bullet* was all written while Turner was deployed in Iraq. As a soldier he kept a journal to help him understand the foreign land that surrounded him. He said,

I wanted to understand *where I was*. And the people I pointed the muzzle of my weapon at, the people whose front doors I kicked in or blew open with explosive charges, the people I flex-cuffed in the middle of the street at 3 am – and their wives, their children, and their neighbors – I wanted to understand them, to know their history, to know the land itself.⁶²

This sentiment is evident in the poems that Erickson chose for the song cycle. The soldier's experience is carried through from the title song to "Curfew" with references in the middle pieces completing a visceral story following a soldier's day-to-day activity and horrors of war in Iraq.

Turner uses the poem "Here, Bullet" as the title of the book, and Erickson follows suit for the cycle. The text paints a picture of lust and power through the bullet and gun. Warfare is shown in its cold, bloody truth. The connection is further amplified in Erickson's setting of the song beginning in a *quasi-recitative* for the first third of the piece. Erickson takes the liberty of adding the text "Here, Bullet" at the beginning and ending. The setting brings out the opening invocation and the body as a twisted offering to the bullet. Using the initial phrasing in measure one reinforced in a second more elaborated phrase in measure two shows the almost chant like dedication to these instruments of war through the use of the notes B flat - C – D flat (See Example 3.1.). The rise of the vocal line reinforces this idea by seemingly calling out to the bullet.

⁶² Douglas Higbee, "Brian Turner's *Here, Bullet* and the Soldier-Poet Tradition," *South Atlantic Review* 80, no. 1-2 (2015): 126.

Example 3.1. Opening to "Here, Bullet" mm. 1-2⁶³

Slow and spacious, but with great freedom
quasi-recitativo
mp

The image shows a musical score for the opening of the piece "Here, Bullet". It consists of two staves: Baritone (bass clef) and Piano (treble and bass clefs). The Baritone staff begins with a rest, followed by a series of notes: B-flat, G, F, E, D, C, B-flat, A, G, F, E, D, C, B-flat. The lyrics "Here, Bul-let If a bo-dy is what you want" are written below the notes. The Piano staff features a *mf* dynamic and a complex, rhythmic accompaniment. The score is marked "Slow and spacious, but with great freedom" and "quasi-recitativo".

Baritone

Piano

Here, Bul-let If a bo-dy is what you want

Following this *quasi-recitativo* opening, Erickson enlists the piano in measure eight to help establish “the adrenaline rush you crave” by using an *ostinato* figure. This energetic figuration allows the smoother vocal melodic line to sit smoothly above the thicker piano texture.⁶⁴ The vocal phrases continue to raise in pitch and *tessitura* until an optional G₄ is used to paint the word “deeper” with the largest interval of the piece, a minor ninth, showing the growing depth that the bullet continues to find in the body. The *ostinato* stops in measure twenty-nine and the piano *tacets* while the voice sings “ev’ry time.”⁶⁵ These words complete the phrase “here is where the world ends” and also serve as a transition into a structured improvisation.⁶⁶ Another *ostinato* begins in the piano as the vocal line moves into a repetition of the text “Here, Bullet” as described by the composer: “mm. 30-34: structured improvisation; sing the motives in the boxes rhythmically independent of the piano; may be sung at pitch or one octave lower; may

⁶³ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 3.

⁶⁴ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 1.

be repeated and/or sung out of order.”⁶⁷ The addition of the text “Here, Bullet” provides a heightened sense of worship for what war entails and the push and pull within the speaker to experience the thrill.

Following “Here, Bullet,” Erickson sets the poem “Eulogy.” If “Here, Bullet” is a representation of a soldier’s inner thoughts, “Eulogy” is a cold look at one of war’s harsh realities: suicide. A thematic correlation between the two is established with the gun and bullet. The poem recounts the day surrounding the suicide of Private Miller, who served with Turner. Whereas the language in “Here, Bullet” is visceral and florid in its word choice and descriptions, “Eulogy” is definably objective regarding the events. The poem’s opening text, “It happens on a Monday, at 11:20 A.M.,” is so exact that the moment itself is frozen in time.⁶⁸ The poem continues to recount the activity surrounding the war zone prison, quickly shifts to the suicide, and finally shows nature’s reaction to the stillness and release of Private Miller. The language prolongs the moment and, through multiple examples, gives credence to the sound of the gun shot inciting nature. The bullet from “Here, Bullet” has found its depth. The poem also effectively uses a verb tense change to further elongate the moment and shift the paradigm of a soldier’s agency over his involvement in war and altering a foreign society. From the *South Atlantic Review*, Douglas Higbee remarks, “‘Eulogy’ proceeds in the present tense until its conclusion in the past perfect – reversing the standard grammatical shift in authoritative soldier poetry.”⁶⁹

67 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 12.

68 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 14.

69 Higbee, "Brian Turner’s Here, Bullet and the Soldier-Poet Tradition," 123.

Erickson expertly chose “Eulogy” to follow “Here, Bullet.” The worship of war shows a great consequence through a soldier’s suicide. The music begins innocuously in its recounting of the day, and Erickson uses a distinct technique to show how nature interacts with suicide. He says,

Nineteenth Century Romantic poets idealized Nature, so I paired this poetic scene with musical choices that one might find in a mid-century Romantic work by Chopin or Mendelssohn. The poem simultaneously presents two completely dichotomous scenes (Nature vs. Private Miller’s suicide) – in a similar manner I used two contrasting arpeggiated harmonies in D flat Major and e minor as the musical basis for the setting.⁷⁰

Example 3.2. E minor to D flat Major harmonies in “Eulogy” mm. 4-6⁷¹

The musical score for Example 3.2 shows three measures of music. The top staff is a vocal line in bass clef, and the bottom two staves are piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs. The key signature changes from one flat (E minor) to two flats (D-flat major) between the first and second measures. The piano accompaniment consists of arpeggiated chords. The vocal line has lyrics: "It hap-pens on a". The dynamic marking is *mp*.

This interplay in the shifting harmonies keeps the listener from feeling fully settled in the monotony of the routine. At measure thirty-three, the time signature changes to 3/8, and a percussive, accented beat pervades in the piano as “the sound, reverberates down concertina coils.”⁷² Erickson repeats “the sound” at different pitches before continuing with the poem to reinforce the event more emphatically. Once the verb tense shifts into the past perfect, the melody line begins a gradual chromatic rise to an E₄

⁷⁰ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 14.

⁷¹ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 15.

⁷² Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 19.

marked in the score with a composer note of “complete and total catharsis.”⁷³ Private Miller has found “the hush,” and it is a complete release from the war and life.

“A Soldier’s Arabic” follows “Eulogy” and is the opening poem in Turner’s *Here, Bullet* book. Unlike the previous two poems, “A Soldier’s Arabic” has distinct stanzas and is accompanied by the quotation, “This is a strange new kind of war where you learn just as much as you are able to believe,” – Ernest Hemingway.⁷⁴ This quote and the text of the poem echo a cycle of culture clashes and a unique dynamic between each side and their thoughts on the opposition’s objectives. The poem further uses the Arabic words *habib* (IPA: [habib]) and *maut* (IPA: [maʊt]), love and death respectively, adding a cross-cultural tint to the respective sides of the war. In both societies, love and death are pivotal life points. Love can be seen as the driving force in the beginning, sustaining, and end of war; death can be seen as being an unknown in regard to the afterlife and its own purpose and consequence in this and other struggles. The soldier uses the “language made of blood” to understand the world they are entering and to be sensitive to a culture that has only known constant war.⁷⁵ Higbee writes in his article,

The difficult process of knowing, of coming to terms with the kind of war wracking Iraqi society, is a function of belief, or one’s set of assumptions about what is possible... Turner’s authority in “A Soldier’s Arabic” paradoxically stems from his caution to US soldiers and other Westerners that our understanding of Iraq may very well be imperfect.⁷⁶

73 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 26.

74 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 28.

75 Ibid.

76 Higbee, "Brian Turner’s *Here, Bullet* and the Soldier-Poet Tradition," 126.

A soldier does not gain understanding exclusively through combat experience, but also by responding to the different ways love and death are articulated in a country that is very different from his/her/their own.

In Erickson's setting of "A Soldier's Arabic", he uses a dance meter and the notation "A gentle swing" to set the piece as a respite from violence and war itself.⁷⁷ He writes the Arabic words of *habib* and *maut* to be spoken in a *sotto voce*.⁷⁸ This marking brings the words out of the texture and makes them special in the context of the English poetry. It also anticipates, along with the line "To be spoken, it must be earned," the narration of the poem, with a piano *ostinato* underscoring the end of the piece, culminating in an *attacca* into the final song "Curfew."⁷⁹

With "Curfew," like "A Soldier's Arabic," Turner precedes the poem with a quote, specifically, "The wrong is not in the religion; The wrong is in us." – Saier T.⁸⁰ "Curfew" speaks about nature and mundane day-to-day occurrences, but it contains underlying tension due to the backdrop of war. Erickson writes of Turner's poetry,

Trauma and incredibly vivid descriptions of violence are never far off in Turner's poems... So a picture of bats flying out at dusk, water snakes gliding in ponding basins, policemen sunbathing on traffic islands, even children helping their mothers is of course juxtaposed with a linguistic negative: an announcement that Sgt. Gutierrez did not comfort a man who cupped pieces of his friend's brain in his hands. These are poems from the Iraq War by a poet who saw it all firsthand – this is what we should expect.⁸¹

77 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 29.

78 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 29, 31.

79 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 34, 35.

80 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 38.

81 *Ibid.*

Erickson's words capture the idea of the poem perfectly. The normal can be quickly interrupted by anything. The mood of the poem encapsulates that moment when everything is dying down and how nature and time continue moving during war. The poem also recalls Private Miller's suicide. Erickson's notes,

In public presentations of his poems, Turner speaks of the injustice when a Colonial addressing the troops at a parade ground neglects to name Private Miller among those killed in Iraq, perhaps because he died by suicide and not a "soldier's death". Turner writes the poem about Private Miller as a way of honoring his colleague...⁸²

All these choices make "Curfew" a perfect ending poem for the cycle.

Erickson's setting uses moments of word painting in the vocal line to describe nature like the gliding of snakes and the rays of moonlight shining at dusk. He keeps the tempo almost exaggeratedly slow to elongate this instant in time. The ending of the song includes two unique musical ciphers referring to love and Private Miller (See Example 3.3.).⁸³ Having made musical connections through these particular ciphers to both "Eulogy" and "A Soldier's Arabic," "Curfew" also includes improvised timing for a repetition of the word "today" to reference the improvisation in "Here, Bullet." Despite all the atrocities and horrors of war and suicide, the set ends in a hopeful tone with the dedication to love and remembrance.

⁸² Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 38.

⁸³ A musical cipher is used to transform text into a motif that has some relation between pitches and letter.

Example 3.3. LOVE/MILLER ciphers and “today” repetition in “Curfew” mm. 49-50⁸⁴

ad lib timing of figures in boxes

49

to - day

to - day

L O V E

M I L L E R

84 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 45.

CHAPTER FOUR. ANALYSES OF POEMS AND SONGS, WITH PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS

“Here, Bullet”

*Summarization of Characteristics*⁸⁵

- **Range:** B₂ to F#₄ (optional E₂ to G₄)
- **Tessitura:** Middle to Upper Middle Voice (optional Low Voice)
- **Vocal Line:** The vocal line is simple in the *quasi-recitative* opening with stepwise movement and manageable larger intervals. In the energized body of the song, the vocal line becomes more difficult because of the advancing harmonic progression almost every phrase and a gradual increase to higher pitches with an optional G₄. For the concluding structured improvisation coda, the vocal line is only as difficult as the singer can handle, though it does include some octave leaps over and into *passaggi*.
- **Metric Organization:** Unmetered for the *quasi-recitative* opening; 5/4, 3/4, 2/4, 4/4, 6/4 meters for the body of the song; unmetered for the concluding structured improvisation coda
- **Rhythm:** Rhythm is free in the unmetered *quasi-recitative* and improvisatory sections. The piano *ostinato* in the middle portion includes sixteenth, eighth, quarter, and half notes with dotted, tied, and syncopated rhythms interspersed along with triplets.

⁸⁵ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 2-13.

- Expression and Tempo Markings:** Slow and spacious, but with great freedom; *quasi-recitative*; with expressive flexibility; *barely contained excitement*; with a small amount of Pedal, but keep it clean; Biting; [may be sung one octave lower; mm. 30-34: structured improvisation; sing the motives in the boxes rhythmically independent of the piano; may be sung at pitch or one octave lower; may be repeated and/or sung out of order]; *with a mixture of defiance, resignation, and like a moan*; mostly breath, fading to nothing; softer and slower until the notes become imperceptible
- Accompaniment:** The piano is chordal and also includes quick moving *ostinatos* that require great touch and dexterity from the pianist, like *toccata* figures. The *ostinato* patterns are written in thirty-second notes, and the pianist must diligently follow the vocal line because the harmonies change with the *ostinato* before the vocal line.
- Pianistic Needs:** Information supplied by Liliia Oliinyk:

The first piece explores *toccata*-like motives that are repeated and altered through enharmonic changes and transpositions; here the main pianistic issue is physical endurance; as the patterns progress throughout the movement their intervallic makeup shifts from narrow to wide and requires constant physical adjustment without any change in the rhythmic density; however, *perpetuum mobile* is a commonly used concept in piano repertoire and generally does not present significant difficulty for a pianist.⁸⁶
- Level of Difficulty:** Moderate. “Here, Bullet” challenges the singer to accurately execute different types of musical techniques and styles: unmeasured *recitative*, harmonically and rhythmically challenging quick

⁸⁶ Oliinyk, E-mail interview.

changes, and structured improvisation. The transitions from one part to another, along with an optional extended range, make it the most difficult piece of the set to sing and coordinate with the pianist.

- **Length:** Thirty-five measures and approximately three minutes

Analysis of Song

“Here, Bullet”, despite its title, does not begin with an expected explosiveness from a gunshot. In the beginning, the speaker invokes the bullet with the text “Here, Bullet,” an addition to the original poem. The opening chord and vocal line elaborate upon an E flat Minor Ninth chord, despite the G natural in the left hand; this chord is rolled up from the bottom and presents a blues-like sound and mysterious atmosphere. By leaning on the more worshipful sound scape along with Erickson’s *quasi-recitative* marking, the song subverts the title and sets the stage for the rest of the cycle by providing a blank canvas for what the speaker desires.⁸⁷

Measure five uses the text “the aorta’s opened valves, the leap thought makes at the synaptic gap” and musically paints the “leap” with the largest interval and highest note in the piece so far, a perfect fifth to an E₄.⁸⁸ Erickson speaks about his style of word painting saying, “I can be very Schubert-like in my approach to setting texts in that I’m continually looking for that one word or phrase that can really bring meaning to the setting, amplify it to bring out different layers of meaning.”⁸⁹ The painting of “leap” echoes that idea along with its preparation and conclusion. By using the phrase before

87 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 3.

88 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 4.

89 Erickson, E-mail interview.

as a practice leap and then remarking on the “gap” after the leap, as a quasi-coda for the word painting, the whole gesture exemplifies this conceptualization. The half step movement from the E flat to the E natural musically notates the loft and suspension of height in the leap. The added *forte* dynamic marking reinforces the high point of the line; and along with the preceding *crescendo* and following *decrescendo*, the full phrase is shown, and the large leap over “synaptic gap” is experienced.⁹⁰

Example 4.1. Word painting of phrase and “leap” in “Here, Bullet” mm. 5-6⁹¹

5

the a - or - ta's o - pened valves, the leap

6

thought makes at the syn - ap - tic gap.

⁹⁰ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 4.

⁹¹ Ibid.

The opening concludes in measure seven using a tied pair of half notes on the word “crave” to connect with a contrasting middle.⁹² The piano comes alive with an *ostinato* and two markings evoke the “adrenaline rush” experienced: “with expressive flexibility” above the vocal line and “*barely contained excitement*” in the piano.⁹³ These markings provide the atmosphere by exemplifying the building energy in the text. The vocal line comes in with different parts of the poetry as it rises in pitch. Unlike the *ostinato*, the vocal phrases are separated by rests and often begin on an upbeat that keeps the listener guessing for entrances while also facilitating the character and tone by providing a sense of breathlessness in the excitement. These swells give each thought its own need to burst through the piano texture. The *ostinato* represents the racing heartbeat and an energy deeply suited for the piece as it seemingly craves the bullet with lust.

Example 4.2. Markings, *ostinato*, and gesture in “Here, Bullet” mm. 8⁹⁴

8

with expressive flexibility

mp

that in - ex - or - a - ble flight,

p barely contained excitement

with a small amount of Pedal, but keep it clean

92 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 4.

93 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 5.

94 Ibid.

Midway through the song at measure sixteen, the marking “Biting” is over the vocal line as it reaches the lowest pitch of the piece so far, B₂.⁹⁵ It seemingly runs contrary to a typical lower pitch’s desired timbre and color, though the text “hissing through the air, here is where I moan” does lend itself to a sharper and more abrasive timbre leading into a coloring for “moan” that evokes a deep and colorful sentiment.⁹⁶ This color change in the voice can effectively paint both aspects of the thrill and release from firing a bullet. The word “moan” in measure eighteen is set with *tacet* in the piano to provide a slowing of time and suspension of the moment that is a brief respite from the rush and energy in the piano.

More word painting comes with the words “explosives” and “deeper.” “Explosives” arcs in the vocal line to move an octave from F#₃ to F#₄ and then back down to A#₃ (See Example 4.3.). The dotted rhythm and intervals leading up to the high note allow it to have more explosion and finish. As the highest written note in the piece, the color is also reflected within the vowel and the intensity of the sound along with the word choice. The painting on “deeper” involves an optional G₄, from a written E₄, setting up the largest downward interval of the piece: a minor ninth. In this particular case, the optional note creates even greater word painting. Even if the optional note is not taken, the E₄ can still effectively show a great depth of plunge with increasing intensity and perhaps a *crescendo* (See Example 4.4.).

95 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 7.

96 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 7-8.

Example 4.3. "Explosives" in "Here, Bullet" mm. 20-21⁹⁷

21

plo - - - - - sives

20

trig-ger - ing my tongue's ex -

p

(b)

97 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 8-9.

Example 4.4. “Deeper” with optional note in “Here, Bullet” mm. 25-26⁹⁸

The image displays a musical score for two measures, 25 and 26. Measure 25 features a vocal line in bass clef with a 6/4 time signature. The lyrics are "each twist of the round spun". The piano accompaniment consists of a continuous eighth-note ostinato in both hands, marked *mp*. Measure 26 continues the vocal line with the lyrics "deep - - - er, _____ be - cause". The piano accompaniment continues with the same ostinato. The time signature changes to 5/4 at the end of measure 26.

The middle of the song’s *ostinato* ends with the piano *tacet*, but unlike the end of the opening, the vocal line is stretched through its rhythm and the possibility to be sung an octave lower. This choice is made by the singer in regard to their range and comfort, but if the optional lower octave is taken, it evokes a strong sense of finality to the phrase and the body of the song. This choice follows well with the text “here is where the world ends, ev’ry time” and evokes an ominous tone (See Example 4.5.). Every time the piano

⁹⁸ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 10.

tacets, the world of the speaker pauses, and a cathartic sensation in the vocal line arises due to its immediacy and naked exposure.

Example 4.5. Transition with optional octave in “Here, Bullet” mm. 29⁹⁹

29 may be sung one octave lower

ev - - - 'ry' time.

A type of coda begins with the note “mm. 30-34: structured improvisation; sing the motives in the boxes rhythmically independent of the piano; may be sung at pitch or one octave lower; may be repeated and/or sung out of order.”¹⁰⁰ This note along with the marking “*with a mixture of defiance, resignation, and like a moan*” is reminiscent of the opening of the piece but with a more frenzied attribute (See Example 4.6.).¹⁰¹ The continued almost chant-like repetitions with adjustments sound like an invocation of the bullet and war. This particular invocation finds its mark in “Eulogy.” The improvisation and the coda itself act as a dynamic and emotional *messa di voce* with intensity and pace rising and falling dependent on the singer. The final note is marked as “*mostly breath, fading to nothing,*” and the written piano notes physically begin to fade on the

⁹⁹ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 12.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

score to show a dissolve to nothingness and the bullet's lasting place (See Example 4.7.).

Example 4.6. Note and structured improvisation in “Here, Bullet” mm. 30¹⁰²

mm. 30–34: structured improvisation; sing the motives in the boxes rhythmically independent of the piano; may be sung at pitch or one octave lower; may be repeated and/or sung out of order
with a mixture of defiance, resignation, and like a moan

30

Here, Bul - let

Here, Bul - let

molto cresc.

Example 4.7. Ending and fade to nothing in “Here, Bullet” mm. 35¹⁰³

35 *pp* mostly breath, fading to nothing

*
Here,

softer and slower until the notes become imperceptible

102 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 12.

103 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 13.

Performance Suggestions

“Here, Bullet” is the most difficult piece in the set. The optional high notes and the rise and fall of intensity create high drama that the singer must reflect in articulation, tone, and intent. Within the opening *quasi-recitative*, the singer should endeavor to produce the invocation-like quality of the tone and lust within the language. The use of a richer spectrum of tone in terms of a darker timbre, more sharp and crisp diction, and an emphasis on key words allow for an engaging opening.

Beyond the color, the word painting on “leap” can be difficult for the baritone singer because of the multiple resonance tracking events leaped through and the lingering in the *secondo passaggio*. While there are typical vowel modification choices for this area, the singer should prepare the initial leap to focus on how to adjust the vowel. As the E₄ is held, a modification toward an [i], like the word “lip,” from the [ɪ], like the word “leap,” would possibly provide a sense of height and lift to the word painting. The diction in this *quasi-recitative*, and really throughout the entire piece, needs to be precise due to a preponderance of words not frequently used in colloquial speech like “gristle” and “inexorable.”

For the more energetic body of the song, the singer needs to plan the beginning, middle, climax, and end of each phrase. An additional difficulty is the continuing rise in pitch, *tessitura*, and the multiple high notes that act as a peak for each phrase. The singer should plan accordingly within their own technique on how they will traverse each move into and through their *passaggi*. Of note are the low notes starting on measure sixteen. The marking “Biting” implies a certain harsher and more grating timbre, and the

singer should allow for a more evenly energized set of harmonics to allow the sound to achieve a “brassier” quality.¹⁰⁴ The other high pitches in the piece are prompted in ways that help ease their production. The word “explosives” uses the [oʊ] effectively as a pass through the *passaggio*. This vowel has passive modification and “turn” effects, and dependent on the singer, it can possibly be maintained or slightly shaded toward [ɔ] for effect and ease. The optional G₄ is led into with a *passaggio* E₄ and preferably a “turned” vowel. To make the optional note easier, the singer can use a *portamento* or passive vowel modification with a similar vocal tract shape to connect the pitches.

The coda is a structured improvisation that requires the most variety of vocal colors and tone production. Because of the marking “*with a mixture of defiance, resignation, and like a moan,*” the singer must choose how to designate and differentiate each emotion and action between utterances of the text.¹⁰⁵ Multiple repetitions of each figure can be sung, and additionally, the figures can be placed in any order and emotional context. If the singer has a low extension, a variety of pitches at or an octave below can be used for effective invocation. Because of this freedom, the singer and pianist should plan a strategy that allows for a naturalistic rise and fall in the totality of the line so one ends only slightly after the other. A mixture of “brassy,” “*cupo,*” and moan-like sounds can be produced with different emotional contexts until the final breathy “Here” is sung or spoken as the necessary goal of the bullet.

104 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 7.

105 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 12.

“Eulogy”

Summarization of Characteristics¹⁰⁶

- **Range:** C₃ to E₄
- **Tessitura:** Middle to Upper Middle Voice
- **Vocal Line:** The vocal line is fairly simple with mostly stepwise motion and small intervals covered in each phrase. *Legato* is important for the continuity of the vocal line and phrasing. One long ascending phrase at the end of the piece leads into the *secondo passaggio* for most baritones and provides the hardest technical moment.
- **Metric Organization:** Cut time for the opening; 3/8, 5/4, 6/4, 4/4 meters for the middle; 3/4, 4/4, 3/2, cut time meters and an unmeasured ending for the closing
- **Rhythm:** The rhythms are composed of sixteenth, eighth, quarter, half, and whole notes with dotted, tied, and syncopated rhythms interspersed along with triplets and a single septuplet.
- **Expression and Tempo Markings:** Flowing, but with rhythmic push and pull; with lots of Pedal; *smoother and flowing*; rit.; a tempo; *hazy, shrouded in mystery; ironically dreamlike*; accel.; Anxious and Driving ([Quarter note] = 90); without pedal; *gently*; with Pedal; *gentle and sustained; fast and excited*; molto rit.; a tempo; *building steadily, getting more and more intense; complete and total catharsis*

106 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 14-27.

- **Accompaniment:** The piano is in constant motion with mostly eighth note *arpeggios* making up the opening. The middle is more articulated and chordal with accent markings on the beat and strong syncopations. The closing involves chords with some reinforcement, syncopated repeated notes, and longer *arpeggios*.
- **Pianistic Needs:** Information provided by Liliia Oliinyk:

The second piece also relies heavily on the repetition of patterns, but the rhythmic patterns here vary from diatonic arpeggiations in both hands to accented chordal clusters to almost guitar-like chordal strokes with a syncopated bass line; hand flexibility and a shift from one type of finger attack to another is a must in this piece.¹⁰⁷
- **Level of Difficulty:** Less than moderate. “Eulogy” does not have the large leaps of the first piece, “Here, Bullet.” Each phrase stays in a fairly limited *tessitura* overall, and none of the rhythms or harmonies provide much difficulty in the shifts. The range is also limited and sustains mostly in the middle voice. One note of difficulty occurs during the end of the piece with a long, mostly chromatic ascent to the climax and highest note of the piece.
- **Length:** One hundred and seventeen measures and approximately four minutes

107 Oliinyk, E-mail interview.

Analysis of Song

“Eulogy” begins in stark contrast to the end of “Here, Bullet.” The opening of the piece presents an immediate interplay of tonality between D flat Major and e minor which keeps the listener on alert because something is amiss with the natural order. An unmetered opening measure presents the duality of the clashing key areas through steady, running eighth note chords that quickly alternate between each tonality. Erickson represents a primary struggle between D flat Major denoting nature and e minor denoting Private Miller’s suicide, with e minor being more justified after the act is committed in the piece.

The piano’s arpeggiated chords act as a representation of the Tigris river and create an overall sense of continuous, unending motion. A smooth ebb and flow between harmonic switches, with *crescendos* and *decrescendos* littering the piano part, is noted by Erickson with the marking *smoother and flowing*.¹⁰⁸ The pianist is given more leeway with tempo-quickenning *rubato* during the *crescendos* and tempo-slowng *rubato* during the *decrescendos*, typically in the transition between tonalities.

Within the beginning of the song, the vocal line does not move out of the middle voice and lends itself well to the storytelling and the calm that is taking place in the prison. A bit of word painting happens with the vocal line on “Tigris” with quarter note triplets over the piano’s continuous, arpeggiated eighth notes forming a *hemiola*; this moment allows the vocal line to lead and come out from the texture indicating the move inside the prison and away from nature. Additionally, the use of the harmonies and notes from the D flat Major diatonic series, through the voice’s word painting of “Tigris”

¹⁰⁸ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 15.

until the late offbeat shift to a D natural at the end of “River,” complete the line’s movement into e minor. This indication reaffirms the natural element of the Tigris River and foreshadows the eventual abrupt interruption with the suicide of Private Miller.

Example 4.8. *Hemiola* in the vocal line against the piano in “Eulogy” mm. 17-19¹⁰⁹

The image shows a musical score for three measures (17-19). The top staff is the vocal line in bass clef, with a key signature of one flat and a 3/4 time signature. It features a hemiola pattern with triplets and a 'rit.' marking. The lyrics are 'Ti - - - - gris Ri - ver.' The piano accompaniment is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one flat and a 3/4 time signature. It includes various rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings.

At measure twenty, the poem moves into the prison and makes reference to the prisoners of war. Erickson repeats the word prisoners at different pitches inferring their annoyance to the soldiers, and the repetition gives way to mockery of their custom. The marking “*hazy, shrouded in mystery*” changes the piano line to more block chords in the right hand and a quicker change between harmonies.¹¹⁰ As the speaker describes the prisoners’ actions, the marking “*ironically dreamlike*” is indicated in the piano along with a change in rhythm of the right hand to dotted eighth notes above the left hand of continuous eighth notes.¹¹¹ This offset rhythm between the hands creates a chase-like

¹⁰⁹ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 16.

¹¹⁰ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 17.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

effect aurally and eventually sets up the quickening of rhythm and tempo to the gunshot. The poetry and musical sentiment are at odds in describing the prisoners especially in the line “though burlap sacks and duct tape blind them,” with the poetry harshly describing the state of the prisoners and the vocal line continuing to flow with *legato*.¹¹²

At measure thirty-two, an *accelerando* is initiated in the piano with thirty-second notes in the right hand and sixteenth note sextuplets in the left hand. This transition shifts to the moment of the gunshot, and the flow of the river and nature in the piano gives way to an extremely percussive striking of block chords on and off the beat. *Sforzandos* and accents litter the piano part, and the sudden change between a quarter note driven meter and a 3/8 meter creates even more agitation. The vocal line is more declamatory and provides the fluid narration during the ensuing chaos. The switch to “Anxious and driving” is reinforced with the percussive accompaniment as well as the repetition of “the sound” in the vocal line (See Example 4.9.).¹¹³ Marking each note with a *tenuto* is different than the strike of an accent marking, and this musical gesture emphasizes the text and the importance of each repetition in the realization that a gunshot has rung throughout the area.

112 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 17.

113 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 18.

Example 4.9. Percussive piano, meter, and *tenutos* in “Eulogy” mm. 33-35¹¹⁴

Anxious and driving (♩. = 90)

33

The sound, the sound, the

sfz

without Pedal

After the sound has been described in the poetry, the full realization that Private Miller has committed suicide permeates the atmosphere. Erickson gives Private Miller a *leitmotif*, meaning recurring melodic and harmonic material, that evokes “a kind of bastardized version of a Bach chorale” (See Example 4.10.).¹¹⁵ His use of the chorale was to provide “honor and respect to the chaos of the situation,” which was in reaction to Turner, who in public interviews stated that the suicide was not properly honored in the listing of the dead when he returned from active duty.¹¹⁶ The bastardized harmonic motion sets itself apart and makes this moment the most important of the piece because of its acknowledgment of the event. The breaking of the usual and normal cycling of nature was not because of the prisoners, but because of the invading foreign power and what war drove someone to do.

¹¹⁴ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 18.

¹¹⁵ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 14.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Example 4.10. Private Miller's *leitmotif* in "Eulogy" mm. 51-56¹¹⁷

51 *mf*
 sun, when Pri - vate Mil - ler

54 *f*
 pulls the trig - ger, when Pri - vate Mil - ler

8

With the realization that Private Miller committed suicide with a gunshot in his mouth, the piano quickens in tempo to a held whole note. The song shifts to the aftermath of the gunshot as a moment frozen in time. Nature has been disrupted with birds flying off the water, a mongoose noticing, and “for this moment the earth is stilled.”¹¹⁸ The piano repeats elaborated chords in the right hand with a dotted rhythm in the left for a sense of misalignment and a stagnation of time. The vocal line maintains a similar *tessitura* and uses longer note values to continue this elongation of the moment. A sense of calm is expressed in the color until the *leitmotif* is repeated.

The poem shifts its verb tense into the past perfect and Private Miller’s “hush” is elaborated with a repetition of “down in the eucalyptus shade, there by the river” (See

¹¹⁷ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 20-21.

¹¹⁸ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 25.

Example 4.11.).¹¹⁹ The vocal line begins a slow, mostly chromatic climb to the climax and release of Private Miller’s action along with a syncopated internal rhythm in the piano. This part of the closing of the song is marked with “*building steadily, getting more and more intense*” and moves from an F#₃ to an E₄.¹²⁰ The building energy and the rising pitch into the *secondo passaggio* of the baritone creates the needed tension and release to express the moment of suicide. Upon climaxing on the E₄, “*complete and total catharsis*” is noted in the piano, and it provides an unmetred postlude that returns to the arpeggiation at the beginning of the piece and the flow of nature returning after the suicide (See Example 4.12.).¹²¹ The song ends where it began, and nature and time continue to flow despite the catastrophic event.

Example 4.11. Beginning of the chromatic build in “Eulogy” mm. 104-105¹²²

104 *p* *building steadily, getting more and more intense*

down in the eu - ca - lyp - tus shade, there by the ri - ver,

119 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 25-26.

120 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 25.

121 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 26.

122 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 25.

Example 4.12. Climatic ending for the vocal line in “Eulogy” mm. 108-112¹²³

The image shows a musical score for the climatic ending of the vocal line in "Eulogy" (mm. 108-112). It consists of two systems. The first system (mm. 108-110) features a vocal line in bass clef with lyrics: "there by the ri - ver, there by the ri - - - -". The piano accompaniment is in bass clef, with a right-hand part in treble clef. The second system (mm. 111-112) shows the vocal line continuing with "ver. _____". The piano accompaniment includes a right-hand part in treble clef with a dynamic marking of *f* and the instruction "*f* complete and total catharsis". The left-hand part of the piano accompaniment is in bass clef. The score concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

Performance Suggestions

“Eulogy” generally stays within the middle voice of the baritone. Because of the lack of extended range, the piece can seem very easy to produce. One of the major struggles technically is with the elongation of the rhythms and some of the text. Consonants must have more energy and length to mirror the longer rhythmic structure, but they must not pop out of the texture because of the more straight-forward retelling aspects in the poetry. Thick and wide vibrato is not recommended for the opening.

¹²³ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 26.

When the piece shifts to the gunshot, a more declamatory tone color and articulation must occur. The piano texture is far more percussive, and the voice has to be easily understood within all the chaos. Sharper consonants and the use of a more resonant sound quality enhance the clarity and power. When the shift occurs in measure sixty-seven, the vocal line must change color to match the frozen moment in time. A return to the sentiment of the beginning and use of some or approximations of straight tone can allow the listener to be drawn into the stillness that has occurred.

The most difficult moment for the singer occurs at the end of the song with the mostly chromatic rising in pitch for the climax. Allowing the voice to find its center and yet emotionally maintain the mounting pressure for release will help gather the necessary textual agitation in the tone until the release on the E₄. Vowel modifications are necessary for the last few measures and should be used for resonance tracking and consistency of timbre. The technical choice for the baritone moving through D₄ to E₄ by half step is personally and artistically dependent on the individual singer. The only stipulation is that the E₄ must be the climax in articulation, volume, and intensity.

“A Soldier’s Arabic”

Summarization of Characteristics¹²⁴

- **Range:** D flat₃ to F₄
- **Tessitura:** Lower Middle to Middle Voice
- **Vocal Line:** The vocal line is very simple and flows with the 6/8 swung meter. It has the lowest non-optional *tessitura* of the whole cycle. The

124 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 28-37.

ending of the piece is a spoken recitation of the poem which requires use of resonant voice techniques to be clear and audible over the piano.

- **Metric Organization:** 6/8 and 9/8 meters and an unmeasured ending.
- **Rhythm:** The rhythms are composed of sixteenth, eighth, quarter, and half notes with dotted, tied, and syncopated rhythms interspersed along with triplets. Within the piece, there are many dotted rhythms pairing a duple versus a triple between the piano and vocal line.
- **Expression and Tempo Markings:** A gentle swing [Dotted quarter note] = 55; spoken *sotto voce*; *shimmering*; free and with rubato; a tempo; *murmuring*; slight pulse on l.h. notes throughout; *molto, molto cresc.*; spoken as narration; *attacca*
- **Accompaniment:** The piano is mostly chordal with rocking shifts swung between beats at the beginning. Some *ostinato* chordal patterns pit generally eighth note bass lines against sixteenth note septuplets and triplets. The unmeasured recitation involves a moving *ostinato* with an eighth note bass line changing harmony every measure until a triplet flourish up to the ending of the piece.
- **Pianistic Needs:** Information provided by Liliia Oliinyk:

The third piece's main challenge is shifting seamlessly between changing meters and unifying polyrhythmic patterns (the left hand's even triplets against septuplets in the right hand, for example); opposed to the previous two pieces, it also explores the widest range of the piano; creating an uninterrupted wash of sound in the right hand passagework while also providing a rhythmic 'heartbeat' can be challenging, especially taking into account the harmonic

language of the composer, which doesn't necessarily fit in the functional tonality realm.¹²⁵

- **Level of Difficulty:** Easy. "A Soldier's Arabic" has a low *tessitura* and a limited range. The rhythms are straight-forward and the harmonies follow closely with the vocal line. The main difficulty comes with the spoken *sotto voce* text inside of the sung line and the final spoken recitation of the poem in full to finish the piece. With spoken lines of poetry, the singer will need to employ some form of resonant voice to be heard clearly over the percussive piano part.
- **Length:** Sixty-six measures and approximately three and a half minutes

Analysis of Song

"A Soldier's Arabic" is the third piece in the cycle, and unlike the former two pieces, it does not directly refer to the violence and trauma of war. The title itself is less direct than any of the other poems chosen. Despite being written by an American, the poem has a ubiquitous tone that infers and directly embraces the differences of society between foreign entities.

The song begins with a piano prelude of block chords and rocking pick-up beats. The 6/8 meter and the downbeat emphasis lend the piece a dance-like quality, while the dissonance of the B natural in the left hand and the B flat in the right hand indicate an unease and misunderstanding between the two sides of war. The familiar "l.v." (from the French *laisser vibrer* meaning let vibrate) is seen in the piano as the vocal line takes over and the piano stops playing. Erickson uses "l.v." throughout the cycle to give way

¹²⁵ Oliinyk, E-mail interview.

to the voice in areas where he wants the vocal texture to be definitively in the forefront. The vocal line immediately plays with the dissonance of the first measure and rocks between the B natural and B flat before finishing with a “spoken *sotto voce*” on the Arabic word *habib*, meaning love. The song continues and shows its subtle jazz influence through the use of different palettes of tone and chromaticism. The rocking in the piano continues as the voice describes the differences of war and the conundrum presented by two opposing sides “starting where we would end it and ending where we might begin.”¹²⁶ This line affirms the concept of different beginnings and endings with war depending on the side.

Example 4.13. B natural/B flat, Arabic, and rocking piano in “A Soldier’s Arabic”
mm. 6-8¹²⁷

The musical score for measures 6-8 of "A Soldier's Arabic" is presented in 3/8 time. The vocal line begins with a "spoken *sotto voce*" instruction. The lyrics are: "word for love, *ha-bib*, is writ-ten from right to left,". The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line in the left hand and a syncopated right hand with a rhythmic structure of eighth and sixteenth notes.

As the song progresses, the piano changes into a steadier walking bass line with a syncopated right hand rhythmic structure. The new sentiment is made clearer through a repeated musical figure on the line “or as an echo of history” and its subtle variation on “recited again.”¹²⁸ Playing with the dissonant opening, the figures both lead to a B

¹²⁶ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 29-30.

¹²⁷ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 29.

¹²⁸ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 31.

flat₃ but through a G flat₃ initially and a G natural₃ in the repetition. This echo, with its slight change, presents the duality of thought in one subtle gesture.

Example 4.14. Echoed with subtle change in “A Soldier’s Arabic” mm. 25-31¹²⁹

25

ning, — or as an e-cho of his-to-ry, re-ci-ted a-

29

gain.

mf

p shimmering

Transitioning into the second thought in measure thirty-one, the piano begins a climb into a new texture of septuplets in the right hand and eighth notes in the left hand. The atmosphere becomes more magical and mystical, and the vocal line’s more *legato* melody soars over it. The word for love, *habib*, was uttered first, and now the word for death, *maut*, is marked in a similar fashion. Where love is represented in a duality of

¹²⁹ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 31.

understanding, death is represented through mystery and the unknown. Word painting of the rush of the wind occurs in the piano with a quickening right hand from two septuplets to a single fifteen-tuplet that elaborates the line “and you will hear the cursives of the wind.”¹³⁰

Example 4.15. Word painting in the piano in “A Soldier’s Arabic” mm. 35-37¹³¹

The image shows a musical score for three measures (35-37). The top staff is the vocal line in bass clef, with lyrics: "hear the cursives of the wind". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. The right hand (treble clef) features a series of septuplets (marked with a '7' and a bracket) in measures 35 and 36, followed by a single fifteen-tuplet (marked with a '15' and a bracket) in measure 37. The left hand (bass clef) plays a walking bass line with triplet figures. A dashed line with an '(8)' above it spans across the piano part, likely indicating a specific rhythmic or melodic pattern.

Measure forty-three begins the piano transition with further painting of the wind through a flowing right hand of continuous sixteenth notes. Different techniques between the vocal line and the piano, like polyrhythm, are employed in the subsequent measures. While the piano has a walking bass line with triplet figures in the right hand, the vocal line switches between a triple and duple rhythmic pattern to create both a lining up and subtle misalignment for the parts. This polyrhythmic method brings out the vocal line and also represents the dichotomy of thought in regard to war and what it will bring through its bloodshed. The piano symbolizes a continuous conflict and the vocal line symbolizes a calming force.

¹³⁰ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 32.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Example 4.16. Polyrhythm and tone in “A Soldier’s Arabic” mm. 45-48¹³²

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system (mm. 45-46) features a vocal line in bass clef with lyrics "This is a" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part has a right hand with a triplet of eighth notes (marked with a '3' and a '(h)') and a left hand with a steady eighth-note pulse (marked "slight pulse on l.h. notes throughout"). The second system (mm. 47-48) continues the vocal line with lyrics "lan - guage made of blood." and the piano accompaniment. The piano part maintains the same rhythmic patterns. Dynamics include *mf* for the vocal line and *mp* for the piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "a tempo".

Ending the sung portion is a repeat of the text “it must be earned” which initially followed “To be spoken.”¹³³ The rhythm in the repetition is elongated for emphasis and leads into an unmetred, spoken recitation of the poem in full. Erickson said,

132 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 33.

133 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 34-35.

As a composer I love the special kind of urgency created when spoken text floats over music, so I was happy to comply. Reciting the text in its entirety as a kind of coda pays homage to the rich tradition of poetic recitation, and is a fitting end to this wonderfully ambiguous poem.¹³⁴

The recitation is marked with “spoken as narration,” and it occurs over arpeggiated chords in the right hand with a steadily moving bass in the left hand.¹³⁵ While each line is marked with *verse*, *rubato* is necessary due to the unmetered quality in the piano to accommodate different speeds of reading and spoken interpretation. Much like the structured improvisation in “Here, Bullet,” the singer is given full control of their interpretation and quality of spoken voice to show their own artistic and emotional concepts of the poem. The song ends with a rising piano line postlude and an *attacca* leading directly into “Curfew.”¹³⁶

Example 4.17. Recitation in “A Soldier’s Arabic” mm. 65¹³⁷

65

This is a language made of blood. It is made of sand, and time. To be spoken, it must be earned.

134 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 28.

135 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 36.

136 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 37.

137 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 36.

Performance Suggestions

“A Soldier’s Arabic” provides unique challenges to the singer. Staying almost exclusively in the middle of a baritone’s voice, the song’s requirements become more reliant on intention and color to express specific musical and artistic choices, rather than vocal stamina or advanced techniques. Within the first part of the piece, the dance-like movement should be accompanied with a smoother and almost jazzier tone color to play into the harmonies. Each utterance of the Arabic text must be done with specific intention to provide the palette of colors needed for differentiation and habilitation of its depth of importance. *Habib* should be spoken as the purest feeling of love, and *maut* should be spoken as the unknown mystery that comes with death and the afterlife. A strong *legato* line is paramount in the piece, and the voice should always sit above the piano texture to balance the different rhythmic lines and show the distinct interpretations of each word.

When the piece shifts to the mysterious death imagery, the voice should echo that transformation and match the piano by almost sinking into parts of the piano line to instill more depth to the message. Starting in measure forty-five, a newfound strength and determination is roused to color the text and lead into the spoken recitation.

The recitation should use resonant voice strategies and be thought as its own specific interpretation of the poem. The voice should be entirely present and every line should have weight and importance. A steady pace should also accompany the recitation to maintain the piece’s flow and reinforce that the recitation is a coda and a response to the pleading of the final line of text, “To be spoken, it must be earned.”¹³⁸

138 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 37.

“Curfew”

Summarization of Characteristics¹³⁹

- **Range:** C flat₃ to F₄
- **Tessitura:** Lower Middle to Middle Upper Voice
- **Vocal Line:** The piece does not have an extended range for the most part and also has a very slow tempo. The vocal line has to maintain longer phrases and more *legato* between the notes for cohesive thoughts to be evident. There are some word painted *coloratura* passages in the song as well as piano *tacet* sections leaving the voice completely exposed.
Tessitura is not an issue because of the limited range and the consistency of pitches.
- **Metric Organization:** 4/4, 7/4, 6/4, 5/4, 3/4, 8/4, 2/4 meters; begins with one unmeasured measure
- **Rhythm:** The rhythm includes eighth, sixteenth, quarter, and half notes with dotted, tied, and syncopated rhythms interspersed along with triplets. At the end, the boxed figures' rhythm and tempo are improvised within a metered measure.
- **Expression and Tempo Markings:** Spacious and Free [Quarter note] = 55; with Pedal – rich, deep, and sustained throughout; *when r.h. has loud grace notes, always play l.h. notes as softly as possible; *more animated*;

139 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 38-45.

make an obvious portamento; a tempo; l.v.; ad lib timing of figures in boxes; *L O V E; M I L L E R*

- **Accompaniment:** The piano is slow and full of grace notes leading into chordal figures representing far off possible war. There is often a doubling of the vocal line, though many sections are *tacet* to give the voice space to be slightly freer. Other than some *sforzando* figures, the piano is almost muted in dynamic and tone. For the final musical ciphers, the piano should express the grace notes with much more delicacy and reverence to articulate the ending of the day and the sunset of the final chord.
- **Pianistic Needs:** Information provided by Liliia Oliinyk:

The last piece of the set is the most unified in its choice of pattern and figuration – it’s predominantly homophonic and chordal with bell-like accents connecting different sections throughout the piece. The main difficulty for the pianist here is grasping the harmonic language (reminiscent of impressionism) and creating the necessary ‘sound world’ without making phrases disjointed.¹⁴⁰
- **Level of Difficulty:** Moderate. “Curfew” has particular challenges for the singer that are unique in comparison to the rest of the cycle. A few extended instances of word painting and much longer phrases pervade the song. Along with those moments, the color and the timbre should echo the slightly muted nature in the piano and have a more restful tone. Since the range is limited, it allows for more colors within the scope of the middle of the baritone voice and more potential articulatory gestures.
- **Length:** Fifty-six measures and approximately five minutes

¹⁴⁰ Oliinyk, E-mail interview.

Analysis of Song

“Curfew” begins right after “A Soldier’s Arabic” with no break. As the final song in the cycle, it carries the burden of completing thoughts and providing closure to the soldier’s experience in war. Throughout the piece, there are instances of recollection and reference to the other pieces, but overall “Curfew” can stand alone. Erickson said,

The mood I created in my setting has a marked sense of timelessness using static harmonies, an exaggeratedly slow tempo, deep and rich harmonies, and subtle color shifts that underscore the feeling of ease at dusk. We hear ease to match the scene, but violence and trauma are never far off, referenced by unexpected stabbing rhythmic gestures in the highest registers in the piano. The lyric and the languid are adjacent to the dissonant and the discordant – in art as in life.¹⁴¹

The marking “Spacious and Free [Quarter note] = 55” is given, and the direct tempo marking sets up the tone and a distinct measuring that is much slower when compared to the end of “A Soldier’s Arabic.”¹⁴² The slow tempo and block chords of the piano evoke dusk and the calming of the day. The grace note figure with a *sforzando* marking dots the piano throughout the beginning of the piece and act as the sounds of war in the distance (See Example 4.18.). The familiar B flat and B natural pairing starts in the *sforzando* grace note figure, and this subtle callback to the beginning of “A Soldier’s Arabic” maintains the concept of constant struggle in the war zone. Though war is not completely muted and far off, dusk does not stop, and the natural flow of time and nature’s own order continue to calm the day.

141 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 38.

142 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 39.

Example 4.18. Grace note figure, dissonance, and marking in “Curfew” mm. 1-2.¹⁴³

Spacious and Free ♩ = 55

with Pedal—rich, deep, and sustained throughout

The poetry begins, similarly to “Eulogy,” by setting a scene, but this time, it is for the end of the day. The language is fluid and many of the actions are painted by the vocal line. The poem continues the set’s theme of nature’s constant flow and how it would remain uninterrupted if war had not been a factor in the region. The word “glide” is used to describe the movement of water snakes in their pond and set with running sixteenth notes in a slithering back and forth gesture reinforcing the concept.

Example 4.19. Word painting the snake’s movement in “Curfew” mm. 7-8¹⁴⁴

glide _____ in _____ the pon-ding ba-sins

¹⁴³ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 39.

¹⁴⁴ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 40.

Each vocal phrase in the opening of the song is separated by small piano interludes that include the *sforzando* grace note figure and some *tacet* underpinnings to maintain the calm and yet slightly unsettled ending of the day. The word “moonlight” is given space to luxuriate with the piano *tacet*, and the elongation of the line on the “moon” portion of the word evokes its silvery beams. In measure sixteen, the piano finishes a flourish that can be related to the moon rising and then *tacets* for the next phrase that comments on the line “Today policemen sun bathed on traffic islands.”¹⁴⁵ This unique and interesting image runs contrary to the ideas of war and sets even the human element in the region at rest on this particular day. The vocal line also runs in contrast to much of the phrasing with a minor sixth interval up to an F₄ that, even if sung at the *mezzo piano* dynamic indicated, would bring out that particular part of the line. The jump gives alert to seeing the policemen, and the subsequent falling of pitch brings the line back to the calm of dusk.

Example 4.20. Vocal line interval and phrase in “Curfew” mm. 16-19¹⁴⁶

16

mp

To-day po - lice - men sun bathed on traf - fic is - lands

f *p*

¹⁴⁵ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 41.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

At measure thirty, the calm fully reaches the vocal line with the words “There were no bombs” intoned on C₄.¹⁴⁷ Like many other important moments in the set, Erickson *tacets* the piano and lets the voice express the sentiment in syncopation. Maintaining the same note throughout the phrase brings the message a stronger sense of magic and appreciation. The evidenced calm pervades into the subsequent piano line with block chords on each beat and the affirmation that there was a day of peace in this area of conflict. The text “no panic in the streets” is expressed through sixteenth notes indicating the excitement of a day with no large scale violence in the area.¹⁴⁸

The poem then pivots back to the suicide in “Eulogy” and uses “a direct reference to the musical motive we hear when Private Miller is introduced.”¹⁴⁹ The motive uses diatonic chords on every beat in the same bastardized chorale sentiment to sound like something “one might hear as part of a funeral service” (See Example 4.21.).¹⁵⁰ The text paints a grim and visceral picture of the recalled event and gently moves onto the natural order and calm of the day. The elongation of the figure and motive allow the entire thought and action to unfold in a more lucid way. The *tacet* piano under the beginning of the phrase along with the slow tempo provide a scene that stretches longer than most phrases and single thoughts in the entire set. We feel for the speaker and Sergeant Gutierrez in their loss.

147 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 42.

148 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 43.

149 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 38.

150 Ibid.

Example 4.21. Sgt. Gutierrez bastardized chorale in “Curfew” mm. 36-40¹⁵¹

36

Gu - ti - er - rez did - n't com - fort an in - jured man who

38

cupp ed pie - ces of his friend's brain in his hands; in - stead to - day in -

Following the reference to “Eulogy,” on a sustained F#₃, the text “instead today” is repeated and used as a reflection on the death of Private Miller.¹⁵² The repetition can also be interpreted in other emotional and contextual directions depending on the singer, but it ultimately leads back to nature and how “white birds rose from the Tigris”

¹⁵¹ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 43.

¹⁵² Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 43-44.

even without the startling of a gunshot.¹⁵³ This moment is another direct reference to “Eulogy” and the line within it that “the sound lifts the bird up off the water,” but in “Curfew,” the birds are choosing to fly themselves, and not due to the ringing, momentous event. “White birds rose from the Tigris” is repeated for emphasis and as a reiteration of the continuing movement of nature (See Example 4.22.).¹⁵⁴

The song ends with repetitions of the word “today” in a similarly structured improvisation to “Here, Bullet,” without the extra repeats and octave displacements. While the vocal line chooses the length and quality of tone, the piano is playing a musical cipher made out to spell LOVE and MILLER (See Example 3.3. on page 35). The chords in the piano are offset from the grace notes that help fill out the cipher. The LOVE cipher is a direct reference to “A Soldier’s Arabic” and the word *habib*, and the MILLER cipher continues the earlier “Eulogy” reference in the song. “Curfew” takes on a much more reverent sentiment and gives Private Miller a musical memorial. The ending of the piece has the vocal line lift another step, and the piano closes the piece with a quiet chord that lingers past the vocal line as if the speaker is quietly watching the sunset. Reverence for the bullet at the beginning of the cycle turns into love and remembrance for a life lost.

153 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 44.

154 Ibid.

Example 4.22. “White birds” and repetitions in “Curfew” mm. 41-46¹⁵⁵

41

stead to-day in - stead to-day white birds rose from the

44

Ti - gris. to - day, white birds rose from the Ti - gris.

Performance Suggestions

“Curfew” like “A Soldier’s Arabic” does not present much of a range or any significantly difficult technical issues vocally. The thrust of the piece is in the color and tone the voice can achieve to express the calm and recollection. A warm tone with plenty of light mechanical mixture can be used for great effect in the beginning of the song. The word painting requires the voice to imitate the idea of a snake gliding and the

155 Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 44.

moonlight shining down from the sky. Allowing the voice to slither between straight and more vibrant tones and finding a bright and silky color respectively will aid in these particular moments. The song also implies nothing forced or heavy in production or stamina. Further moments like the note in measure twenty-seven, “make an obvious portamento,” require specific actions to infer the picture for the audience without any help from the piano, unlike in “A Soldier’s Arabic”’s image of the wind.

Example 4.23. “An obvious *portamento*” in “Curfew” mm. 27-29¹⁵⁶

The musical score for Example 4.23 consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting at measure 27. It begins with a note marked with a flat and a sharp (B-flat) and is annotated with "make an obvious portamento" and "a tempo". The middle staff is the right hand of the piano accompaniment, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and an 8-measure rest. The bottom staff is the left hand of the piano accompaniment, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The piano accompaniment includes a piano (*pp*) dynamic and an 8-measure rest in the right hand.

Each moment of rest, repose, and peace need to have colors that evoke no form of agitation. The ending with the repeats of “today” must sonically hold many different moments of remembrance and memorial for Private Miller and the journey that the soldier has gone through. “Curfew” offers a hopeful and loving ending for the cycle which began with the bullet and ended with a quiet day.

¹⁵⁶ Erickson, *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*, 42.

CONCLUSION

Learning and studying this set of music gives credence to the necessity of new work and particularly art song creation. Kurt Erickson has created, through Brian Turner's poetry, a set of songs that vividly tells a compelling and riveting vision of the soldier's journey. Using unique techniques like structured improvisation, spoken recitation, and musical ciphers, Erickson adds to his prolific offerings and gives the baritone voice something truly magnificent. No baritone should find the set inaccessible from a vocal standpoint, and highlighting the middle voice creates an opportunity for many different colors, tone qualities, and interpretations by each individual. The pianist is also well served with many different integral musical motives, rhythmic articulations, and themes that allow the piece to truly shine.

In addition to his craftsmanship, Erickson has taken a great step forward for entrepreneurship in the commissioning of new works. The consortium has dozens of performances planned and has brought Erickson attention from NATS, *Classical Singer* magazine, and many other publications. This new possibility in collaboration can and should open many doors for artists struggling to find ways to disseminate their art and expand their profile.

While this written document and lecture recital presentation, the Louisiana Premiere, are as comprehensive as possible, many choices and features of the cycle cannot be fully fleshed out by one singer. I hope to perform the cycle numerous times and come back to it in the future to see how my own continued life experiences have changed and colored my interpretation. Further events involving a joint poster

presentation with Erickson and performance, as the 2020 NATS Art Song Composition Winner, at the 2020 NATS National Conference in Knoxville, TN will continue expanding the reach of this project and the *Here, Bullet* consortium story. These pieces have indelibly influenced my life and my academic and musical journey. I hope many baritones will sing and study this cycle and have the opportunity to experience pieces written by a living and accessibly communicative composer and poet.

APPENDIX A. TRANSCRIPT OF ELECTRONIC MAIL INTERVIEW WITH KURT ERICKSON

**Interview Questions for Composer Kurt Erickson regarding *Here, Bullet*
10/8/2019**

Can you give me your biography? I have used the one on your website, but are there any other specifics you'd like to bring out?

Written biographies can be a little one dimensional, so let me flesh mine out a bit.

It's probably impossible to underestimate the importance that both the piano and my love of literature have had on my life.

My piano studies began in earnest with a very old school German emigre pianist named Phillip Lorenz – a disciple of the great Claudio Arrau who boasted a teaching lineage that stretched back to Franz Liszt, Beethoven, and Haydn. Lessons with him (life lessons, really) were like stepping back in time to a 19th Century salon, where photos, paintings, and personal effects of master artists like John Cage, Jean Cocteau, and Morton Feldman were either hung up or strewn around his apartment.

I took in everything.

Beyond the technical tutelage on how to play the instrument, I developed the mindset that it really was possible to have a thriving, international career in the arts. To a young boy who grew up in what was essentially farm country to middle class parents, this was nothing short of a revelation.

Literature: being the son of an elementary school teacher has its advantages. I developed a great love for reading at an early age, spending hours combing through books the way younger generations are obsessed with phones and electronic gadgets.

Books became my world – both an escape and an exercise in creativity.

In college I took a completely impractical approach to course selection – I'd search the catalogue for all the literature and humanities classes that interested me and simply enrolled, even if they in no way led to my degree completion. I had an idea in my head that I needed to become a complete artist, so feeding my intellectual curiosity became my highest priority. The idea of taking courses to complete a degree was nowhere on my radar – I simply (naively) enrolled in courses I thought would make me a more complete artist.

As a college professor, I am aware how foreign this concept has become, where counsellors and professors are expected to help navigate a student through the degree

process as quickly as possible, paying little heed to whether the student is actually becoming educated in the process.

Lastly (and this isn't something I've ever shared publicly), I started writing poetry in my early 20's and I discovered that in finding my literary voice I was simultaneously developing and honing my composition voice. Both aspects of artistic creativity were cross pollinating with each other, and informing how the other progressed. It was fascinating to watch; as a miniature, I improvised on the piano shared traits with a short poem, and vice versa. I still to this day write poetry as an avocation – it opens me up if I'm feeling blocked musically and gets me into a kind of flow state.

What attracted you to the Here, Bullet poetry?

I've taken to heart Ezra Pound's dictum to "Make it new" – I'm just really not interested in using same old, same old approaches. As an art song composer, that means the idea of setting the same poet or the same texts seems a little lazy. I'm also very much aware that as a contemporary composer, I want to encourage and advocate for other contemporary artists. I'm a huge poetry and literature guy so looking for inspiration from contemporary poets and writers is a very natural outgrowth of my personality and mindset.

My wife first heard Brian Turner in an interview on NPR and was so swept up that she bought me his book as a gift. It sat on my dresser for about a year and when I finally went through the poetry it blew me away. The approach is certainly unique – a much lauded poet at the height of his powers writing about his first hand experiences in the Iraq War. But beyond the novelty, the poetry is strong, direct.

Writing about war and veteran's experiences are the sort of thing that needs to be written and talked about – as a society we tend to sweep unpleasantness and collective bad decisions under the rug. Turner's poetry is bold and forces us to confront the real world consequences of our political choices. It's tremendously powerful stuff, and there is a dearth of good and/or contemporary war poetry that has been set to music. Everyone knows Britten's inclusion of Winfred Owen's poetry in the War Requiem, and Walt Whitman settings are pretty ubiquitous. But those examples are some 100 years and older. We need new voices and new expressions to reflect the times in which we live.

Why did you only use four poems?

Four poems just felt right and for some unknown reason, I've always found myself attracted to pieces in sets of four (both my own and others). My *Four Andalusian Love Songs* was commissioned by the late great countertenor Brian Asawa – we performed it frequently together and a video of our performance is the last recorded documentation we have of this great artist who met his untimely passing in 2016.

It's entirely possible that this connection with Brian Asawa was still bubbling around my subconscious and resurfaced as an act of homage and an attempt to connect with a friend and colleague who greatly influenced me.

What inspired you to create this global consortium?

I've been fortunate to spend eleven years in multi-year composer residencies with different organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area, and I've always felt that artists should use the same level of focus and resources on their career as they do to perfecting their art. In my case, what started as commission requests from individual organizations soon evolved into requests from small commissioning consortiums. Taking the next step, why not really open it up and try out a completely new template for how a work could be commissioned and presented on a large scale? Removing the upfront commissioning fees lowers the bar to participation significantly for performers who might not otherwise budget for these expenses.

I think as composers we get used to asking the question "Why not?" and "Why not me?"

(note: text above submitted to *Classical Singer* for upcoming feature article)

NEW TEXT:

The traditional mode of commissioning is an inefficient process, yet few question or modify it. We spend countless hours writing, rewriting, studying, researching, seeking inspiration, honing, creating, editing a work – then cross our fingers for a wonderful performance by a sympathetic performer. When everything lines up and the performance of the composition is a moving experience, everyone involved says: "This work should be performed!", yet we've done absolutely nothing to secure additional performances and find ourselves at square one.

Instead of trying to convince performers after the fact, why not front load interest by incentivizing performers to jump on board at the beginning of the writing?!? This project is a thought experiment in action to find an answer to this question.

If you decided to do the consortium again, how would you improve upon it?

This is the first time I've created a consortium this large and to my knowledge, it is the first time any composer has attempted anything quite like this. It's all new territory and I don't have the proper perspective at present. I am very happy with the results so far.

What would suggest for other composers considering this consortium?

Be bold!! Get help from a team of supportive colleagues and publicity people who can provide a perspective outside of your own. Plan out as much as you can, then act. Be

open to new ideas while also acting on opportunities as they arise. Be exhaustive in your actions.

What are your compositional influences?

From an art song perspective, finding a poem or text that speaks to me on a deeply personal level makes all the difference in the world. When that deep connection is there, the music almost writes itself. Being a self-described poetry guy, I know what I like and even more importantly, I know what I can set to music almost instantly.

In terms of compositional influences from a musical standpoint, my tastes are fairly eclectic. Bach, Beethoven, and Chopin were the usual suspects of my formative musical education and have influenced me deeply. I just love the textures and harmonic language of the French Impressionists (Ravel especially). Benjamin Britten taught me (teaches me) that it is possible to effectively straddle the line between accessibility and complexity. I have a singular obsession with the French composer Albert Roussel and for the life of me can't understand why he isn't more popular. I love so much music from the time period around World War I – Prokofiev, Scriabin, Villa-Lobos, Poulenc, George Antheil, and Shostakovich are wonderful. I first embraced more contemporary composition via a love of minimalism (Ingram Marshall, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, John Adams) and the more experimentally minded west coast composers such as Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, Harry Partch, and John Cage. The sensibility of jazz has been a strong influence – I improvise my pieces and write in structured improvisations for performers in the same way that jazz musicians would be expected to improvise and create a piece in real time. The American expatriate Frederic Rzewski is an example of an artist with an absolute mastery of both traditional techniques as well as those found on the fringes of the avant-garde.

I reserve the right to use and be inspired by anything I come across, musical or otherwise.

*****What unique composition techniques did you use in each particular song?**

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED PROGRAM NOTES *beginning on page 85

For each poem set, what were the first impressions that led you to set them the way you did?

I can be very Schubert-like in my approach to setting texts in that I'm continually looking for that one word or phrase that can really bring meaning to the setting, amplify it to bring out different layers of meaning.

The poem “Here, Bullet” is replete with rich and viscerally evocative language. One of the lines that stood out for me is the phrase “Here is the adrenaline rush you crave” as the Narrator addresses the bullet.

How to capture this essence of both adrenaline and desire and put it into a musical form?!?

My setting starts with a brief recitative-like introduction as I imagined the Narrator alone and uncertain with his fear and isolation. The accompaniment is initially a series of rolled chords, then changes to a quick and skittish *ostinato* pattern that never really stops until the end of the piece.

The dark and ominous repeated 32nd notes low in the bass register take on the role of the adrenaline rush that I imagined the Narrator feeling when on patrol looking for snipers and in essence, serving as human bait for gunfire. I wanted to create a sense of the heart beating fast and a kind of foreboding darkness that all is not well, with tragedy right around every corner.

Why did you choose the baritone/lower male voice type?

I’ve had this perception that composers use the baritone voice as a kind of shorthand for the archetypal masculine character. The US military is a more inclusive place now, but I wanted to honor Brian Turner’s voice in the selection of the type of voice I chose.

On a more mundane practical level, I really didn’t have a lot of pieces for the baritone voice type and wanted to add some works for this wonderful instrument to my compositional oeuvre.

What was the process in securing the rights to the poems and the interaction with the poet?

The poet Brian Turner has been nothing but gracious and supportive throughout the entire process. The negotiation to secure the rights was simple and straight forward – turns out we have some mutual friends in the poetry world and he was happy to have me start work on the piece.

I confess I was nervous to send him the first video recording of the song *Here, Bullet!* Even though I was very pleased with how it came out (and flattered that so many musician friends recognized its value), that nagging doubt of “What if the poet doesn’t like it?!?” gnawed at my conscience.

Fortunately, Brian was incredibly sympathetic – sending me a long and glowing detailed response to my video, as well as sharing the video on his social media sites.

As of this writing (October 2019), Mr. Turner and I are planning a new collaboration based either on *Here*, *Bullet* or as an entirely new subject.

What makes art song an important genre for you over opera and other types of pieces?

Art song is an important genre for me because it overlaps with so many aspects of artistic expression that I value: poetry, solo voice writing, piano writing, drama in music. There is also an element of instant gratification as I can not only sing and play my works as part of the creative process, but I can also sight read works with my wife and other fellow singers. Feedback and testing things out are an indispensable part of what I do as a composer.

In terms of your compositional output, where do you believe you will go next?

Opera. I am completely, pathetically overdue for a new project.

And of course I will continue to write art songs because there are so many wonderful poets in the world who's poems deserve to be set to music – I welcome the challenge and have so much yet to write!!

PROGRAM NOTES

HERE, BULLET

“Here, Bullet” is radically innovative poetry – firsthand poetic descriptions of 21st Century warfare by an established poet at the height of his powers. I approached this work with great respect and trepidation, seeking ways to amplify the raw, visceral power of the poetic descriptions. The music starts tentatively, then the pace picks up at measure eight with an *ostinato* in the piano part mirroring the language in the poetry “Here is the adrenaline rush you crave”, crystalizing in a musical gesture the fear and crazed excitement which drives the piece to the very end. The descriptive beauty of the poetry is highly charged (“Here is bone and gristle and Flesh...here is the clavicle snapped wish...that insane puncture into heat and blood”). I sought a musical language steeped in expressive dissonance coupled with an angular vocal line to pair with the beauty and horror of the verses. There is a kind of musical arrival at the lines “... here is where the world ends every time”, which then leads directly to the final plaintive calling out for the Bullet in a mixture of horror, defiance, and even resignation. This is poetry unsparing in its intensity.

EULOGY

“Eulogy” might just be my favorite poem in Brian Turner’s collection. It’s deeply personal, and there are few topics more personal than suicide (especially when the

victim is a fellow soldier with the poet serving in Iraq). The poem starts with a description of a seemingly normal outdoor scene (“tower guards eating sandwiches...”) which soon hints at something darker – the tragedy of Private Miller taking his own life as the reactions of nature and wildlife unfold around him.

Nineteenth Century Romantic poets idealized Nature, so I paired this poetic scene with musical choices that one might find in a mid-century Romantic work by Chopin or Mendelssohn. The poem simultaneously presents two completely dichotomous scenes (Nature vs. Private Miller’s suicide) – in a similar manner I used two contrasting arpeggiated harmonies in Db Major and e minor as the musical basis for the setting.

As the centerpiece of the poem, Private Miller gets his own leitmotif – for this I used more rapidly changing, traditional harmonies in an attempt to call to mind a kind of bastardized version of a Bach chorale. I imagined the solemnity of a chorale, providing honor and respect to the chaos of the situation, especially important considering that Turner tells us in public interviews that

Private Miller wasn’t properly recognized among the honored dead upon their return from active duty. (It should be noted that a version of the leitmotif reappears in the setting of “Curfew” at the appearance of another individual who deserves our sympathy – Sgt. Gutierrez remembering the act of comforting a man who cupped bits of his friend’s brain in his hands.)

As the music builds to a final climax, we return to the sweeping Romantic arpeggios that bring us back to Nature in all its unsettling Romantic glory.

A SOLDIER’S ARABIC

(not available at present) *notes are available with the full published score

CURFEW

Trauma and incredibly vivid descriptions of violence are never far off in Turner’s poems. Even when the scene is at its most benign and idyllic (as it is in “Curfew”), a memory or a potential disaster is right around the corner. So a picture of bats flying out at dusk, water snakes gliding in ponding basins, policemen sunbathing on traffic islands, even children helping their mothers is of course juxtaposed with a linguistic negative: an announcement that Sgt. Gutierrez did not comfort a man who cupped pieces of his friend’s brain in his hands. These are poems from the Iraq War by a poet who saw it all firsthand – this is what we should expect.

The mood I created in my setting has a marked sense of timelessness using static harmonies, an exaggeratedly slow tempo, deep and rich harmonies, and subtle color shifts that underscore the feeling of ease at dusk. We hear ease to match the scene, but

violence and trauma are never far off, referenced by unexpected stabbing rhythmic gestures in the highest registers in the piano. The lyric and the languid are adjacent to the dissonant and the discordant – in art as in life.

The music we hear when Sgt. Gutierrez is mentioned is a direct reference to the music we hear when Private Miller is introduced in the second song (“Eulogy”) earlier in the set. Both characters are associated with more traditional diatonic chord progressions that change on every beat – I had in mind a bastardized version of Bach chorales (with their rapidly changing harmonic rhythms) one might hear as part of a funeral service. The use of a unique leitmotiv with each character underscores their importance and shines a light on the human costs of the war. Here is where the abstract becomes personal.

Another musical technique I used in this setting is the use of musical ciphers to spell out names and important parts of the poem using a code based on the musical alphabet. In public presentations of his poems, Turner speaks of the injustice when a Colonial addressing the troops at a parade ground neglects to name Private Miller among those killed in Iraq, perhaps because he died by suicide and not a “soldier’s death”. Turner writes a poem about Private Miller as a way of honoring his colleague; putting Miller’s name in a cipher and giving him a leitmotif associated with human suffering is another small way to recognize and honor the memory of all soldiers who perished in the war. So ‘Miller’ gets spelled out musically, the same way ‘Love’ gets spelled out, referencing the first line in the poem “A Soldier’s Arabic” (“The word for love is written from right to left...”)

There is an emotional trajectory in the set that moves from trauma to a kind of acceptance. The first song *Here, Bullet* ends with the repeated refrain “Here Bullet!” – the last song also ends with a repeated refrain, but this time the repeated refrain is “Today!”, referencing not bullets and violence to the flesh but instead the absence of bombs, panic, and the idyllic scene of white birds rising from the Tigris.

APPENDIX B. TRANSCRIPT OF ELECTRONIC MAIL INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN TURNER

Interview Questions for Poet Brian Turner regarding *Here, Bullet*

10/14/2019

Can you give me your biography? I have used the one on your website, but are there any other specifics you'd like to bring out?

[Can you send as you have it—and I can add, amend, revise, etc.?)

Are these the first songs set to your poetry?

I've been fortunate enough to work with Shawn Crouch, Jake Runestad, Rob Deemer, among others, over the years. I've collaborated on text, with poet Ilyse Kusnetz, and that has also been set to music. Chanticleer has performed the work, along with VocalEssence, as well as vocal groups and orchestras in different parts of the country.

Can you describe the process of rights sharing, etc. in regards to getting your poetry set to music?

That has always worked out in different ways over the years. I'm registered with ASCAP and BMI, and some composers have listed me for these and other rights as time has gone by. In each case, the process begins with the publisher: Alice James Books.

How have your experiences in war been reflected in the poetry?

My first published book (*Here, Bullet*) was written while serving as an infantryman in Iraq. My second book (*Phantom Noise*) is a meditation on the soldier's return home.

How does it feel to have your poetry set to music?

It's an honor to have artists in different fields carry the work into another medium. Truly. That said, it must be recognized that poetry is an aural art form, and so the poems already have a tonal palette and rhythmic structures built into them (whether in free verse or in a traditional form, such as an alexandrine). So, I suppose I'm saying that it's an honor to have my poems—which are a traditional musical art form of their own—carried over into another, very different musical discipline, as Kurt Erickson has done by setting these poems, and you do as well by lifting these poems with the artistry and skill of your voice and interpretation. It's thrilling to see the work take on a new life, making it new and alive, as you shape the air in a sculpted way that transports the work and creates a wholly new experience.

With these four poems, what are some unique attributes that you feel are important to the singer singing these pieces?

Here, *Bullet*: This is the most personal poem in the book, and the signature poem of the collection as a whole. There's a roiling of language, with a lyric pressure and intensity that several months in a combat zone boiled up out of me. Still, Phil Levine's "They Feed They Lion" is the inspiration—even though I didn't recognize that fact until years after publication. If you read the two poems aloud, you'll quickly feel the similarities in your body.

Curfew: This poem has a kind of detached beginning, one that swivels on a hinge into an understated emotional charge at the end.

Eulogy: From "And nothing can stop it now..." onward, the poem has an undertow, a deep current inside of it that I can always feel pulling me forward and into the memory I hold inside when I read it aloud. It's subtle, but present.

I see in your biography that you are well traveled and have an affinity for many different disciplines and hobbies. Did any of those have any influence on these particular poems chosen for the song cycle?

These are all from *Here, Bullet*—a book of poems written in my notebooks while I was stationed in Iraq from 2003-2004. Most of my travels have taken place after my life in the Army. In a larger sense, though—I've been influenced by language, music, film, landscapes, and so much (as we all are, I imagine). The poems in *Here, Bullet* have a more direct, austere, and somewhat raw approach, and I think this is due to the circumstances under which they were written.

Explain your process in regard to creating your poetry.

These poems were written mostly in different Forward Operating Bases and smaller fire bases in Iraq during the war, from 2003-2004. Early on, while sleeping in an old Iraqi Army barracks, I sometimes used my red lens flashlight to write by, as I didn't want to wake other soldiers sleeping nearby. I normally begin with an image that appears to me within a fragment of language that feels *right* in my body. This musical phrase sets an expectation that informs the rest of the writing. Normally, the neocortex seems to take over—and elements of story, and rhetorical intention, dominate my imagination. I often think cinematically, and so spatial and temporal details lead me in one sense, while the music of the poem, that which carries all else, is sounded within so that my body becomes attuned to the music—and will hopefully recognize when I drift from the composition. As I type these sentences, I quickly realize that I'm describing some ways in which poems develop and come to be. That said, each has its own needs and mystery; learning how to draft each poem is an experience that is never quite the same. That's one of the reasons why I am drawn to the art.

What are some major literary influences that you have?

Too many to list, but among them would be Ismail Kadare—whose novels have compelled me to travel to Albania to better understand, and see for myself, the landscapes that appear in his work.

How does a sung version versus a spoken version of your poetry affect you personally?

There's a *stretched* quality to words when sung that I find very moving. It's the vowels, I think, and how they amplify the layered meaning of a word as they sound across the sonic landscape. It's as if the singer were mining the depths of each individual word while still unfolding sentence by sentence forward. I suppose that tension, that interplay between the singer's suspension within a moment, within an experience, and the story's drive forward into mystery—that's what I enjoy and am most affected by when the sung version is performed.

APPENDIX C. TRANSCRIPT OF ELECTRONIC MAIL INTERVIEW WITH LILIIA OLIINYK

**Interview Questions for Pianist Liliia Oliinyk, pianist for the lecture recital and Louisiana premiere, regarding the piano part to *Here, Bullet*
1/6/2020**

Do you have any piano techniques that are necessary for playing these pieces as a set?

Pianistically speaking, this set requires great flexibility in touch and weight distribution to achieve necessary sound effects the music calls for. Overall, it focuses on the repetition of patterns as the main aspect of compositional development.

Are there any specific things to note in regard to ensemble and staying together with the singer?

Because there is so much repetition of pattern and rhythm in each of the pieces, some sections of the set imply almost improvisatory nature (especially with the segments in the first piece where the composer indicates “structured improvisation” to be independent from the piano part). That can present significant difficulty for both the singer and the pianist to line up in a musically logical way, sounding free yet not disturbing the texture of the work. I would argue that this aspect of sounding improvisatory while not lining up on purpose is the most challenging in regard to ensemble.

Within each piece, what are the specific needs of the piano?

The first piece explores toccata-like motives that are repeated and altered through enharmonic changes and transpositions; here the main pianistic issue is physical endurance; as the patterns progress throughout the movement their intervallic makeup shifts from narrow to wide and requires constant physical adjustment without any change in the rhythmic density; however, *perpetuum mobile* is a commonly used concept in piano repertoire and generally does not present significant difficulty for a pianist.

The second piece also relies heavily on the repetition of patterns, but the rhythmic patterns here vary from diatonic arpeggiations in both hands to accented chordal clusters to almost guitar-like chordal strokes with a syncopated bass line; hand flexibility and a shift from one type of finger attack to another is a must in this piece.

The third piece’s main challenge is shifting seamlessly between changing meters and unifying polyrhythmic patterns (the left hand’s even triplets against septuplets in the right hand, for example); opposed to the previous two pieces, it also explores the widest

range of the piano; creating an uninterrupted wash of sound in the right hand passagework while also providing a rhythmic 'heartbeat' can be challenging, especially taking into account the harmonic language of the composer, which doesn't necessarily fit in the functional tonality realm.

The last piece of the set is the most unified in its choice of pattern and figuration – it's predominantly homophonic and chordal with bell-like accents connecting different sections throughout the piece. The main difficulty for the pianist here is grasping the harmonic language (reminiscent of impressionism) and creating the necessary 'sound world' without making phrases disjointed.

APPENDIX D. LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM KURT ERICKSON

December 30, 2019

Kurt Erickson
kurterickson7@gmail.com

Dear Mr. Kurt Erickson: I am completing a doctoral dissertation at Louisiana State University entitled "A Performance Guide to Kurt Erickson's Song Cycle *Here, Bullet*."

I would like your permission to reprint the following material in my dissertation, which is in preparation for my graduation in May 2020:

Erickson, Kurt. E-mail interview by the author. October 8, 2019.
Erickson, Kurt. *Here, Bullet* (complete song set) score. San Francisco: Kurt Erickson Music, 2019.

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the prospective publication of the material in any other form by you or others authorized by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

Please contact me if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



André Chiang
andrechiangbaritone@gmail.com

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:



Kurt Erickson, composer

Date: December 30, 2019

APPENDIX E. LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM THE PERMISSIONS COMPANY ON BEHALF OF ALICE JAMES BOOKS PUBLISHING

The Permissions Company, LLC
PO Box 670455
Coral Springs, FL 33067
(754) 702-8812
e-mail: PermDude@eclipse.net

February 20, 2020

Andre Chiang
8008 Bluebonnet Boulevard #18-05
Baton Rouge, LA 70810

Dear Mr Chiang:

Thank you for your request for permission to reprint the Brian Turner poems detailed below in your dissertation "A Performance Guide to Kurt Erickson's Song Cycle *Here, Bullet*" done as part of the requirements for your Doctor of Musical Arts degree for Louisiana State University.

This letter will grant you permission to use the poems as requested in your dissertation and in all copies to meet university requirements, including University Microfilms edition. You must credit our work as the source of the material as indicated below, and you must re-apply if your dissertation is later published.

No changes are permitted to the text, title, or structure of the poems.

There is no fee for this use.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. Thank you for your interest in Brian Turner's work.

Sincerely,



Frederick T. Courtright, President
The Permissions Company, LLC
Rights Agency for Alice James Books

Credit: Brian Turner, "Here, Bullet," "Curfew," "Eulogy," and "A Soldier's Arabic" from *Here, Bullet*. Copyright © 2005 by Brian Turner. Used by permission of the poet and The Permissions Company, LLC on behalf of Alice James Books, alicejamesbooks.org. All rights reserved worldwide.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Erickson, Kurt. "Biography." Accessed August 26, 2019. <http://www.kurterickson.com/>.
- _____. E-mail interview by the author. October 8, 2019.
- _____. *Here, Bullet for baritone and piano*. San Francisco: Kurt Erickson Music, 2019.
- _____. "Works – Choral." Accessed December 23, 2019. http://www.kurterickson.com/work_category/choral/.
- _____. "Works – Orchestra." Accessed December 24, 2019. http://www.kurterickson.com/work_category/orchestra/.
- _____. "Works – Solo Voice." Accessed December 23, 2019. http://www.kurterickson.com/work_category/solo-voice/.
- Higbee, Douglas. "Brian Turner's Here, Bullet and the Soldier-Poet Tradition." *South Atlantic Review* 80, no. 1-2 (2015): 115-132.
- Kaliss, Jeff. "Composer Kurt Erickson Finds Fertile Ground in a Veteran's Poem." *San Francisco Classical Voice: Concerts. Artists. Critical Reviews*. Accessed January 2, 2020. <https://www.sfcv.org/events-calendar/artist-spotlight/composer-kurt-erickson-finds-fertile-ground-in-a-veterans-poem>.
- Kempton, Rosemarie. "Napa Valley resident's musical journey: Kurt Erickson named composer-in-residence for San Francisco Lieder Alive!" *Napa Valley Register*, March 12, 2014. https://napavalleyregister.com/entertainment/arts-and-theatre/napa-valley-resident-s-musical-journey/article_2812f1c8-aa5d-11e3-937f-0019bb2963f4.html.
- Libin, Laurence Elliot. "Symphony." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Accessed January 13, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/art/symphony-music>.
- McGuire, Thomas G. "Among the Lightning Trees: A Conversation with Brian Turner." *WLA; War, Literature and the Arts* 27 (2015): 1-32.
- Merriam-Webster. "Consortium Definition." Merriam-Webster: Since 1828. Accessed January 2, 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consortium>.
- Oliinyk, Liliia. E-mail interview by the author. January 6, 2020.
- Poetry Foundation. "Basho 1644-1694." Accessed January 1, 2020. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/basho>.

Turner, Brian. "Bio." Accessed December 28, 2019. <http://www.brianturner.org/bio/>.

_____. "Books." Accessed December 28, 2019. <http://www.brianturner.org/books/>.

_____. "Books – As Editor." Accessed December 28, 2019.
<http://www.brianturner.org/as-editor/>.

_____. "Books – Poetry." Accessed December 28, 2019.
<http://www.brianturner.org/poetry/>.

_____. E-mail interview by the author. October 14, 2019.

_____. *Here, bullet*. Alice James Books, 2014.

VITA

Baritone André Chiang has been described as “handsome of voice” (Opera News), and lauded with “let’s hear more from this singer” (Washington Post). Chiang has performed with Portland Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, the Glimmerglass Festival, Virginia Opera, and Mobile Opera to name a few. Being a versatile performer in classic to modern opera and music theatre, Chiang’s highlights include Ford (*Falstaff*), Dandini (*La cenerentola*), Charlie (*Three Decembers*), Falke (*Die Fledermaus*), and Anthony (*Sweeney Todd*). Additionally, Chiang has concertized with symphonies and choral organizations including the Richmond Symphony, Huntsville Symphony, and Canterbury Voices. Chiang was recognized as the winner of two major competitions: the 59th National Federation of Music Clubs (NFMC) Biennial Young Artist Competition in Man’s Voice and the 45th National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) Artist Awards Competition. Further awards were given by the Metropolitan Opera, Opera Birmingham, Annapolis Opera, and Mobile Opera.

As a voice teacher, Chiang models his teaching after his professors including Professor Dennis Jesse, Brian Gill, DMA, and Loraine Sims, DMA. He was honored as a 2018 NATS Intern and received the designation as a “National Center for Voice and Speech trained Vocologist” through the Summer Vocology Institute. Chiang will present a poster at the 2020 NATS National Conference on Kurt Erickson’s *Here, Bullet* and perform the 2020 NATS Art Song Composition Competition winning set. Chiang graduated from the University of South Alabama, the Manhattan School of Music, and Louisiana State University.