

**SOUNDING DISABILITY IN MUSICAL THEATRE:
SONIC MARKERS OF MENTAL IMPAIRMENT FOR FEMALE CHARACTERS
ON THE CONTEMPORARY BROADWAY STAGE**

by

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Broadway composers such as Stephen Sondheim, Adam Guettel and Tom Kitt are changing the way we hear disability. Musicals such as *Passion* (1994), *The Light in the Piazza* (2004) and *Next to Normal* (2008), all feature a disabled woman as a central character of the show. I demonstrate that the music, specifically those written for female characters with mental impairments, is vastly different than music sung by other characters. An examination of the narratives of these musicals indicates that disability in musical theatre, in many cases, is first presented as invisible or the nature of the character's illness is never fully revealed. By combining current scholarship on music and disability research with an in-depth analysis of the text and score in *Passion*, *The Light in the Piazza* and *Next to Normal*, I examine the musical treatment of these disabled characters and demonstrate how representation of disability is shaped sonically.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As both an actor and director of musical theatre, research is always an expected part of my dramatic process. It has been an eye-opening experience these last two years to embark on an in-depth scholarly study of three of my favorite musicals: *Passion*, *The Light in the Piazza* and *Next to Normal*. I would like to say a huge thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Estelle Joubert, for pointing me in the direction of disability studies and allowing me to experience a deeper and more meaningful exploration of these beloved musicals. Special thanks to my second reader, Dr. Austin Glatthorn, for his patience in this long process and providing me with such constructive and valued feedback. Special thanks to Dawn Sadoway, Brittany Greening, Hala Nader and Dr. Thomas Abrams for your friendship, advice, and support during the writing process. Thank you to my dad for the endless support and especially my best friend, Duane, who was a constant shoulder through this painfully rewarding journey of grad school. Returning once again to Dalhousie after being in the workforce for many years was a daunting prospect. I am indebted to The Fountain School (both professors and staff) for not only making me a better writer, but for believing in me and having such patience as I navigated the challenges of student life once again. The curtain now goes up on a new phase of my life and I can say with certainty that because of all my experiences at Dalhousie, I am ready for any challenge.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

What does disability sound like? Contemporary Broadway composers, such as Stephen Sondheim, Adam Guettel, and Tom Kitt are changing the way audiences hear disability. Musicals such as *Passion* (1994), *The Light in the Piazza* (2004) and *Next to Normal* (2008), all prominently feature women with mental impairment as central characters. Musically, there are many striking similarities and in all three stories, we are presented with a depiction of three female characters with different degrees of emotional, intellectual, and psychological disabilities. Through a careful dissection of the plots and scores, I intend to demonstrate the ways in which musicians compose for disabled characters in comparison to other parts, which is a crucial cornerstone in the creative theatrical process.

To contextualize the work of Sondheim, Guettel and Kitt, it is necessary at this point to provide a definition for disability. Passed in 1990, The Americans with Disabilities Acts states that a disability is defined as:

(A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; (B) a record of such impairment; or (C) being regarded as having such an impairment.¹

Following these guidelines, we can clearly identify many disabled characters in musical theatre. The characters of Fosca in *Passion*, Clara in *The Light in the Piazza* and Diana in *Next to Normal* in some way suffer from emotional or mental impairment. Their inability

¹ Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, Public Law 101-336, 108th Congress, 2nd session (July 26, 1990).

to function in every day society or to function outside of their own world demonstrates that fact. It is important to recognize that there are many types of disabilities including physical, psychiatric, visual, and neurological impairment. My thesis, however, focuses on musicals that feature three female characters suffering with intellectual or mental impairment.

The study of disabilities in the performing arts is a relatively new but bustling subfield in musicological research. This is due in part because of a steady increase in the visibility of disabled characters in contemporary musical theatre. Detailing the emerging interdisciplinary field of disabilities studies, *The Journal of the American Musicological Society* published a volume describing the ways music itself may be understood both to represent and construct disability.² Recently, the American Musicological Society has formed a study group which aims to focus more research and discussion on the intersection of disability and other positions of identity, methodologies, and fields of study.³ As well, through the Music and Disability Interest Group (Society for Music Theory) and Study Group (AMS), a database was formed and is updated regularly to include musical works that feature representations of disability or disabled persons.⁴ By grouping similar disabilities together, the database uses mostly medical terminology to compress a complex representation of bodily difference to one reductive label: impairment. By turning to this database as a reference, I will follow with a detailed analysis of the cast recordings and musical scores for *Passion, The Light in the Piazza*

² Joseph N. Straus, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 59 No. 1, Spring 2006, pp. 113-184.

³ “AMS Study Groups,” *AMS*, accessed April 17, 2017.

⁴ Blake Howe, “Musical Representations of Disability,” *Louisiana State University*, last updated March 11, 2016.

and *Next to Normal*. I then devise a catalog of sonic markers of disability that form the basis of my research. In the attempt to understand the aural implications suggested in the scores, my research comprises of a comparative musical analysis between the “enabled” and disabled characters in each of these shows. Since disability can appear to be invisible at the beginning of any theatrical performance, I provide further explanation as to how the visual and sonic representations of these disabled characters relate. Under the umbrella of the medical humanities, my research contributes to international discourse on disability studies and provides a fuller understanding of the ways in which disabled characters are portrayed musically on stage.

In the rehearsal process, the score is the starting point for an actor to begin building his or her character. Therefore, I also investigate this creative process and highlight how an actor might assimilate and interpret a musical score. To do so, I draw on published interviews from both actors and directors and provide a further dimension of understanding as to how these disabled characters were conceived as well as their journey from score to stage. Current groundbreaking studies on disability aesthetics in musical theatre by scholars such as Ann Fox⁵ and Raymond Knapp⁶ place emphasis on text, interpersonal character analysis and dramatic representation on stage. I build on this research and analyze how these characters are musically represented. My study focuses on three different musicals spanning the years 1994 to 2009. I feature the musicals

⁵ Ann Fox, “Scene in a New Light: Monstrous Mothers, Disabled Daughters, and the Performance of Feminism and Disability in *The Light in the Piazza* and *Next to Normal*,” *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, ed. Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen- Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁶ Raymond Knapp, “‘Waitin’ for the Light to Shine: Musicals and Disability,” *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, ed. Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen- Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Passion, The Light in the Piazza, and finally, *Next to Normal*. These are Tony Award-winning shows that have been performed across the globe and continue to be produced in both amateur and professional productions to this day.

It is no coincidence that these roles have been written for female characters; historically, women have been cast in mad scenes in which they have enacted insanity in opera.⁷ Over the centuries, there are certain themes that have fascinated audiences when it pertained to theatrical performances. Madness has unquestionably been a riveting subject in opera and is a trope that has been used repeatedly in many operatic works. Beginning in the seventeenth century, melancholy gained special popularity as being intellectually in vogue in connection to creative genius and accomplishment in artistic and humanistic works, such as poetry, theatre, and even opera.⁸ This is also certainly the case in eighteenth century melodrama where female characters descend into madness. Medea, for example, murders her own children as a means of revenge against her husband.⁹ Themes such as death, love and insanity have allowed audiences to experience these captivating subjects without ever having to endure them.

Significant ideas about individuals suffering from insanity at that time changed as well.¹⁰ The popular image shifted from that of the bestial madmen of the eighteenth century to the less threatening but troubled mad-woman.¹¹ New research and diagnosis at

⁷ Nina, from Giovanni Paisiello's 1786 opera, *Nina, a Sia la Pazza per Amore*, (Nina, or the Girl Driven Mad by Love) is widely considered the original madwoman in opera.

⁸ Courtney Miller, "The Evolution of Madness: The Portrayal of Insanity in Opera," (Dissertation, Eastern Kentucky University, Fall 2015), p.4.

⁹ Georg Benda, *Medea*, Contributor: Friedrich Wilhelm Gotter (Michigan: S. Sonnichsen, 1976) Vocal Score.

¹⁰ Kendra Cherry, "Timeline of Modern Psychology," *Verywell.com*, October 23, 2017.

¹¹ Elisabet Raket Siguroardottir, "Women and Madness in the 19th Century: The Effects of oppression on Women's Mental Health," (Dissertation, Haskoli Islands University, September 2013), p.3.

the time included neurasthenia,¹² anorexia nervosa, hysteria and, according to psychiatrists, almost all were exclusively attributed to women. Hysteria was (nearly always) the woman's illness and neurasthenia the man's.¹³ Anorexia nervosa was seen as self-sacrificing and a very feminine disease while hysteria was often deemed selfish and destructive, a rebellion of which doctors did not approve.¹⁴ Since there was no structured study of mental disorders or insanity during this period, doctors and priests began to acknowledge that some forms of insanity "were a kind of illness, brought about by traumatic injury, or by physical disorders that add mental effects."¹⁵ Peter Brooks notes that these episodes of melodrama were often enacted in opera where the woman's "hystericized body"¹⁶ became a place for "the inscription of highly emotional messages that cannot be written elsewhere, and cannot be articulated verbally."¹⁷

While this convention came to an end after the Bel Canto era of the nineteenth century,¹⁸ present-day musical theatre has been influenced by these representations of madness. Indeed, musicals such as *Passion*, *The Light in the Piazza*, and *Next to Normal* all feature women who vividly demonstrate these signs of madness now called mental illness.¹⁹ Depending on the era they depict onstage, their mental impairment is

¹² Neurasthenia was a term used as early as 1829 to label a condition known as physical and mental exhaustion.

¹³ Rosemary Dinnage, "Hysteria was for Women, Neurasthenia for Men," *The New York Times*, September 9, 1984.

¹⁴ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 133.

¹⁵ Andrew Scull, *Madness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Insanity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p.91.

¹⁶ Peter Brooks, "Body and Voice in Melodrama and Opera," in *Siren Songs*, edited by Mary Ann Smart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p.120.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Courtney Miller, "The Evolution of Madness: The Portrayal of Insanity in Opera" (Honors Thesis, Eastern Kentucky University, Fall 2015).

¹⁹ Lynne Malcolm and Clare Bluner, "Madness and Insanity: A History of Mental Illness from Evil Spirits to Modern Medicine," *ABC News*, August 2016.

represented in a plethora of ways. For instance, in *Passion*, set in nineteenth-century Italy, Fosca frequently displays fits of hysteria (seen onstage and heard offstage) which suggests that she is suffering from some form of mental illness; in the 1950s-inspired, *The Light in the Piazza*, the character Clara is featured in a song entitled “Hysteria” during which she appears to have a panic attack in public; set in modern-day America, *Next to Normal*’s Diana sings the song “Who’s Crazy” while she fantasizes over how her new prescription drugs will make her feel, further romanticizing the notion of drug dependency. Regardless of the time period, all three characters suffer from the same social stigma towards mental illness and struggle with constant judgement, ridicule and misunderstanding. In her research on gender and performance, Roberta Barker comments that “the woman’s suffering fascinates – and sometimes transforms – the men around her.”²⁰ Similarly, I argue that the disabled women characters in *Passion*, *The Light in the Piazza* and *Next to Normal* change very little by the end of the musicals while, often, the secondary characters are enlightened and changed for the better for having interacted with these disabled women.

In approaching the exploration of music and narratives, my research draws on several scholars, including Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, Neil Lerner and Joseph Straus, who are currently publishing research in the discipline of disability and music. *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies* (2016) offers a comprehensive view of current research into the field of music and disability studies.²¹ This collection of essays is united in its theoretical and methodological approach to

²⁰ Roberta Barker, *Early Modern Tragedy, Gender and Performance, 1984 - 2000: The Destined Livery* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p.1.

²¹ Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen- Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus, editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2016.

disability studies, especially its central idea that disability is a social and cultural construction. Disability both shapes and is shaped by culture; this includes musical culture.²²

While each musical incorporates disability into the narrative, only one of the stories (*Next to Normal*) is actually about mental illness. In *Passion*, *The Light in the Piazza*, and *Next to Normal*, disability is used as a plot device, and the elimination, rehabilitation, or accommodation of that disability participates in the story's resolution. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have recently termed this appropriation of disability "narrative prosthesis."²³ Mitchell and Snyder suggest that the narrative prosthesis has two main functions: "it gives the story a problem to solve and it defines by counterexample the desirability of the subsequent resolution."²⁴ In storylines that feature disabled characters, Mitchell and Snyder use the term "deviance" to describe disability. This can be identified by the following characteristics: 1) a character introduced early in the story is marked as different; 2) the narrative calls for an explanation of the deviance associated with the disabled character; 3) this disabled character is brought from the periphery to the center of the developing action; and 4) the remainder of the story, "rehabilitates or fixes the deviance in some manner."²⁵ All three musicals follow Mitchell and Snyder's characteristics on "deviant" characters and I argue that disability is employed as a plot point.

While the score is the starting point, I also analyze the actors' creative process to

²² Howe, Jensen- Moulton, Lerner, and Straus, *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, p.6.

²³ David Mitchell, Sharon Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011).

²⁴ Mitchell, Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, p.5.

²⁵ Mitchell, Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, p.53.

more fully understand exactly how dramatic interpretation can alter the depiction of characters with disabilities. While recent productions such as the play, “Cost of Living,” star disabled actors who are cast in disabled roles,²⁶ the reality is that most actors in Broadway productions who premiere these roles are enabled actors. There has been a long-standing debate on casting able-bodied actors in disabled roles. Playwright Christopher Shinn, in his 2014 article, “Disability is Not Just a Metaphor,” argues that it is reassuring to an audience to watch abled-bodied actors successfully portray disabled characters and see them re-emerge as non-disabled during the curtain call.²⁷ He states, “it is all make believe...able-bodied actors can listen to the disabled, can do research, can use imagination and empathy to create believable characters. But they can’t draw on their direct experience. This means that the audience will be able to ‘enjoy’ them without really confronting disability’s deep implication for human life.”²⁸ While scholars are currently active in contributing to research involving narratives of disability, my research will focus on the musical perspective.

Representation of disability can change significantly depending on the influence of producers, directors and actors’ research. My examination hinges on the premise that sonic indicators are imbedded in the score, which forms the foundation of how both actors and directors approach a character with mental impairment. My research focuses on the fusing of sonic signatures with visual aesthetics created for the stage and the result of that fusion. My musical analysis will demonstrate that composers are utilizing similar techniques in the musical representation of female characters with mental impairment.

²⁶ Barbara Hoffman, “These Actors with Disabilities are Wowing Theater Crowds,” *New York Post*, July 6, 2017.

²⁷ Christopher Shinn, “Disability is Not Just a Metaphor,” *The Atlantic*, July 23, 2014.

²⁸ Shinn, “Disability is Not Just a Metaphor.”

CHAPTER TWO

Madness and Vocal Manipulation in *Passion*

“Beauty is power, longing a disease.”¹

Passion (1994), a one-act musical written by Stephen Sondheim (b.1930), is an adaptation of Ettore Scola’s film *Passione d’Amore* (1981), in turn based on *Fosca*, an 1869 Italian novel by Iginio Tarchetti. The original film was billed as a dark comedy whereas the musical version is, by contrast, a darker drama. In a *New York Times* interview, Sondheim explained that “‘*Passion*’ is about how the force of somebody’s feelings for you can crack you open, and how it is the life-force in a deadened world.”² At the center of this story is a handsome army captain, Giorgio, who is forced to re-evaluate his beliefs about love when he becomes the object of the obsessive, unrelenting passions of Fosca, his colonel’s sickly cousin.³ The nature of Fosca’s illness is never fully revealed; the doctor describes it as an overly sensitive nervous system that is debilitating. The musical focuses on the themes of love, sex, beauty, power, manipulation and illness, and it is revealed that Fosca is a woman who has experienced most pleasures in life vicariously. Although she appears sickly and feeble onstage, she sounds full of life; Fosca is most expressive when she sings.

The musical is primarily set in Milan in 1863. There we meet Giorgio, who is

¹ Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, *Passion* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1994), 57.

² Michiko Kakutani, “Sondheim’s Passionate ‘*Passion*,’” *New York Times*, March 20, 1994.

³ “*Passion*,” *Music Theatre International*, accessed November 19, 2017.

having a love affair with a married woman named Clara. When Giorgio is transferred to a remote military base, he meets the colonel's ill cousin, Fosca. Her illness is rooted in depression and she exhibits sudden bursts of madness. Through a series of subtle asides from soldiers and anguished screams from Fosca herself heard from offstage, the audience is led to believe that she is suffering from some form of mental illness. Fosca persistently shows her affection for and to Giorgio, while Giorgio describes Fosca as repulsive and wretched in a series of letters to Clara. Fosca's relentless pursuit both upsets and angers him but after Clara reveals that she is not willing to leave her husband to be with him, he comes to the awareness that Fosca truly loves him as no one ever has. The revelation, however, comes all too late; not long after they consummate their love, Fosca succumbs to her illness.

***Passion's* Style, Narrative and Reception**

Passion is a musical in one act;⁴ the intermission is omitted so there is no interruption in the dramatic arc of the story. This allows for a natural, unbroken progression to the climax which is achieved, in part, through segues. The show, which is nearly two hours long, is described by Sondheim as "one long song."⁵ Although *Passion* won several awards, it only played a total of 280 performances, making it the shortest running musical to ever win the Tony Award for Best Musical. Reviewers, such as the New York Times critic, David Richards, commented that madness itself was present in

⁴ The Musical Theatre International score divides the show into two different acts; act 2 is to happen before the "Flashback" sequence. The scene just before this, however, indicates a segue into the "Flashback" scene. Most professional and regional theatre companies perform the musical as it was first presented- in one act.

⁵ "Sondheim on *Passion*," p.8.

the score and noted that *Passion* was an “unalloyed love story [...] The score contains some insinuating melodies. You can hear madness in the ecstatic lilt”⁶ He insists that *Passion* didn’t resonate with audiences because the show led “right up to the moment of transcendence but is unable in the end to provide the lift that would elevate the material above the disturbing.”⁷ Similar reviews placed blame on the characterization of Fosca; early reactions to her character were less than favorable. In one earlier preview, as Fosca laid on her deathbed at the end of Act 2, one audience member from the balcony yelled, “Die, Fosca! Die!”⁸ Since audiences were repelled by Fosca’s grotesque appearance and behavior, many revisions took place before the show opened on May 9, 1994. Yet the question remained: how does one maintain Fosca’s uncompromising nature without alienating the audience and undermining the confidence of the actor?

Donna Murphy, who first played Fosca in the original Broadway production, won the Tony Award for best actress in 1994. Playing the role of a character who is characterized as both “obsessive” and “sickly”⁹ proved to be a journey of self-discovery as she approached the complicated role. Murphy stated in an interview that she doesn’t think of herself as “a beautiful woman, and if anything during this process I’ve grown more accepting of what I like about my appearance, because I tend to focus on what I don’t like.”¹⁰ As often is the case in preparing for roles, actors will conduct their own research into their characters and usually bring ideas to the rehearsal process; directors

⁶ David Richards, “Review/Theatre; Sondheim Explores the Heart’s Terrain,” *The New York Times*, May 10, 1994.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Meryl Seacrest, *Stephen Sondheim: A Life*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), p. 386.

⁹ “*Passion*,” *Mtishows.com*, accessed December 15, 2017.

¹⁰ Bruce Webber, “Ugly is as Ugly Does, So Actress Tries to Look Her Very Worst,” *The New York Times*, May 26, 1994.

help refine and shape these choices. Director James Lapine recalls that Murphy herself pushed for more deforming makeup; she wanted Fosca's appearance to be even more unpalatable. He recalls, "For the first invited dress she had a bald pate on. Her hairline started halfway back on her head. She looked like something out of 'Star Trek.'"¹¹ In earlier versions of the show, audiences found it difficult to accept that Giorgio would eventually succumb to the character of Fosca, based on how she was originally depicted.

In time for opening night, both Sondheim and Lapine, who wrote the book in addition to directing, made many additional changes, most of which were intended to smooth the way for Giorgio's change of heart toward Fosca. For instance, short lines of dialogue were added between them, such as a shared love of gardens, to establish mutual sympathy. They also exchange a shared appreciation of Rousseau's novel, *Julie*¹², when first getting to know each other early in the show. Later, Giorgio confides in Fosca and explains that, as a child, he wished he could fly. To make the character of Giorgio more likable, a repeated refrain in letters addressed to Clara now refers not to her "ugliness" but to her "wretchedness." Because it was felt that the audience was turning against Giorgio for his tolerance of Fosca's unacceptable behavior, the authors made manifest his growing impatience with her obsession, including several angry monologues for him.¹³

While Fosca is presented as a deplorable character, she was not originally portrayed as a sympathetic one. This, in part, derives from current perceptions of insanity or madness, most of which were formed in eighteenth century opera.¹⁴ Although Fosca's

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Julie*, a novel by Jean-Jacque Rousseau, deals with the struggle of the individual against societal norms, emotions versus reason, and the goodness of human nature.

¹³ Webber, "Ugly is as Ugly Does."

¹⁴ Fabrizio Della Seta, *Not Without Madness: Perspectives on Opera* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), p.2.

illness is never fully confirmed, based on the script, it can be assumed that she is suffering from a combination illnesses which results in unpredictable moments of hysteria. Sondheim has pointed out that “Fosca is an opera-sized character in a musical;” the Musical Theatre International website calls the show a “chamber opera.”¹⁵ *Passion*, however, is not considered an opera since there is so much dialogue. Generally regarded as a musical, both dramatically and musically, *Passion*, which takes place in 1863, carries forth the notion of operatic madness.

Although some scholars have likened his work to both opera and operetta, Sondheim’s writing is rooted in the traditions of American musical theatre.¹⁶ Musicologist Elise Kuhl Kirk notes that *Passion* lies somewhere among “musical theatre or opera or both.”¹⁷ At a young age, Sondheim received a critical evaluation of his first stage work by the famous traditional Broadway librettist, Oscar Hammerstein. After serving four years as an assistant to Hammerstein, Sondheim gained valuable insight into the world of professional theatre.¹⁸ Upon graduating from Williams College, he began studying composition at Princeton University with contemporary American composer Milton Babbitt (1916-2011). Much of Sondheim’s unique approach to melody is influenced by Babbitt’s own work on serialism, an extension of Schoenberg’s serial organization of pitch.¹⁹ While Sondheim’s style of composition is known for being less than hummable, he has forever changed the landscape of the American musical. Although not always favored by critics, his sound is distinctive.

¹⁵ “*Passion*,” *Mtishows.com*.

¹⁶ Peter Charles Landis Purin, “I’ve a Voice, I’ve a Voice”: Determining Stephen Sondheim’s Compositional Style Through a Music- Theoretic Analysis of his Theatre Works,” (Dissertation, University of Kansas, 2011), p. 210.

¹⁷ Elise Kuhl Kirk, *American Opera* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2005), p.318.

¹⁸ “Stephen Sondheim,” *PBS.com*, accessed December 6, 2017.

¹⁹ Elaine Barkin and Martin Brody, “Babbitt, Milton,” *Grove Music Online*, January 20, 2001.

Sondheim's use of motivic stops and melodic cadences often contains large intervals. Both prosody, the correct marriage of words and music,²⁰ and drama drive his melodic writing. He is known for writing short, motivic units that are often repeated for a dramatic effect, sometimes disrupting meter and hypermeter.²¹ He also writes melodies shared between actors in scored dialogue, a key device used often in *Passion*. These significant musical elements all play a part in the identification of a Sondheim musical. Regarding his own compositional style, Sondheim himself commented:

I handle the lyrics first...it's important that I get as much of the lyric done as possible right away, because once the music is done, that's it for me. I'm trapped in that form[...] If you write 'Just One of Those Things,' the way Cole Porter did, he wrote it without the melodic values, he wrote 'It—was—just—one—of—those...'—he wrote that rhythmically on the paper, and then he filled in the notes. So, I will do that quite often. If I think of a line that I want—either an opening line or a refrain line—that will often suggest a melodic idea, particularly if you take the inflection of the way it's spoken; because I write often for inflection of sentences that will suggest by inflection what you want sung.²²

Clearly, Sondheim approaches the compositional process with a lyrics-first approach, closely following Cole Porter's writing process. Many times, to make his melodies sound conversational, Sondheim will write short or distorted melodic motives and phrases if they are dictated by dramatic concerns.²³

²⁰ Al Kasha and Joel Hirschhorn, *If They Ask You, You Can Write a Song* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.) p. 97.

²¹ Purin, "I've a Voice," p.iii.

²² Mark Eden Horowitz, *Sondheim on Music: Minor Details and Major Decisions* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2010), p.204.

²³ Purin, "I've a Voice," p. 201.

Fosca's Music

Early in *Passion*, Sondheim makes Fosca's musical presence distinct. Her first song, "Fosca's Entrance Part 1," contains many differing musical sections including melodies which are conversational in nature. These sections are often dictated by her mood swings and abrupt changes in emotions. This first time we see Fosca and hear her voice, it is musically distinct and jarring. Giorgio, who is in the middle of reading a letter from Clara, is interrupted by Fosca who we come to find out has been spying on him for quite some time. Clara's voice is heard as Giorgio reads the letter and her clear soprano voice grows in intensity but is abruptly cut off by Fosca during the segue into the song, "Fosca's Entrance Part 1." Clara's last pitch is a C (A4), and Fosca interrupts her by singing a tritone almost an octave and a half lower than hers. (fig. 2.1) Setting Fosca in this drastically low register immediately sets her apart from Clara and sets the tone to establish both her exhaustion and illness.²⁴

The image shows a musical score for two characters, CLARA and FOSCA, in 4/4 time. CLARA's part begins at measure 22 with the lyrics "The se-cre-cy, the world out-side, your mouth on mine." Her melody is in a higher register. FOSCA's part is mostly silent, with a few notes at the end of the passage labeled "Cap-tain..." in a lower register.

Figure 2.1 "Fourth Letter" mm. 22-25, In her first vocal line, an interval of a minor third, Fosca is immediately set apart as "different" from Clara.

Preserved in the score, Sondheim also wrote some phrases which contain sudden

²⁴ Visually, Fosca is first presented in stark contrast to Clara. In the original Broadway production, her dark hair, pulled back into a tight bun, and dark dresses dramatically compare to Clara's flowing blond hair and cream colored gowns.

octave jumps which serve to both manipulate Giorgio and elicit his pity. This first form of vocal manipulation firmly establishes Fosca’s character as different from the others in the show. This is the first time in the score where recitative-like music is introduced; Giorgio speaks his lines in rhythm while Fosca sings hers in disjointed, conversational phrases. Her music, which begins quite low in the mezzo range, contains frequent irregular rests and the succession of jumps become larger as the phrases continue. These instances of vocal manipulation occur on key words that Sondheim emphasizes for the intended effect of exemplifying her illness. The ends of phrases, which are abruptly cut short and separated by prolonged rests, give an indication to the actor that the character is too weak to finish the lines with strength (fig. 2.2).

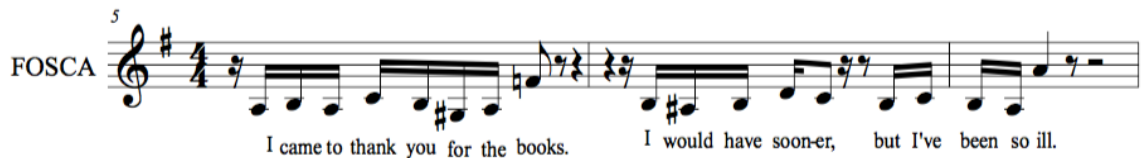


Figure 2.2 “Fosca’s Entrance Part 1,” mm. 5-7, the large intervals at the ends of phrases brings specific focus to the words “book” and “ill” which Fosca uses to her advantage to elicit pity from Giorgio.

Sondheim subsequently introduces in the song what Geoffrey Block has labelled Fosca’s six note “obsessive” motif.²⁵ This theme, which is used by all three leading characters, is first introduced by Fosca. Musicologist Steven Swayne notes that Fosca’s “obsession” theme is “so ubiquitous in the musical that its absence becomes more

²⁵ Geoffrey Block, *The Oxford Handbook of Sondheim Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.272.

significant than its presence.”²⁶ To firmly establish this theme, Fosca repeats it three times in succession when it is first introduced in “Fosca’s Entrance (Part 1).” The song begins in 4/4 time but as Fosca’s “obsession” theme begins, compound time signatures are incorporated and stay in constant flux, which allows the lyrics to replicate natural speech inflections. Here, the composer uses rubato, allowing the actor to dramatically develop her thoughts (fig 2.3).



Figure 2.3 “Fosca’s Entrance Part 1,” mm. 11-16, Fosca’s “obsession” theme is first introduced and repeated three times.

By use of various analogies, Fosca goes on to carefully describe her medical condition; she also compares love to a dangerous wild flower filled with poison. The song showcases the many sides to Fosca’s character and the music reflects these moods. Depending on her mental state, the themes range from playful waltz sections to moments which are operatically grand in nature. Depending on her mood and range of expression, the tempos fluctuate accordingly. Although many rallentandos are scattered throughout the piece, Sondheim, through carefully crafted crescendos, still manages to achieve a musical climax. As Fosca explains that she does not cling to dreams of love, she demands

²⁶Steven Robert Swayne, “Hearing Sondheim’s Voices,” PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1999, p.230.

that Giorgio understands her as, in the climax of the song, she forces him to look closely at the pitiful woman standing in front of him. The aftermath of this outburst leaves Fosca delirious and she ends the song with a hushed, quasi-child-like lullaby before she breaks into unexpected, maniacal laughter (fig. 2.4).



Figure 2.4 “Fosca’s Entrance Part 1,” mm. 60-66, To express delirium, Sondheim uses a playful and taunting child-like melody before Fosca bursts into uncontrollable laughter.

Later in the musical, Giorgio takes a leave from his post to join Clara in an attempt to escape from Fosca’s growing fixation. Before he leaves, however, Fosca asks him to write a letter for her. As she begins to dictate the missive, it becomes clear that she is once again manipulating Giorgio; the letter is written as if the sentiment is Giorgio’s alone. Although he is apprehensive, he decides not to abandon her in her weakened state and continues to write the letter and even signs it with his own name at the end. The letter forms part of the song, “Scene 7, Part 2,” and Sondheim’s writing for Fosca again shows signs of her mental and physical exhaustion. The ends of her phrases often drop below the staff and the effect is twofold; she can both express her shortness of breath and at the same time display the alluring depths of her rich and seductive lower register (fig.2.5).

19 FOSCA *poco rall.*

I know I have up - set you. — I know I've been un - kind.

mp

Figure 2.5 “Scene 7 Part 1,” mm. 19-25, Sondheim has musically written in shortness of breath by dramatically dropped to a low F on the word “unkind.”

Although there are slight variations, Sondheim incorporates Fosca’s obsession motif frequently in the song; the first line clearly presents this theme. Block notes that “I cannot think of another work for the musical stage, opera or musical, in which a single motive pervades all the central characters so thoroughly and relentlessly as it does in *Passion*.”²⁷ As Fosca dictates to Giorgio the first passage in the song about love, the music changes briefly to a slow broken waltz. Although Giorgio is hesitant, Fosca still convinces him to continue writing the letter. Indeed, the motif is employed so persistently throughout the piece that even Giorgio echoes the melody after Fosca sings it, indicating that she is starting to infiltrate his thoughts. (Fig. 2.6).

²⁷ Geoffrey Block, *The Oxford Handbook of Sondheim Studies*, p.272.

12
FOSCA
That does-n't mean I love you... I

GIORGIO
pp
That does-n't mean I love you...

16
wish that I could love you...

(Giorgio stops writing)

Figure 2.6 “Scene 7 Part 1,” mm. 12-17, the first time where Giorgio sings Fosca’s established “obsession” motif.

Giorgio is not the only character who appropriates Fosca’s “obsession” motive; halfway through Act 1, Sondheim also incorporates the theme into Clara’s music. In Scene 3, Clara begins to read another letter from Giorgio in which he describes being repulsed by Fosca. Giorgio surprisingly admits that every aspect of Fosca’s appearance, including her voice and touch, reminded him only of Clara. As Clara begins to read the letter, Fosca’s “obsession” motive begins to permeate the song. While the motive starts an octave higher than Fosca’s original melody, Sondheim quickly lowers the intervals with each phrase and concludes with a now deflated Clara singing below the staff (fig. 2.7).

CLARA

55 *poco rall.*

And then to hear a wo-man's voice, to hold a wo-man's

57 arm, to feel a wo-man's touch...

Figure 2.7 “Scene 3- Part 1,” mm 55- 58 as Clara reads Giorgio’s letter, Fosca’s “obsession” theme now begins to infiltrate Clara’s music.

Another significant musical idea in *Passion* is the “happiness” motif which is introduced in the opening duet entitled, “Happiness.” While this theme is used frequently throughout the show and is mainly sung by Clara and Giorgio, it becomes the basis for two of Fosca’s defining musical moments. Supporting the melody is a simple major triad that acts as the accompaniment for the love duet. In a 1995 interview, Sondheim describes the frequent use and the importance of this figure: “The accompaniments are often based on bugle calls, though more hidden. The bugle only plays three notes, and I decided to use them as the basic figuration for all the Giorgio/ Clara stuff, though with a dissonant underpinning to make them restless as well as less blatant.”²⁸ [see Fig. 2.8]

13

pp

Figure 2.8 “Happiness Part 1,” mm. 13-15, the accompaniment resembles a bugle call which forms the basis for Fosca’s melody in the song, “Loving You.”

²⁸ “Sondheim on *Passion*” p.6.

As Fosca’s obsession with Giorgio progresses later in the show, they have an argument on a desolate mountain. Suddenly, Fosca faints and Giorgio must carry her back to the town in the rain. Soon after, he falls ill with a fever and the doctor grants him sick leave for forty days. As he boards the train to leave, he is followed once again by Fosca. Once onboard, she apologizes for her behavior and promises to keep her distance for good. In “Loving You,” arguably the most hummable and memorable song in the musical, she explains to Giorgio that loving him is not a choice, it is part of who she is and that she would gladly die for him. The melodic idea of “Loving You” is based on the accompaniment figure of the “happiness” motif which is first introduced in the beginning of the musical. There are two moments in the song, however, when Fosca’s “obsession” motif is still present, such as on the phrase, “This is why I live. You are why I live.”²⁹ The use of the “happiness” motif marks a significant change in her sentiment and once Giorgio hears this, he is moved enough to cancel his trip home and return with Fosca back to the outpost (fig. 2.9).

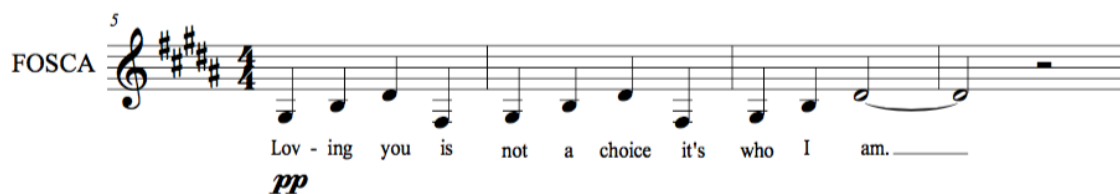


Figure 2.9 “Loving You,” mm. 5-8, Fosca’s melody is based off the bugle call in “Happiness Part 1.”

Once he returns, the doctor warns Giorgio that Fosca is becoming a threat to his mental and physical health but he requests to stay, feeling obligated to stay by Fosca’s

²⁹ Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, *Passion* (New York: Riltling, 1994), p. 3-4.

side. During Christmas, Giorgio finds out that he is being transferred back to military headquarters and tensions grow between him and Clara. He asks her to leave her husband, but Clara refuses to do so given that she now has a young child. Giorgio wants a more serious commitment and no longer desires the arrangement they once had. He now realizes that he truly loves Fosca but time is running out; she is now weaker than ever and is close to death. Before they consummate their love, she sings, in an extremely weakened state, to Giorgio. In the song, “Scene 14 (Fosca),” she usurps Clara’s “happiness” melody and, while she only sings a few phrases, the absence of her “obsession” motif is significant (fig. 2.10).

8 Adagio
 FOSCA
 All this hap-pi-ness, com-ing hen there's so lit-tle time.
 12
 Too much ha-pi-ness, more than I can bear.

Figure 2.10 “Scene 14 (Fosca),” mm. 8-15, Fosca’s takes over Clara’s established “happiness” theme.

Meanwhile, the colonel has discovered the letter Fosca dictated, accuses Giorgio of leading her on and demands a duel. Giorgio shoots the colonel dead behind the castle, and the scene ends with him wailing in a scream that is reminiscent to Fosca’s numerous outbursts. Giorgio has a nervous breakdown and once he awakes in the hospital he is informed that Fosca passed away shortly after their night together. As he reads Fosca’s final letter to him, the effect is dreamlike as the acting company joins in to narrate. Fosca’s voice eventually joins in and, once again, her “obsession” motif is reestablished

and “repeats as a musical phrase no fewer than eleven times.”³⁰ This time, however, Giorgio begins the theme, followed by Fosca and the company in the final moments of the finale (fig. 2.11).

113

FOSCA

GIORGIO

GROUP 1

dim. poco a poco

Your love will live in me...

Your love will live in me...

Your love will live in

115

Your love will live in me...

me...

me...

Figure 2.11 “Finale,” mm 113-115, Fosca’s “obsession” theme, begun by Giorgio, is repeated eleven times and is echoed by the company until the end of the musical.

Fosca’s death at the end of the musical represents a familiar scenario in both opera and musical theatre. Frequently, narratives involving disability include a disabled character who is either cured or expelled from the story. Musicologist Blake Howe explains the “many narratives, requiring tension before release, requiring a problem

³⁰ Swayne, “Hearing Sondheim’s Voices,” p. 230.

before its resolution, appropriate disability as their obstacle of choice.”³¹ *Passion*’s main narrative is focused on Giorgio’s transformation as the result of Fosca’s obsessive love. Fosca is steadfast in her obsessive (and toxic) love for and devotion to Giorgio; her disability is the obstacle. In the end, Fosca teaches Giorgio an important lesson: “Love within reason, that isn’t love. And I learned that from you.”³² Fosca’s passionate pursuit of Giorgio is so obsessive that it eventually contributes to her death – and almost to his.³³ Although he loses Fosca in the process, his character is the only one who is transformed by the end of musical.

While Sondheim often writes melodies in his musicals which are shared between characters, this device is taken one step further in *Passion*. The frequent use of Fosca’s six note obsession theme symbolizes a deeper interpretation on the themes of love and obsession which run through the narrative of *Passion*. As the story progresses, love is attributed to being a disease that is capable of being spread. Eventually, every character adopts this theme which implies that Fosca’s sickness is slowly transferred to Giorgio and Clara by the end of the musical. Throughout the score, Sondheim “allows the Fosca motif to become a musical obsession as well, and in the final scene even her ghost sings with the devastated Giorgio.”³⁴ This choice of metaphor reveals the aftermath of the emotional destruction that love can cause. In doing so, the musical also “perpetuates the

³¹ Blake Howe, “Music and Disability Studies: An Introduction,” *Musicology Now*, February 9, 2014.

³² Stephen Sondheim, *Passion* (New York: Riltng Music In., 1994) p.222.

³³ Elise Kuhl Kirk, *American Opera* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p.318.

³⁴ Kirk, *American Opera*, p.318.

stereotypes that the disabled community has fought long against – that those with illness or disability are pitiable, pathetic, and poisonous.”³⁵

The story closely follows Mitchell and Snyder’s theory on narrative prosthesis to describe disability.³⁶ At the beginning of the musical, before she is visible to the audience, Fosca is described as different by the other characters; she is talked about and referred to as if she is the family’s shameful secret. The first time we hear her, she is heard screaming offstage, which adds more speculation to the seriousness of her mysterious condition. Although she is brought to the center of the storyline, neither she nor her illness is the focus of the story. The story is primarily about Giorgio dealing with his personal life and his failing relationship with Clara and the resulting new appreciation of love he has learned from Fosca. While her disability is not rehabilitated (treated), Fosca’s ultimate “elimination” falls in line with Mitchell and Snyder’s narrative prosthesis of how deviant characters are dealt with by the end of a storyline.³⁷ Fosca’s disability is also shaped by Sondheim’s musical depiction of her while his use of characters’ borrowing musical themes in *Passion* helps to solidify the narrative.

Perhaps *Passion*’s short run at Broadway’s Plymouth Theatre was due to an exaggerated portrayal of disability; actress Donna Murphy’s physical depiction of Fosca was both mocked and ridiculed in earlier previews. The likeability of Fosca’s character proved to be a crucial element in determining the musical’s ultimate success. The last-minute addition of the simplest song in the show, “Loving You” revealed a hitherto

³⁵ Heidi Temple, “Every Now and Then a Madman’s Bound to Come Along...” The use of Disability Metaphor in the Musicals of Stephen Sondheim: Freak Shows and Freakish Love,” (Master’s Thesis, University of Florida, 2006), p.25.

³⁶ David Mitchell, Sharon Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011).

³⁷ *Narrative Prosthesis*, p.53.

missing more tender side to Fosca. As she sings in a more helpless than demanding tone, she wins the affections of Giorgio. Murphy stated that what Fosca is really saying about her obsession is, “I can’t control this. I don’t mean to hurt you with it.”³⁸ The simplistic and non-threatening scene provided a humanizing layer to Fosca’s self-awareness, which in turn won the audience’s sympathy. *Passion* proves that the more depth a “different” character possesses, the more sympathy and understanding she will receive in return. In the end, a careful blend of musical writing and characterization made Fosca more likeable, and the result was a somewhat non-threatening representation of disability. The rationalization of Fosca’s obsession turned an extremely unlikeable character into a woman who became a powerful catalyst in Giorgio’s ultimate transformation.

³⁸ Webber, “Ugly Is as Ugly Does,” *The New York Times*.

CHAPTER THREE

Invisible Disability and Sonic Markers in *The Light in the Piazza*

“Love’s a fake, love’s a fable”¹

Set against the backdrop of Italy, Adam Guettel’s Tony Award winning *The Light in the Piazza* (2004) is a compelling love story which, at its heart, centers on a young woman with an intellectual disability who falls in love with a non-disabled man. The musical is based on Elizabeth Spencer’s 1960 novella of the same name. The story was first published in *The New Yorker* and received positive reviews. Two years later, MGM purchased the film rights, and, in 1962, *The Light in the Piazza* was released as a motion picture directed by Guy Green and screenplay by Julius Epstein. Although the movie closely follows the plot of the original novella, there are slight differences between the film and the subsequent musical, which was written some forty years later. Set in the 1950s, it tells the story of Margaret Johnson, a wealthy Southern woman, who takes her developmentally disabled daughter, Clara, on a trip to Florence, Italy. Because of her disability, Clara behaves unpredictably in certain situations. While on holiday in Florence, Clara meets a young, handsome Italian named Fabrizio; they soon become romantically involved. Margaret, who is extremely protective of her daughter, is forced not only to consider Clara’s future, but also must face her own deep-seated hopes and regrets.

The Rogers and Hammerstein website vaguely describes the show: “As *The Light in the Piazza* unfolds, a secret is revealed: in addition to the cultural differences between

¹ Craig Lucas, “The Light in the Piazza,” *everythingmusicals.com*, accessed November 7, 2016.

the young lovers, Clara is not quite all that she appears.”² A plot device commonly used in narrative structures, known as the “big reveal,” consists of a convention which reveals to the audience a hidden key element of plot or the performance. In many cases, characters who are initially portrayed as “different” are first presented in an ambiguous manner and then, in a plot twist, are later revealed to be not quite as they first appeared. In *The Light in the Piazza*, Clara’s disability is the big reveal. The story is told from Margaret’s perspective and in the 2005 musical setting, she initially defines Clara’s disability to the audience by describing her to be “not quite as she seems.”³ While Clara’s disabled status is invisible at the beginning of the show, I argue that disability can nevertheless be heard in her music and that there are sonic indicators embedded in the score which provide clues to her condition before the reveal. Guettel has incorporated instances of melodic disfluency in Clara’s music by writing abrupt octaves leaps during moments of excitement as well as frequent rhythmic and melodic repetition immediately following other characters’ musical lines. Furthermore, Clara’s disability is slowly rehabilitated throughout the musical; Guettel reflects this in the score, for there is a noticeable change in her musical language by the end of Act 2.

Guettel, who was born into a musical family, was exposed to Broadway musicals at a young age. Critics have compared him as a cross between his grandfather, the influential Broadway composer, Richard Rodgers, and his friend, the composer Stephen Sondheim. Rodgers, together with lyricist, Oscar Hammerstein, created timeless musicals including *Oklahoma* (1943), *South Pacific* (1949), and *The Sound of Music* (1965) which created the standard form of the modern musical that is still followed today. *Piazza* was,

² Adam Guettel, “Rodgers and Hammerstein,” *RNH.com*, accessed December 6, 2016.

³ Lucas, “The Light in the Piazza,” *everythingmusicals.com*.

in fact, originally pitched to Rodgers by his daughter and composer Mary Rodgers. Reviewer John Larh notes that “Mary Rodgers suggested to her gloomy father, the composer Richard Rodgers, that he adapt for Broadway Elizabeth Spencer’s “The Light in the Piazza.” The great man demurred. [...] Four decades later, the gifted composer and lyricist Adam Guettel, took up the challenge.”⁴ The musical opened on April 18, 2005 and won six Tony Awards including best performance by a leading actress (Victoria Clarke), best orchestration (Adam Guettel and Ted Sterling) and best original score. Guettel describes *Piazza* as “a tale about emotional ambition, about having had love and losing it, or dreaming about it and finding it for the first time.”⁵ Reviews of the musical were mixed, but most applauded Guettel for his fresh compositional style. In addition to Sondheim and Rodgers, Guettel’s music is also reminiscent of composers such as Stravinsky, Ravel, Britten and even Stevie Wonder,⁶ for it is characterized by gorgeous melodic lines with the undercurrent of dissonance. These moments of harmonic dissonance serve as my point of departure.

Piazza is scored for strings, harp, reeds, piano and percussion; brass is absent from the score. The overture, which is lush and romantic with its sweeping melodic lines for violin, sets the show’s mood. Like his grandfather, Guettel writes melodies which are striking and memorable. While traditional in melodic structure, Guettel’s complex harmonies, however, are more ambitious and sophisticated in approach. By providing repetition in songs coupled with strong melodic themes throughout, the show is musically anchored enough to bear the complexities of his arrangements. Over four minutes long,

⁴ John Lahr, “Innocence Abroad,” *The New Yorker*, February 2, 2005, 90.

⁵ Adam Guettel, “I’m Happiest when I’m in the Middle of it’: Brendan Lemon Meets Adam Guettel as the Composer-Lyricist’s Latest Project Prepares to Open in Seattle,” *Financial Times*, June 13, 2010.

⁶ Erin James, “A Quick Chat with Adam Guettel,” *Aussietheatre.com*, June 3, 2013.

the overture remains bright and up tempo and introduces three of the show's major musical themes, two of which belong to Clara. Guettel selected the harp to begin the overture and immediately establishes a dreamlike mood. What begins as a gentle slow, arpeggiated pattern, quickly crescendos into the first main theme of the show with support from the strings. This sets the tone for the musical: beautiful, free-flowing melodic lines, while underneath a complex, often arpeggiated harmonic structure exists. The intricate harmonies provide the ever-present musical tension that is heard throughout the show.

Established by the violins, the overture's first theme is again repeated at the end of the introduction, but this time it is sung by Clara. It is important to note that we do not see Clara at first; rather we *hear* her. Hers is the first voice featured in the musical and is electronically amplified from offstage. Clara's clear soprano tone mimics the melody played by the violins: there are no words – only Clara singing on an open vowel “ah.” Since the audience does not see her first, her tone suggests the initial essence of her character. In the original Broadway recording, soprano Kelli O'Hara's bright, classically-trained voice is clear and articulate, which implies a strong, confident and intelligent woman. While the melody is vibrant and pure, the underlying orchestration is restless; the piano and harp play a complex and aggressive progression of arpeggios. As the last notes of her opening solo are sung, she steps onstage and our first image of Clara is formed: a blond, beautiful and articulate young woman dressed in a blue sweetheart dress who is discovering Italy for the first time.

Disability on Broadway in 2004

Theatre critic for *The Village Voice*, Julius Novick, argues that *Piazza* worked not because of producers relying on Broadway conventions; instead it appealed to the audience because of the heart and attention to the characters and the compelling nature of the story. Novick notes that “Clara – so fresh and impulsive, so radiant and eager – has the body and feelings of a woman.”⁷ Many reviews, however, had mixed feelings about Clara; there was a common thread of confusion as how to best describe her disability. An Australian reviewer based in New York, David Rooney, attended the show a second time, since he admitted he was too harsh with the first review. Upon seeing it again, he commented on how the actor’s performances had changed since his original negative review of the show. He noted that actress Kelli O’Hara, the original Clara, had, “blossomed into the difficult role of Clara in satisfying ways, bringing darkness and decisiveness to this deceptively uncomplicated, open-hearted girl.”⁸

In a *New York Times* article, Kelli O’Hara discussed her approach to making the character more appealing to audiences. According to O’Hara, “she’s a very fictional person already. From all the studying I’ve done, a person who suffered the trauma she did would likely be overweight, might drool or say inappropriate things. [...] I wanted to find something believable but not repellent, so she could be loved. So, I couldn’t really use any developmentally challenged people as models, and as a result, she at first seemed

⁷ Julius Novick, “The Light in the Piazza,” *Back Stage*, 2005.

⁸ David Rooney, “Return to ‘Piazza’ Sheds More Light,” *Variety*, October, 2005, p.62.

totally normal.”⁹ O’Hara also notes that she approached the character from the angle of childlike innocence, rather than disability. Instead of using spasmodic hand gestures to physicalize Clara, she incorporates childlike motions, such as mimicking a toddler reaching for objects around her. As with all forms of storytelling, one actor’s interpretation can radically change the representation of how a character with disabilities—or any character for that matter—may be presented. In O’Hara’s interpretation, likeability rather than authenticity was ultimately chosen to construct Clara’s disability.

Historically in musical theatre, female characters who appear “different” have often been written in the mezzo range. Supporting characters such as Martha (*The Secret Garden*, 1991), Elphaba (*Wicked*, 2003), and Fantine (*Les Miserable*, 1980), are either comedic or marginalized in some way. As explored in chapter two, when Fosca’s rich, mezzo tone is set against the coloratura soprano sound of Clara, it is easy to hear the difference. I will also argue in the following chapter that the character of bipolar depressive Diana, in *Next to Normal*, sings in a strong mezzo range. Guettel, on the other hand, has approached Piazza in a unique manner. Since Guettel scored Margaret and Clara as sopranos with very similar tones, it is not completely obvious that there is any distinction between “normal” and different. Even visually, Clara’s appearance offers no insight into her condition; her costuming consists of fashionable brightly coloured dresses and high heeled shoes. Although there are subtle physical and musical signs that Clara may be different, it is not until Margaret discloses to the audience that her daughter is disabled that we are privy to the secret.

⁹Jessie Green, “Characters Who Are More Than the Sum of Their Tics,” *New York Times*, June 26, 2005.

In his book, *“Face to Face with Italy,” American Women in Elizabeth Spencer’s The Light in the Piazza*, Yuko Matsukawa explains that “the story sprang out of the tale of the princess with the harelip and the prince who fell in love with her. Love being blind, he could not see her defect.”¹⁰ In a series of reveals, what first appears to be childlike innocence is quickly discovered to be intellectual disability. When Clara meets Fabrizio, who knows very little English, they fall instantly in love. Because of the language barrier, Clara’s disability is not immediately apparent. Throughout the musical, Fabrizio never questions Clara’s mental capacity since he is constantly struggling with the English language, which is somewhat of a disability in and of itself. Clara’s rehabilitation between Act 1 and Act 2 is remarkable and a closer look at the score reveals that Guettel has subtly changed Clara’s musical language to reflect this transformation.

Clara’s Music

The first song in Act 1, “Statues and Stories,” sets up the mother-daughter dynamic as Margaret reads and recites to Clara tales from Italy. While Margaret’s lines consistently remain in a moderate tessitura, Clara’s are often erratic. As Clara sings in measures 23-24, she is visibly excited and Guettel has written many of her musical lines to quickly escalate upward in pitch (ex. 3.1). Although her disability has not yet been disclosed to the audience, her impulsive and unpredictable melodic lines provide sonic indications thereof.

¹⁰ Yuko Matsukawa, *“Face to Face With Italy: American Women in Elizabeth Spencer’s The Light in the Piazza”* (Tokya: Seijo University, 2007), p.8.

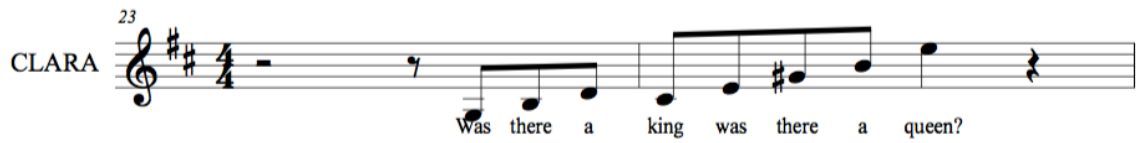


Figure 3.1 “Statues and Stories,” mm. 23-24, the music matches Clara’s excitement as her pitches rise drastically in this short phrase.

Throughout the remainder of the song, a repetitive musical pattern emerges and it becomes clear that Clara is learning from her mother through repetition games, presumably since childhood. As Clara assimilates new information, she quickly repeats lines after Margaret. This device is repeated in other moments in the show which not only demonstrate that Clara finds a sense of comfort and security in repetition, but it also acts as her tool for learning. In example 3.2, Clara repeats both notes and rhythms established by Margaret, a device which Guettel frequently employs when Clara is in situations in which she must learn new information.

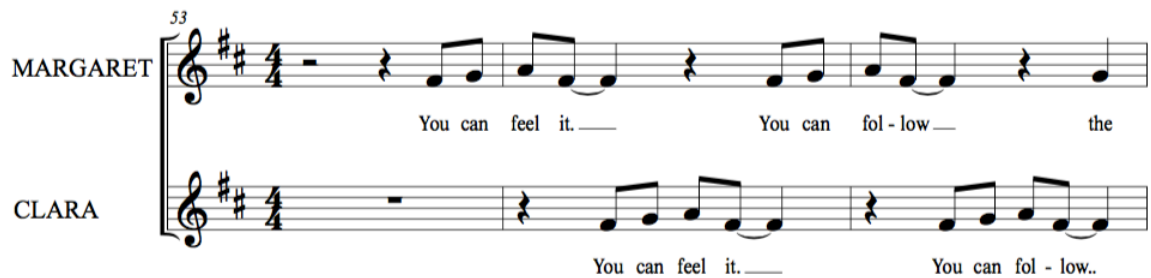


Figure 3.2 “Statues and Stories,” mm. 53-55, Clara repeats short phrases first stated by Margaret.

At first glance, her disability can be difficult to see and hear. Clara now has anonymity; Italy is a place where she is separated from the community who branded her as a disabled girl. As demonstrated in this song, and others in *Piazza*, musical repetition is a way of emotionally connecting with her mother and it is also used as a means to calm and ground her character when in new and potentially frightening situations. As the song

progresses, Clara's repetitions are interrupted because she often gets distracted by the passersby on the streets of Florence. One of these bystanders is Fabrizio, a handsome Florentine, who she meets by the end of "Statues and Stories." There is an immediate attraction. Margaret confides to the audience that Clara has been attracted to boys before. Knowing she may get rejected and hurt, Margaret attempts to keep them apart, but the cunning Fabrizio learns as much as he can about Clara and arranges to meet them later for dinner. As Act 1 progresses, Clara's character becomes more transparent and, specifically, her solo material provides more telling information about her limited cognizant development and how she processes new situations and encounters.

In Clara's first solo, "The Beauty Is," Guettel writes the majority of her melodic lines to replicate spoken speech patterns. In Ana Flavia Zuim's doctoral dissertation, "Speech Inflection in American Musical Theatre Compositions," she investigates the relevance of speech-melody that exists in many Broadway musicals. She explains that "speech-melody is used to refer to the composed melodic line when based on the speech inflections present in the lyrics."¹¹ She argues that composers, such as Guettel, write speech-melody into compositions and she also expresses the importance of text and the delivery of natural-sounding lyrics. Guettel's rhythmic patterns in *Piazza* serve to both enhance and accentuate Clara's Southern accent. In the original Broadway performance, O'Hara was given license to add her own rhythmic variations to the melody, which not only injects the lyrics more of a sense of urgency, it also grounds her character in authenticity.

¹¹ Ana Flavia Zuim, "Speech Inflection in American Musical Theatre Compositions" (Florida: Atlantic University, 2012), 3.

Many insights into Clara’s complex character can be observed when she is permitted to be heard alone, without the guidance or influence of her mother. She reveals the apparent differences she is discovering between her home town, Salem, North Carolina, and Florence. In “The Beauty Is,” Clara discovers that Italy is a place where she can start over; since she is a stranger in a foreign land, she “feels known!”¹² The song, profound in some moments, offers clues into Clara’s limited cognizant development and are displayed by short, impulsive musical phrases. In her article, “Love’s a Fake, Love’s a Fable,” Anna M. Fox notes that Clara’s own sexual desire is sparked in Florence, and she innocently expresses it first in “The Beauty Is.”¹³ Musically, this can be seen in the melody, which is repeated in similar patterns, and introduces the first of many moments where Clara’s melodic lines rise and fall in a wave-like effect, allowing for natural crescendo and decrescendos which, in turn, help to further romanticize the text. The following passage, which includes words like “wanting, praying, holding breath, and fingers crossed,” conjure images of a child who is impatient as she desperately wishes for her dreams to come true (fig. 3.3).

CLARA

51 This is want - ing some - thing. This is pray - ing for it.

53 This is hold - ing breath and keep - ing fin - gers crossed.

Figure 3.3 “The Beauty Is,” mm. 51-54, Guettel has crafted the phrases in both repetitive melodic and rhythmic structures to emphasize Clara’s childlike desires.

¹² Lucas, “The Light in the Piazza,” *everythingmusicals.com*.

¹³ Ann M. Fox, “Love’s a Fake, Love’s a Fable: The Light in the Piazza,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.780.

A common narrative device in the theatre is to “break the fourth wall.” This is a moment where an actor breaks the action of the play and speaks to the audience directly, usually to explain or comment on a particular scene. *The Light in the Piazza* frequently breaks the fourth wall. Margaret uses this device often in the musical to describe her personal take on a situation. These moments, sometimes comedic in nature, serve to reveal clues to Clara’s medical condition. As the show progresses, Margaret breaks the fourth wall many times to describe the day of Clara’s accident. Margaret informs the audience: “When Clara was ten, we rented a Shetland pony for her birthday party, and...the pony kicked her...the doctors told us that her mental and emotional capacities would not develop normally, but her body would continue to develop...”¹⁴

As the musical begins, there is no doubt that Margaret is telling the story; we are not privy to Clara’s perspective. She is transformed from a naïve girl to a woman in love who takes control of her own choices. Margaret, on the other hand, is resistant and constantly reminds Clara that her choices will often come with a price. Clara desperately wants to have a normal life; however, she must first pass as being “normal.” In Act 1 scene 8, unbeknownst to her mother, Clara has received directions from Fabrizio and arranges to sneak away to meet him in a courtyard by the museum. In the song, “Hysteria,” the scene begins with Fabrizio reading the note he wrote to Clara, so that she can find her way alone to meet him in the streets of Florence. The rhythmic pattern that is first established by Fabrizio is then echoed in song by an overly confident Clara. Again, Guettel uses the device of musical repetition as Clara tries to commit the instructions to memory. It is at this point in the musical that we see the full effects of Clara’s disability

¹⁴Lucas, “The Light in the Piazza,” *everythingmusicals.com*.

and “Hysteria” perfectly captures the sonic signatures of Clara: mimicking of Fabrizio’s rhythmical patterns, repetitive phrases and sudden jumps in octaves in unpredictable moments, such as on the repeat of the word, “museo” (fig. 3.4).



Figure 3.4 “Hysteria,” mm. 18-21, while enthusiastically on her way to meet Fabrizio, Clara suddenly jumps more than an octave on the repeat of the word “museo.”

When Clara becomes overwhelmed with being lost and is constantly interrupted by strangers, the music quickly takes a disturbing turn. At this moment, she forgets the directions and begins singing on the vowel “la”. At the same time, Fabrizio sings along with her, but offstage. The music quickly becomes disorientating, all sense of tonality is lost, and Guettel writes in the style of Stravinsky; a pounding, repetitive rhythmic accompaniment, reminiscent of “The Rite of Spring,” mimics the distraught Clara. Once she becomes overwhelmed, she begins to frantically recite her home address in repetition while collapsing to the ground. Subsequently, Margaret finds her daughter in the street and calms Clara by singing a soothing lullaby, calling her “baby Clara.”¹⁵ Clara quickly becomes soothed by the repetitive melody sung by her mother, who is infantilizing her still, even as an adult. Both music and repetition are key factors in how Margaret succeeds in calming Clara during manic episodes and continues to demonstrate the strong bond that exists between mother and daughter.

¹⁵ Lucas, “The Light in the Piazza,” *everythingmusicals.com*.

As each character is introduced, it becomes apparent that Guettel has written a different musical language for each one in *Piazza*. In Act 1, Margaret’s melodies are often in a lower range which mimics the spoken voice, giving her a grounded voice of authority which is the opposite of Clara’s occasional flighty melodic lines. In Act 2, however, when Margaret is in turmoil and must make the difficult decision to allow Clara to marry Fabrizio, her melodic lines and rhythms become much more unpredictable and erratic. Ironically, the result is similar to Clara’s vocal lines in Act 1. These include short impulsive musical thoughts and lines of music that quickly escalate upwards in pitch. In the Act 2 song, “Fable,” Margaret wrestles with the notion of love as she tries to release her motherly hold on Clara (fig. 3.5).



Figure 3.5 “Fable,” mm. 21-23, Margaret’s vocal lines mimic Clara’s in Act 1 as her music quickly rises upward in pitch.

While both Clara and Margaret’s songs may contain colourful and erratic musical lines, they usually stay within a single key. Fabrizio, who sings mostly in Italian, also has distinctive musical characteristics within his solos that differentiate him from the other characters in the musical. Fabrizio’s music, especially in act one, includes frequent modulations. As he becomes excited, especially when singing about Clara, passages in his songs continue to modulate by whole steps. This gives off a somewhat comic effect to the hyper-romanticized style of his declarations of love. Guettel gave Fabrizio’s musical lines a fluid and organic shape; important words receive the strong beat in musical

phrases. In the Italian language, the inflection becomes stronger on important words of the phrase and Guettel mimics this in “Love to Me,” where Fabrizio sings to the distraught Clara. Since Fabrizio is singing in broken English, the incorporation of hemiolas into the melodic line serve to fight the flow of the song (fig. 3.6).

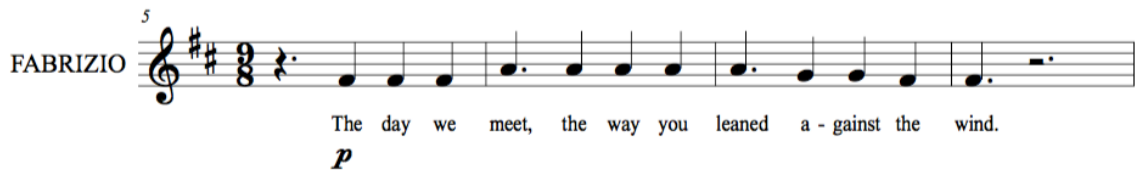


Figure 3.6 “Love to Me,” mm. 5-8, to replicate broken English, Guettel has written hemiolas into Fabrizio’s melodic lines.

In the Act 1 finale, “Say it Somehow,” Clara and Fabrizio try to find a way to solve the language barrier. While it starts with a simple accompaniment in C major, with an almost pop-like melody, the song soon increases with dramatic and musical intensity. Most of the piece is sung in unison, parallel thirds and sixths, which serve to solidify their unity. The song starts with a frustrated Fabrizio struggling to express his emotions in English. In the opening measures, Clara suggests that they play a game, in order to break the language barrier and, as their voices begin to harmonize and intertwine, they both move past verbal language and begin to express themselves through open vowels (fig. 3.7). Fox argues that abandoning spoken words adds a radically different use of disability aesthetics in this moment. She notes that “in making vocalization an expression of disability and an alternately embodied yet equally vaporized source of meaning, this choice also becomes an interpretive accommodation for an English-speaking audience

that has been figuratively disabled by the fact that much of the musical is in Italian, without subtitles.”¹⁶

The image displays a musical score for two characters, FABRIZIO and CLARA, in 4/4 time. Both characters sing the word 'Ah' on an open vowel. The melody is identical for both, starting with a quarter rest followed by a quarter note G4, then a series of eighth and sixteenth notes descending and then ascending. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into two systems: the first system covers measures 53-56, and the second system covers measures 56-59. The second system shows the continuation of the melody for both characters, with the same rhythmic and melodic patterns.

Figure 3.7 “Say it Somehow,” mm. 53-56, while singing on an open vowel and uniting on the same pitch, both Clara and Fabrizio have temporarily solved their language barrier.

Margaret decides that Clara and Fabrizio must be separated and in one last act of protection, Margaret brings her daughter to Rome. Clara’s Act 2 solo, “The Light in the Piazza,” allows an emotional Clara to plead her case to return to Florence to be reunited with Fabrizio. The song itself has many musical sections that contain frequent mood shifts, accelerandos, fermatas and prolonged dramatic passages in which the vocal line requires Clara to sing in an unusually high range. The first verse starts with expressive melodic lines that rise and fall in pitch. As new phrases begin, the same form is followed, although slight changes in pitches increase the intensity of the line. When Clara first

¹⁶ Fox, “Love’s a Fake, Love’s a Fable,” p.783.

mentions the word “light,” she pauses. Musically, the word “the” falls on the first beat of the bar, which is the strong beat in 4/4 time and by doing this, Guettel highlights the uncertainty of Clara’s thoughts. Most of Clara’s songs in the musical feature her repeating phrases of other characters or singing about experiences she has grown up knowing. Clara, in a sense, is now charting new territory in this song as she describes her new-found feelings of love and the beat placement of the word “light” expresses the tentativeness of her thoughts (fig. 3.8).



Figure 3.8 “The Light in the Piazza,” mm. 12-14, as Clara tentatively begins to describe her love for Fabrizio, key words of the phrase are placed on beat 2.

This is a turning point for Clara; her sentiments of love are strong enough to convince Margaret to allow her and Fabrizio to reunite. By the end of the song, Guettel has allowed Clara to musically mature in a subtle manner which suggests that a minor rehabilitation of her disability has occurred. Guettel portrays this in part through beat placement in Clara’s vocal lines. As the song progresses, Clara becomes intent on describing this “light” it in a multitude of ways. Through a series of rallentandos, crescendos and accelerandos, the song features a slow build towards a climax where Clara becomes uncharacteristically eloquent during a moment of extreme emotion. Her vocal lines contain no significant jumps in pitch; she is in control. In the aftermath of this powerful musical passage, the tempo slows and Clara repeats the same lyrics, “the light

in the piazza.”¹⁷ This time, however, the beat placement is slightly different as she places the word “my” of the phrase “my love” on the strong beat (fig. 3.9).

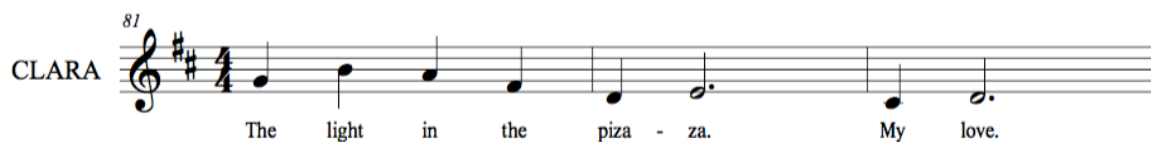


Figure 3.9 “The Light in the Piazza” mm. 81-83, Guettel musically articulates Clara’s declaration of love for Fabrizio.

Once Margaret allows their return to Italy, Clara and Fabrizio reunite and their engagement is announced soon after. Due to Italian church customs of the time, Clara must first master Latin from a local priest before the marriage can take place. To further exemplify her rehabilitation through Act 2, Matsukawa notes that “Clara’s transformation is charted through the ease with which she appropriates both the language and the look of the Italians.”¹⁸ While it appears that Clara is adjusting to Italian life, there is still evidence that her disability exists within the score, although it is masked by cultural differences. In the song “Octet,” Clara is once again learning from repetition as the priest recites texts in Latin and Clara tries her best to replicate the language (fig. 3.10).

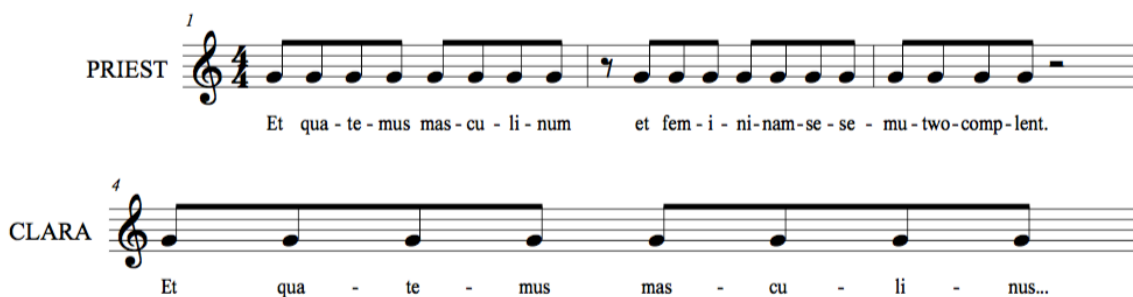


Figure 3.10 “Octet,” mm. 1-4, Clara once again learns from repetition.

¹⁷ Lucas, “*The Light in the Piazza*,” *everythingmusicals.com*.

¹⁸ Matsukawa, “Face to Face with Italy,” p. 24.

Further along in “Octet,” during her Latin lesson, her disability reveals itself from time to time when she becomes distracted and bored from the mundane repetition. These are manifested in random phrases yelled out (in English) by Clara but, once again, her disabled status is masked by the language barrier. This fails to alarm the priest, who is Italian and presumably does not understand the nature of her outbursts. Clara, however, is now aware of her outburst and quickly apologizes which further suggests the continuation of her transformation (fig. 3.11).

The image shows a musical score for two characters, CLARA and PRIEST, in 4/4 time. Clara's part begins at measure 36 with the lyrics "Ol - ly ol - ly ox - en free!" followed by a rest and then "Sor - ry." The Priest's part has a rest in the first measure and then sings "Che a det - to?" in the second measure.

Figure 3.11, “Octet,” mm. 36-37, Clara becomes momentarily distracted and disrupts her Latin class.

After Clara signs the wedding documents, Fabrizio’s father reviews the papers and is visibly upset; he calls the wedding off and abruptly takes Fabrizio home with him. Margaret presumes that her illegible handwriting has given away her disability. It is later revealed, however, that he was unhappy and shocked with Clara’s age of 26; Fabrizio is 18. Sensing that she is being judged for her disability, Clara is devastated. It is here that we hear Clara sing for the final time in the musical. In “Clara’s Interlude,” she again resorts to singing on the open vowel, “ah.” This is reminiscent of the melody she first sang in the overture but the tune is a combination of melodic moments of both “Say it Somehow” and “The Light in the Piazza.” This song, which is partially sung in Italian, is uncharacteristically operatic; Clara’s rehabilitation is also demonstrated at the end of this

piece when she sings the last word: “luce”, which is Italian for “light.” Clara, having been immersed in Italian culture, is now starting to think and respond in the language. In Act 1, most of her musical lines were rising dramatically in pitch and now, the opposite is in effect. At the first of the phrase, she strongly attacks an upper pitch which is then followed by a downward decent of notes (fig.3.12). While Clara is still prone to outbursts, Guettel, with this subtle change of musical inflection, has shown a slight rehabilitation of Clara’s disability and cognizant development since she has arrived in Italy.

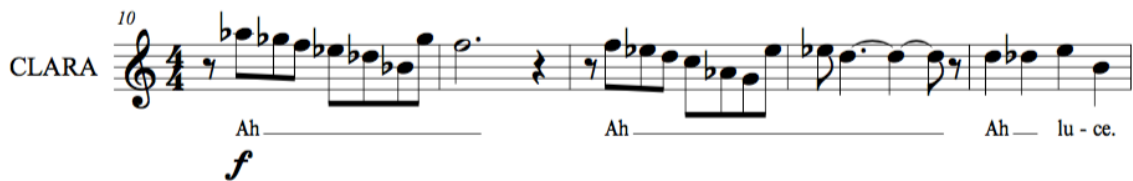


Figure 3.12, “Clara’s Interlude,” mm. 10-14, In a dramatic operatic tone, Clara now expresses herself with a decending vocal line and incorporates the Italian language.

In *Piazza*, Clara’s disability is clearly the “problem” within the story and her function within the narrative becomes clear: the narrative uses disability as an opportunistic device woven through the story for the purpose of ultimately changing the outcome for Margaret. I suggest that the storyline of *Piazza* closely follows Mitchell and Snyder’s narrative prosthesis theory: 1) Clara is first marked as different early in the story; 2) Margaret explains to the audience the “deviance” associated with her daughter; 3) Clara is brought from the periphery to the center of the story; 4) for the remainder of the musical, she is rehabilitated, both mentally and musically. For actress Kelli O’Hara, Clara’s likeability was an important consideration in researching patients with a similar condition and the result was a less-threatening and inaccurate depiction of disability.

Through a nuanced performance by O'Hara, the audience is first led to believe that she is simply overwhelmed and enchanted by Italy. By using a mix of imagination and empathy, O'Hara created a complicated, yet endearing character that an audience would emotionally connect with.

When asked about his compositional process in interviews, Adam Guettel describes his belief that “the characters themselves tell you how to approach writing the music.”¹⁹ He also commented that he tackled the melody first and then the lyrics follow. An analysis of the musical score suggests that Clara's distinctive musical language is apparent and quite consistent in the writing. What is also significant is that Guettel has allowed her to slowly mature musically throughout the play. While this is not changing her disabled status, there is a sense of rehabilitation that takes place between Acts 1 and 2. Initially, Clara is presented to the audience as a naive young woman who seemed prone to brief, excitable musical outbursts but slowly, through agency and subtle musical changes, she matures and ultimately changes Margaret's outlook on love by the end of the musical.

Since Clara's disability is invisible at the beginning of the story, Guettel lays a musical framework to express her mental state in the score, and, as a result, her character is first heard as different. Subtle changes such as fluid legato lines and a decrease in sudden octave jumps in musical passages demonstrate her musical maturity between acts one and two. It can be surmised that Guettel, from the beginning of the writing process, approached writing for disability in a unique and deliberate manner. While the techniques he employs are subtle, they give Clara's character dimension and influence. Even when

¹⁹ Adam Guettel, Interview by Brian Kellow, Opera News, 2004.

her condition appears invisible, Guettel has succeeded in giving Clara a clear and distinctive musical language that aurally sets her apart from the other characters in the show. Therefore, the score of *Piazza* lays a crucial cornerstone for the actor to begin the challenging task of portraying mental impairment in musical theatre.

CHAPTER FOUR

Approaching Bipolar Disorder Through Multiple Genres in *Next to Normal*

“Sing a Song of Forgetting”¹

From *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1970) and *Hair* (1968) to *The Who's Tommy* (1992), *Rock of Ages* (2009) and *Rent* (2006), Broadway audiences have enjoyed rock scores for decades. However, American journalist, Matt Pressman, notes that “most of the shows that made it to Broadway (with the notable exception of *Tommy*) featured somewhat watered-down versions of rock music.”² In the past few years there has been an abundance of successful Broadway musicals with harder-edged, guitar-driven scores. *Next to Normal* (2008), in particular, garnered rave reviews and won the Tony Award for best original score in 2009 and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2010. In the words of Michael Greif, director of the original Broadway production: “To me, *Next to Normal* is like an independent film. I love the honesty of its characters and the riskiness of its concerns. I love how one family's crisis becomes every family's crisis and how all the dirty laundry is left out for everyone to see.”³ The show is a gritty, honest, and shocking look at mental illness and is set against an electrifying pop/rock score; the emotion rings at a heightened level. *Next to Normal* is one of the first major theater productions in the United States to present madness through a contemporary rock musical platform.

¹ Brian Yorkey, *Next to Normal* (New York: Theater Communications Group, 2010), p.65.

² Matt Pressman, “How Rock Became Broadway’s Go-To Genre,” *Vanity Fair*, April 15, 2010.

³ “2010 Pulitzer Prize Winners: Drama,” *Pulitzer Prizes*, accessed March 22, 2017.

Next to Normal is the story of a mother, Diana, who struggles with worsening bipolar disorder and the effects that her treatment has on her family. Diana lost her son, Gabe, when he was a baby, and due to her worsening hallucinations, she (like the audience) still sees him now as a 17-year-old boy and, unbeknownst to her family, frequently interacts with him. Because of Diana's continued delusions, she is pressured by both her husband and doctor to undergo electroconvulsive therapy⁴ (ECT). Due to the subsequent memory loss brought on by the controversial treatment, she is then tested with the task of remembering the past 18 years of her life but with the help of her doctor and family, they devise a system to spark old memories. By the end of the show, Diana leaves her husband and decides to try a life on her own rather than staying in the destructive marriage. The musical addresses issues of drug abuse, suicide, grief and ethics in modern psychiatry and while the subject matter is complex and dark, its brutal honesty resonated with audiences worldwide.

Before this musical was originally produced, experiences with psychiatric medicine or other mental health services were not openly discussed in society, especially in musical theatre. When I myself directed this musical in 2013, many audience members expressed to me their own frustration with taking psychotropic medication and psychiatry's incomplete understanding and poor treatment options. *Next to Normal* sheds light on some of these underrepresented experiences, and therefore can be regarded as a

⁴ Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) is a treatment in which electric currents are applied to the head to induce small seizures for specific patients. These patients include those who are mentally diagnosed for severe depression and other mental illnesses or conditions, including schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and Tourette syndrome.

positive step forward for people suffering from psychosocial disabilities. In an interview, librettist Brian Yorkey commented that:

more families are touched by mental illness than we know—depression, bipolar, and anxiety. For [the] most part, people don't tend to share that. I think we realized that and that's what we wanted to show. An illness like that thrives in the dark, and light may not kill it, but it certainly helps to start the healing.⁵

In many ways, *Next to Normal* offers a unique perspective on the musical representation of disability. I argue that composer Tom Kitt has musically expressed Diana's bipolar disorder through genre-mixing while most of her lyrics, provided by Brian Yorkey, are rich in metaphors. Many of her solos are treated as interior monologues and offer a deep, introspective glance into those suffering with mental illness. I assert that Kitt's combining of genres is fundamental in distinguishing Diana's worsening bipolar disorder. In his book, *Genre in Popular Music*, musicologist Fabian Holt notes that:

naming a music is a way of recognizing its existence and distinguishing it from other musics. The name becomes a point of reference and enables certain forms of communication, control, and specialization into markets, canons and discourses. This process also involves exclusionary mechanisms, and it is often met with resistance.⁶

A Performer's Take on Disability

Diana's disorder is hidden from the audience; it is not till the end of the first song that she suddenly suffers from an unusual, manic episode. As the curtain opens, we see

⁵ Greg Archer, "What's Next for Next to Normal?", *Huffington Post*, February, 1, 2011.

⁶ Fabian Holt, *Genre in Popular Music* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), p.3.

Diana, a suburban mother, anxiously waiting up in the early morning hours for her son, Gabe, to arrive back home. After a brief scene in which she lovingly scolds her son, he leaves the stage and she then comforts her anxious and overachieving daughter, Natalie. After that bizarre exchange, a frantic Diana then helps prepare meals for her family in the song, “Just Another Day.” The audience soon realizes that something is wrong when, instead of making a sandwich, Diana covers the table, chairs, and floor with bread. What is most shocking about this moment is that Diana is presented at the beginning of the show as a stable, albeit high strung, caring mother. Because the script often contains moments of dark humour, the hyper-sensitivity of Diana could easily be overplayed. It is a role which an actress must treat with thoughtful consideration, since she must constantly and tastefully negotiate a character who transitions seamlessly between comedy and tragedy every moment she is on the stage. It is important, for casting purposes, that the actress playing Diana appears to be a woman of “normative beauty that is the very image of an attractive mother on a TV drama.”⁷ The more “normal” looking the actress is, the easier it is to conceal her instability.

Alice Ripley, who premiered the role of Diana on Broadway, is no stranger to tackling characters who have disabilities. Ripley also received a Tony nomination for the role of Violet in *Side Show* (1997) which centered on the lives of conjoined twins Violet and Daisy Hilton. In *Next to Normal*, Ripley approached the role by researching the behavior of people suffering from bipolar disorder and studied treatment options while also learning the effect of drug treatments.⁸ In a 2010 interview, Ripley recalled: “When I

⁷ Charles McNulty, "The Family Next Door is Rocked by Crisis; The Pop Musical 'Next to Normal' Pulses and Ebbs in Its Ahmanson Visit," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 November 2010.

⁸ Barbara Isenberg, “For Alice Ripley, body-swapping is ‘Next to Normal,’” *Los Angeles Times*, November 21, 2010.

was doing my research, I saw how much I *didn't* know and how I could never know what I needed to know. You take a handful out of the grab bag on the Internet, use what you think might be true and, since you're an actor, you can pretend and make it work.”⁹ *Next to Normal* director Michael Greif stated that Ripley “wants to go to the unexplored, surprising and unexpected place, and she really approaches it like a great actor. She's brave. What it's all about for her is examining the truth of the character and the truth of the character's journey.”¹⁰ During the rehearsal process, Ripley spent considerable time developing Diana’s backstory. She initially made intricate collages and diagrams about pills and their side effects, about Diana's range of emotions and even the Goodman family's possible Seattle neighborhood.¹¹ In studying the effects of the drug cocktails Diana must endure for the musical, it helped to see early on "where I would need to be at the beginning of the show. What drugs have I been taking? How has that affected me? What did I do this morning and last night, pill-wise?"¹²

To a certain extent, Diana’s journey in *Next to Normal* closely follows Joseph Campbell’s influential *The Hero’s Journey* (see figure 4.1).¹³ This narrative pattern appears in drama, storytelling, myth, religious ritual, and psychological development. It describes the typical adventure of the archetype known as ‘the hero’, the person who goes out and achieves great deeds on behalf of the group, tribe, or civilization.¹⁴

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Isenberg, “For Alice Ripley, body-swapping is ‘Next to Normal.’”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero's Journey: Joseph Campbell on His Life and Work* (California: New World Library, 1990).

¹⁴ Ibid.

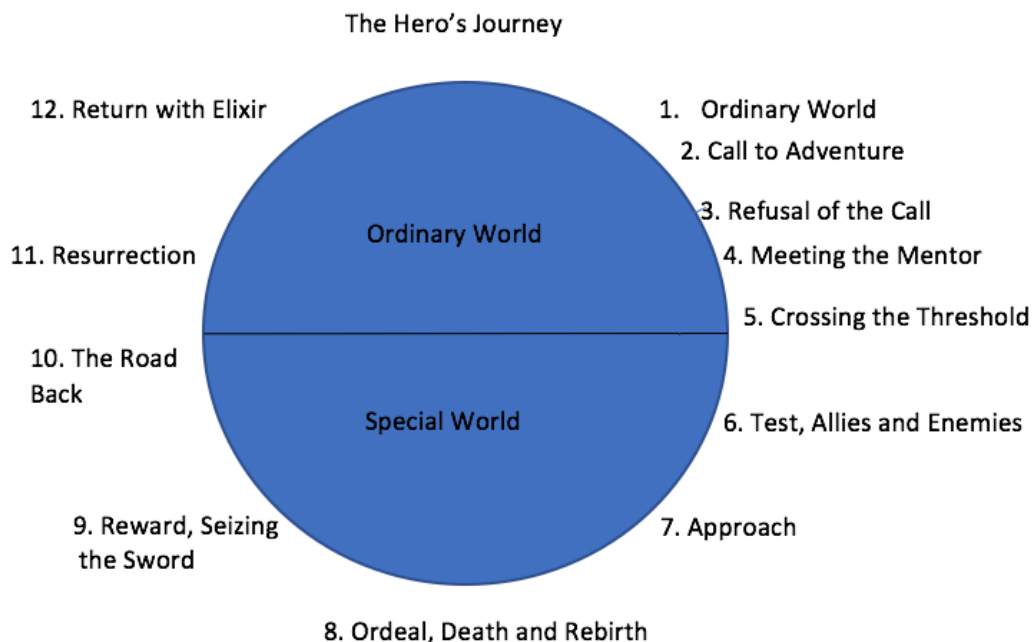


Figure 4.1 Chart displaying the order of Joseph Campbell's The Hero's Journey.

Corresponding to the numbers on the table, Diana's story follows more than half of the journey laid out by Campbell. *Next to Normal* opens in an "ordinary world" (1) where Diana interacts with her family and prepares lunches for them as they start their day. After many delusional episodes and a failed suicide attempt, Diana is encouraged by both her doctor and her husband, Dan, to try ECT therapy to deal with her deteriorating mental state (2). Initially, Diana has reservations (3), but, after added pressure from her husband and a meeting with the doctor who will perform the procedure, (4) she agrees to undergo this controversial treatment (5). After the treatment, she is then tested by trying to find a way of remembering the past 18 years of her life (6) but with the help of her doctor and family, they devise an approach to figure a way in which to recover her missing memories (7).

The deterioration of the marriage (8), which is a death in and of itself, and Diana's ultimate decision to leave is where her hero's journey ends. Now that Diana is gone, the road back (10) focuses on mending the relationship of Dan and Natalie. In a less than perfect happy ending, the entire family sings the song entitled "Light" where Diana is highlighted as still estranged from her family. While her appearance in the finale is somewhat of a resurrection (11), the reality is that little is known about her whereabouts. The end of this "hero's journey" falls in line with Mitchell and Snyder's theory of narrative prosthesis where expunging Diana from the storyline effectively "fixes the deviance."¹⁵

Diana's Music

Diana's musical journey begins with the song, "Just Another Day" and the first of many musical genres is introduced. As Diana describes a typical day in her household, an acoustic guitar is heard. Kitt chose the folk-rock genre to begin the show; the choice of instrumentation is light and unthreatening, setting the tone to be, at most, a light family drama. Historically, folk music has had a crucial role in shaping the aesthetics and boundaries of popular music. Holt explains that "the relation between folk and popular musics has frequently been one of opposition."¹⁶ Furthermore, he notes that "folkloric images of life in a rural past, for instance, have been a major source of fascination in popular music, even in urban settings."¹⁷ *Next to Normal* is set in an unknown urban city

¹⁵ David Mitchell, Sharon Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011) p.53.

¹⁶ Holt, *Genre in Popular Music*, p.31.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.31.

and the first glance we have of this American household is that of a normal, middle-class family dealing with the everyday challenges of life. Diana's disability, at this point, is invisible to the audience; she appears to be a concerned mother who cares for her children and family. However, signs of her disorder are disguised in the script and often are initially presented in a comedic manner. For example, as Diana comforts her anxiety-ridden daughter, Natalie, her motherly advice is anything but appropriate:

Diana: Honey you need to slow down, take some time for yourself. I'm going to have sex with your father.¹⁸

As the opening number continues, Diana begins to show signs of anxiety, albeit in a comedic manner, as she prepares lunches for her family as they begin their day. In a slow progression of increased tempos and crescendos, the song's finale, both dramatically and musically, is both shocking and unexpected. Symptoms of bipolar disorder, such as manic episodes, can be triggered by stress,¹⁹ and Kitt has musically expressed this in the opening number. Diana's melodic line becomes fragmented and repetitive and, as if mimicking shortness of breath, the amount of time between sentences becomes quicker and more urgent. Kitt manages to create this instability by increasing the tempo and abruptly changing the time signature between 6/4, 4/4 and 3/4 in rapid succession. This instance of melodic disfluency is the first time that Diana is musically differentiated from the other characters (fig. 4.1).

¹⁸Yorkey, *Next to Normal*, p.9.

¹⁹ Mitchell Philip, "Bipolar Disorder." *Australian Family Physician* 42, no. 9, 2013.

DIANA

198

We're the per-fect lov - ing fam - ly I will keep the plates all spin -

201

- ning and the world just keeps — on spin - ning.

Figure 4.2 “Just Another Day,” mm 198-203, contains the first sonic indicator of disability in *Next to Normal*.

The third song in the musical, “My Psychopharmacologist and I,” depicts a typical doctor’s appointment for Diana. The number opens with Dr. Fine prescribing a cocktail of medications which illustrates the complexities and seemingly haphazard nature of Diana’s treatments. The scene covers a wide range of medical visits and, based on which drug she is taking, she fluctuates between confusion and lucid thoughts. As the scene opens, Dr. Fine explains to Diana the complexities of her new pill regimen:

Doctor Fine: The pink ones are taken with food but not with the white ones. The white ones are taken with the round yellow ones but not with the triangle yellow ones. The triangle yellow ones are taken with the oblong green ones with food but not with the pink ones. If a train is leaving New York at a hundred and twenty miles an hour and another train is leaving St. Petersburg at the same with but going backwards, which train...²⁰

The song then morphs into many musical styles including waltz and improvisatory jazz “that is reminiscent of Bacharach in style, musically symbolizing the improvisational, even haphazard, nature of Diana’s treatment.”²¹ Between the vocal

²⁰ Yorkey, *Next to Normal*, p.16.

²¹ Ann M. Fox, “Give Me Pain if that’s What’s Real,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.788.

sections of this song, the scenes with Diana and Dr. Fine are underscored with improvisatory-jazz inspired music which heighten the absurdity of the trial and error nature of Diana’s prescriptions. The song, however, begins in a sultry waltz with Diana singing in a seductive tone and, in a tongue in cheek manner, describes the patient-doctor relationship as anything but a fair partnership. Diana’s mix of humor and seduction is heightened by Kitt’s use of strategic rests and beat placement (fig. 4.2).

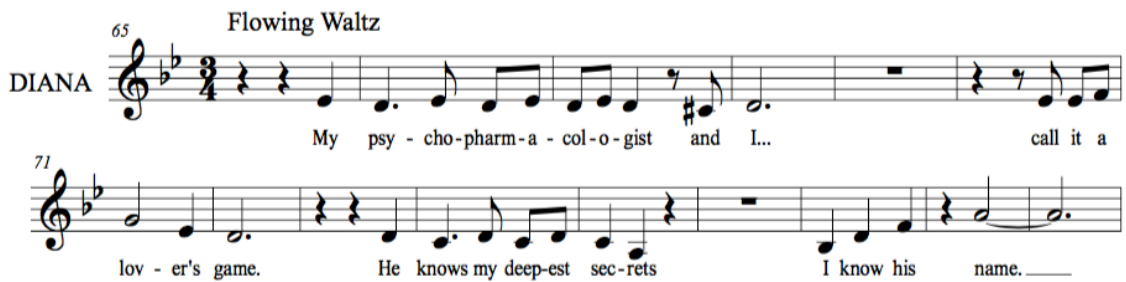


Figure 4.3 “Who’s Crazy/ My Psychopharmacologist and I,” m.65-79, where Diana humorously breaks the fourth wall and describes her take on the unequal doctor/patient relationship.

The waltz is considered a sophisticated social dance by contemporary standards, but, historically, it has a scandalous history. The dance is based on the German word *walzen*, “to revolve,”²² was set to 3/4 meter and involved couples rotating around the dance floor. However, it was not the rotation that gave the waltz its notoriety. It was the position that the dancers took: a “closed” dance position, face to face. While this seems innocent enough in today's dance world, at the time it horrified many members of elite society. In her 1771 novel, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, Sophie von La Roche (1730- 1807) described it as the “shameless, indecent whirling-dance of the

²² “Waltz,” *Grove Music Online*, published January 20, 2001.

Germans that broke all the bounds of good breeding.”²³ In *Next to Normal*'s seductive waltz, Diana causes sexual tension as she shamelessly flirts with her doctor. To further illustrate the imbalance of Diana's thoughts, Kitt samples from the popular family musical *The Sound of Music*. The song, “My Favorite Things,” which is sung by the other characters, is used to somewhat satirize the absurdity of the treatment process (fig. 4.3).

125

NATALIE

A - ti - van calms me when I see the bills... these are a few of my fav - o - rite pills.

GABE
DAN
HENRY

A - ti - van calms me when I see the bills... these are a few of my fav - o - rite pills.

Figure 4.4 “Who’s Crazy/ My Psychopharmacologist and I” mm 125- 132, Kitt has added a musical sampling from *The Sound of Music* to further illustrate Diana’s thought process.

Many visits to the doctor later, she complains of a noticeable change in her energy and mood. Musically, Kitt slowly decreases the tempo to almost a complete standstill which is reflective of Diana’s current mental state and the doctor seems satisfied with the results. The scene ends with a statement which speaks to the consequences of overmedication:

Dr. Fine (spoken): Goodman, Diana. Seven weeks.
 Diana (spoken): I don't feel like myself. I mean, I don't feel anything.
 Dr. Fine (spoken): Hmph. Patient stable.²⁴

²³ Sophie von La Roche, *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, Weidmann, 1771.

²⁴ Brian Yorkey, *Next to Normal* (New York: Theater Communications Group, 2010), p.22.

Later in Act 1, after Diana witnesses Natalie kiss her new boyfriend, Henry, for the first time, she begins to worry that her best years may be behind her. The song, “I Miss the Mountains” begins as a simple country ballad where Diana recalls her youth and compares her own journey to that of her troubled daughter, Natalie. Country music, which is reflective of the rural white American working class,²⁵ follows both themes of earnest reflections of the past and nostalgia. Written in a country style, “I Miss the Mountains” sets the scene for Diana to recall a time where she felt emotional highs and lows which are now deadened by prescription drugs. In the tranquil introduction, Diana has a moment of self-awareness and recalls her prescription-free past:

There was a time when I flew higher,
Was a time the wild girl running free
Would be me.
Now I see her feel the fire,
Now I know she needs me there
To share.
I’m nowhere.
All these blank and tranquil years,
Seems they’ve dried up all my tears.
And while she runs free and fast,
Seems my wild days are past.²⁶

The song is self-reflective and examines her youth; she reveals that she, in fact, misses her manic past. Diana worries that Natalie will suffer the same fate as her and even experiences a bit of jealousy towards her daughter’s youth and freedom. This self-awareness that Diana expresses moves her character forward and propels her to dispose of her medication by the end of the song. Director Scott Miller notes, “There are

²⁵ Dwayne Eng, “Musical Cultures: To What Extent is the Language Used in the Song Lyrics of Hip-Hop and Country Music Reflective of and Shaped by Cultural Beliefs and Experiences?” *International Journal of English Linguistics*, Vol. 3. No. 5, 2013.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.26.

wonderful, almost hidden interior rhymes, like *blank* and the first part of *tranquil*, a trick Yorkey uses throughout the score.”²⁷ Alliteration is also effectively employed throughout this passage and includes –the *f*’s on the words “feel” and “fire, the *w*’s in the first three lines and the last two lines, and the *n* sounds, particularly in the fifth line in which the words “need” and “know” are empathized. Yorkey’s clever use of language, particularly in this song, serves as a window into the past where Diana is seemingly free of anger and resentment, and the eloquent lyrics highlight her clarity of mind before she began taking her medication.

Continuing the dramatic arc and helping aid Diana’s transition into another delusional episode, Kitt uses Hoedown to illustrate the seemingly perfect family on the edge of another meltdown. Kitt transitions out of the peacefulness of the country genre into the pulsing and relentless duple meter of the Hoedown in the song, “It’s Gonna be Good.” The Hoedown is considered “a noisy, riotous dance competition held in a social setting.”²⁸ Furthermore, this dance “involves jigs, reels, and clog dances are mainly associated with rural whites in Appalachia.”²⁹ Dan, as if convincing himself, sings in an uncharacteristic comedic manic style and explains that the new round of medication Diana is taking seems to be working well:

Dan: It’s gonna be great.
It’s gonna be great.
The sex is still amazing and we don’t stay out that late.
It’s almost been a month and she’s as happy as a clam.
Do I look great? I am!³⁰

²⁷ Scott Miller, “Inside Next to Normal,” *New Line Theatre*, 2012.

²⁸ Claude Conyers, “Hoedown,” *Oxford Music Online*, February 6, 2012.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Yorkey, *Next to Normal*, p.28.

The song's comically up-tempo pace perfectly demonstrates the unhinging of the family's stability and the urgent need for the façade of normalcy as their daughter, Natalie, invites her new boyfriend, Henry, to the house for the first time. Musically, Dan takes the lead, but Diana is featured in various frenzied states which culminates, to the horror of her family, with her serving a birthday cake to her son who died as a baby seventeen years ago.

Diana: (spoken) Okay, it's someone's birthday!

Henry: (spoken) Whose birthday is it?

Natalie: (spoken) My brother's.

Henry: (spoken) I didn't know you had a brother.

Natalie: (spoken) I don't. He died before I was born.³¹

To control an uncomfortable situation, Dan tackles the subject head on and tries to rationalize with Diana and explains that their son is not here and that she should go back to the doctor and try a new round of medication. Up until this point in the show, Diana has remained relatively calm amidst her worsening mental condition. Mounting frustration and anger are released in the song, "You Don't Know" and, curiously, Kitt switches to rock. After the pulsing electric guitar introduction, Diana vividly describes to Dan what it is like to live with bipolar disorder (fig. 4.4). Musically, Kitt expresses Diana's anger in a lower register and the use of sixteenth notes followed by dotted eighth notes serves as an effective combination to highlight and emphasize lyrics such as "you."³²

³¹ Yorkey, *Next to Normal*, p.31.

³² This rhythmic pattern, which is repeated often, is first used by the character of Diana in the show which highlights a significant sonic signature of disability. Kitt also utilizes the same rhythmic structure in Dan's Act 1 solo entitled "I've Been" in which he has just learned that Diana has attempted suicide.

Hard Rock ♩ = 98

DIANA

Do you wake up in the morn - ing and need help to life ___ your head? Do you
read o - bit - u - ar - ies and feel jeal - ous of ___ the dead?

Figure 4.5 “You Don’t Know,” mm 3-7, in which Diana explains to Dan what it’s like living with bipolar disorder.

Earlier in the show, during one of Diana’s delusional episodes, Diana’s 17-year-old son (who passed away as a child), Gabe, appeared and sang a rock-inspired song entitled, “I’m Alive.” This is the first instance of rock being used in the musical. The song is laced with bitterness and anger and is a taunting reminder that no matter what course of treatment Diana chooses, she will still experience him in delusional episodes. “I’m Alive” celebrates Gabe as a rock star of sorts and now, in the song, “You Don’t Know,” Diana has taken hold of this anger and it is again expressed as a rock song. The use of rock songs, which is traditionally a masculinist genre,³³ is significant in portraying Diana’s moods of anger and frustration. Diana’s journey from folk, jazz, country and finally to rock music is integral to her medical and musical storyline. With the intent to make Dan understand her condition, Diana reveals to him the unsettling effects of living with bipolar disorder. Popular music scholar Marion Leonard notes, “implicit within the concept of subversion are the issues of intent and effect. The intent is to mock, undermine or overturn well-established or dominant modes of thought, power or behavior.”³⁴ In

³³ Kristen Lieb, *Gender, Branding and the Modern Music Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p168.

³⁴ Marion Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007.), p.25.

transitioning to the rock genre, Diana herself is now behaving in a subversive manner and this momentarily overturns the power balance in the relationship.

Diana's rock songs only intensify as the end of Act 1 approaches. After a failed suicide attempt, a distressed Diana aggressively confronts her doctor while he tries to explain the ECT procedure. In the song, "Didn't I See This Movie," Diana is hostile and combative as her new doctor tries to convince her to undergo ETC treatment. Diana is fearful that she will lose her memories and is resistant to the notion that she is so ill that this procedure is the only alternative left. The lyrics of the song begin by describing the movie, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." The lyrics reveal that Diana recalls seeing the film as a young woman and admits that she found the movie distressing and walked out before the it was finished. Musically, the introduction begins with an aggressive repetitive eighth note riff established with the electric guitar. When Diana's vocal line begins, she mimics both the guitar's established rhythm and pitch. With "Didn't I See This Movie," Kitt has once again solidified that rock is the genre which musically represents Diana in agitated states of distress (fig. 4.5).

Rock out ♩ = 174

DIANA

Did-n't I see___ this mov - ie, with Mc - Mur - phy and___ the nurse?

mp (Vamp- Vocal last time)

4

That hos - pi - tal___ was heav - y but this cuck -

7

- oo's nest___ is worse___

The image shows a musical score for the song "Didn't I See This Movie" from the musical "Rocky Horror Show". It is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 174 beats per minute. The score is for Diana, with lyrics in English. The music is in a rock style, featuring a driving bass line and a melodic vocal line. The score is divided into three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment is marked *mp* (mezzo-piano) and includes a vamp section labeled "(Vamp- Vocal last time)". The lyrics are: "Did-n't I see___ this mov - ie, with Mc - Mur - phy and___ the nurse? That hos - pi - tal___ was heav - y but this cuck - - oo's nest___ is worse___".

Figure 4.6 “Didn’t I See This Movie,” mm 1-8, serves as the second instance where Kitt uses the rock genre to represent Diana in an agitated mental state.

Act 2 opens with the song, “Wish I Were Here,” which is split between Diana, who is undergoing the ECT procedure, and Natalie, who is seen drinking and presumably taking drugs at a local nightclub. Staging in most productions includes a Diana double

who is placed in a hospital bed while the “real” Diana watches the ECT procedure and sings from another position onstage. The song ultimately unites both Diana and Natalie in an alternative reality where they are both hallucinating:

Diana: Sweetheart! What are you doing in my electricity?

Natalie: It’s always about you, isn’t it? I’m Robotripping. I can’t feel my legs.

Diana: I don’t want you doing drugs.

Natalie: That’s persuasive, coming from the Pfiser Woman of the Year. You’re the one who’s hallucinating.

Diana: It’s my treatment. It’s a miracle. Everything is different now.

Natalie: I know what you mean.³⁵

Musically, “Wish I Were Here” incorporates a fusion of two genres which represent both Diana and Natalie and their altered states of consciousness. The song indicates that the piece is “trippy rock/funk”³⁶ and includes a section of “double time punk feel.”³⁷ I am suggesting that the trippy rock represents Diana amid her ECT treatment and the punk sections apply to Natalie’s experimentation with drugs and alcohol. Trippy, or psychedelic rock, is usually associated with hallucinogenic drugs and is thus a suitable genre to represent Diana’s mind-altering procedure. Punk, a protest genre, lends itself well to Natalie’s rebellious nature and her decision to use drugs to cope with her growing depression and anxiety. The music is typically hostile in nature, and, “spread as an ideology and an aesthetic approach, becoming an archetype of teen rebellion and alienation.”³⁸ Fused together, the two genres cause Diana and Natalie to meet musically on common ground.

³⁵ Yorkey, *Next to Normal*, p.61-62.

³⁶ Tom Kitt, *Next to Normal* (New York: Alfred Publishing, 2004) Vocal score, p.167.

³⁷ Kitt, *Next to Normal*, p.172.

³⁸ Allan F Moore, “Punk Rock,” *Grove Music Online*, published January 20, 2001.

Once the doctor applies the electrodes to Diana’s head, a distorted electric guitar is heard wailing which sets the tone for both mother and daughter meeting in this alternative reality. While Diana sings, Kitt frequently switches time signatures in rapid succession from 4/4 to 2/4 and 3/4 (fig.4.6). The lyrics describe how doctors do not know how the procedure will change Diana’s mind and to musically support this, Kitt uses varying time signatures to parallel the instability she is experiencing.

The image shows a musical score for Diana's part in the song "Wish I Were Here". It consists of two staves of music in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The first staff, starting at measure 39, shows a sequence of time signature changes: 3/4, 4/4, 2/4, and 3/4. The lyrics "And they told me it — would change me though they don't know how it" are written below the notes. The second staff, starting at measure 42, shows a 3/4 time signature and the lyric "does." followed by a long note with a fermata. The dynamic marking *mf* is placed below the second staff.

Figure 4.7 “Wish I Were Here,” mm. 39-43, constant time signature changes and crescendos add dimension to Diana’s ECT treatment.

Furthermore, when both mother and daughter finally meet in Diana’s shock-induced delusion, both are united in their shared but individual experience of being in this altered reality. As they sing in a slightly haphazard combination of unison and harmony, their musical lines often cross over each other and the feeling of disorientation is also musically aided by the 7/8 time signature (fig. 4.7).

DIANA
It slips my skin and trips my brain. I

NATALIE
It slips my skin and trips my brain. I

feel the burn but I don't feel the pain.

feel the burn but I don't feel the pain.

Figure 4.8 “Wish I Were Here,” mm. 81-86, contain harmonic dissonance as Natalie and Diana describe being in an altered state of reality together.

Act 2 focuses on the aftermath of Diana’s ECT treatment; the procedure has given Diana retrograde amnesia and has effectively wiped away memories from the past nineteen years of her life, including all memories of her son, Gabe, who died six months after birth. For Diana, many of the songs in Act 2 stay in the pop genre and, aside from a few exceptions, her music closely resembles the melodic structure of the other characters. For instance, in the trio, “Song of Forgetting,” Diana’s musical lines are quite similar in tempo and are rhythmically constant with Dan and Natalie’s melodies. Extreme emotions by Dan and Natalie, however, are now expressed in different genres. Curiously, in a moment of sudden rage, Natalie’s music becomes intense as Kitt breaks away from the established 4/4 time signature and again revives the punk genre in a jarring 7/8 time to express Natalie’s frustration with her mother’s illness. Measures later, Dan, in an uncharacteristically rock tone, joins Natalie and defends his stance on Diana’s treatment.

As he sings, he gradually brings order back to the chaos and the song eventually arrives in a stable 4/4 time until the end of the piece (fig.4.8)

51 NATALIE *f* What a love - ly cure.. it's a me-di-cal mir-a-cle.

53 With a mind so pure _____ that she does-n't know an - y - thing.

55 DAN *mf* It's there I'm sure 'cause mem-'ries don't die. _____

Figure 4.9 “Song of Forgetting,” mm. 51- 58, in which Dan and Natalie both sing in the punk genre while engaged in an argument about Diana’s medical condition.

As Act 2 progresses, Diana is left confused and troubled after a series of what her son calls “aftershocks.”³⁹ In the song, “You Don’t Know, (Reprise)” Diana, once again, returns to the rock genre as she angrily accuses Dr. Madden that the ECT treatment is disturbing since her memory returns at unexpected moments. Furthermore, her use of profanity signals her growing desperation caused by the ECT treatment and this, coupled with reappearance of rock, adds to the intensity of the song. The lyrics help to illustrate this moment:

Doctor Madden: Does the puzzle come together
 Piece by piece and row by row?
 Diana: I don’t know
 I don’t know
 Where the fucking pieces go.⁴⁰

³⁹ Yorkey, *Next to Normal*, p.75.

⁴⁰ Yorkey, *Next to Normal*, p.79.

Diana finally reaches her breaking point when the memories of her son’s death come flooding back in full force. Aside from reliving the painful memories, she also begins to once again experience disturbing delusions of her son, Gabe. At her most aggressive and in arguably her most intense scene, Diana confronts the doctor one last time before ultimately deciding to abandon further medical treatment. Kitt takes genre mixing one dramatic step forward and composes the song “The Break” in Thrash metal, which, because of its extreme aggression, is an extreme subgenre of heavy metal music. The music often featured low-register guitar riffs overlaid with a frenetic bass drum pattern - the two essential elements of what came to be known as thrash metal.⁴¹ Kitt has written “The Break” in a similar manner to this 80’s subgenre; it combines both double bass drumming and a heavy and complex electric guitar riff, heard in the introduction. Diana sings her lyrics in a quick and exasperated manner and her melody is now reduced to clusters of repetitive rhythms of eighth notes (fig. 4.9). She accuses both the doctor and the medical profession on their lack of knowledge in treating patients with bipolar disorder

The image shows a musical score for Diana's lyrics in the song "The Break". It consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff starts at measure 24 and contains the lyrics: "They tried a mill-ion meds and they strapped me to their beds and they". The second staff starts at measure 27 and contains the lyrics: "shrugged and told me 'that's the way it goes." The music is characterized by repetitive eighth-note patterns. A dynamic marking of *mf* is placed between the two staves.

Figure 4.10 “The Break,” mm. 24-28, Throughout the song, Diana’s melodies contain recurring rhythmic groupings as well as repetitive melodic lines.

⁴¹ Joel McIver, “A History of Thrash Metal,” *Music Radar*, April 29, 2010.

To conclude, the musical genres present in *Next to Normal* serve a purpose: through this mixing, there is a constant build which climaxes at the moment Diana decides to forgo further treatment and ultimately leave her family. These genres not only musically support Diana's medical journey, but, depending on the musical aggression in the song being used, they allow each extreme emotion she is feeling to be heightened through the music. As Diana recalls certain memories from her past, Kitt has matched the mood she is experiencing with specific genres. In Act 2, once Diana has no recollection of the last 19 years of her life, Kitt has limited her musical expression to a more simplified light pop sound. However, once memories come flooding back, so do the more extreme genres that were more present in Act 1.

The finale of *Next to Normal* shows Diana living on her own but little is revealed of her medical condition. What is clear is that the relationship between both Dan and Natalie is dramatically improved. Perhaps what makes *Next to Normal* so shocking and devastating to audiences is that it confronts the stigma attached to mental illness head-on, with no apology. This musical does not have the typical happy ending that Broadway audiences have grown accustomed to. Through Diana, audiences can live vicariously through her experience but from a safe distance. *Next to Normal* does not sugarcoat mental illness; although gritty and raw, its portrayal of bipolar disorder still can transport an audience and provide theatre that can heal and promote discussion on mental health. Perhaps the moral of the musical, which is sung by Diana in the show's finale, is simply that of survival. As she stands alone, separated from her family, her final lyrics in the

show resonates strongly: “And you find some way to survive, and you find out you don’t have to be happy at all to be happy that you’re alive.”⁴²

⁴² Kitt, *Next to Normal*, p.101.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Disability has a specific sound in contemporary musical theatre. *Passion*, *The Light in the Piazza* and *Next to Normal* all contain sonic markers to indicate mental impairment for female characters. These include musical repetition, frequent meter changes, large interval jumps, and melodies that resemble speech inflection (See table 5.1). There were, however, two specific areas in which Sondheim, Guettel, and Kitt were united in their writing for female characters with mental impairment. *Passion*, *Piazza* and *Next to Normal* all contain moments of melodic disfluency and dramatic increases in tempos which are dictated by the character’s sudden mood shifts.

<i>Passion</i>	<i>The Light in the Piazza</i>	<i>Next to Normal</i>
Melodic disfluency	Melodic disfluency	Melodic disfluency
Tempos are affected by Fosca’s mood changes	Tempos are affected by Clara’s mood changes	Tempos are affected by Diana’s mood changes
Phrase endings which drop significantly in pitch suggest shortness of breath	Repetition of musical phrases while assimilating new information	Repetition of melodic phrases in moments of confusion
Large interval jumps on key words of a phrase	Phrases that quickly rise upward in pitch	Frequent meter changes in dramatic moments
Speech inflection created by frequent meter and time signature changes	Emphasis on unimportant words in phrases	Genre mixing to represent stages of treatment of bipolar disorder
Solos contain many differing musical sections	Sudden octave jumps	Aggressive use of dotted eighth and sixteenth notes in agitated states

Table 5.1 “Catalogue of Sonic Markers of Disability”

Musicals which contain narratives involving disabled characters continue to be very popular in musical theatre since audiences are drawn to plots in which characters overcome their disabilities. The stories in musicals such as *Passion*, *The Light in the Piazza* and *Next to Normal* do not center on issues of disability itself; the narratives appropriate characters with mental impairments who are marked as different and create a problem which must be solved. In *Narrative Prosthesis*, Mitchell and Snyder both note that disability “has been used as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight.”¹ By the end of all three stories, Fosca, Clara, and Diana are the igniting force for transformation for the enabled characters of the show. In *Passion*, Giorgio has learned about a deeper, truer love; in *Piazza*, Margaret has learned that the chance of love outweighs the terrible risk; and in *Next to Normal*, Dan and his daughter Natalie grow closer only once Diana has left. At the end of each musical rehabilitation of disability has occurred in some manner; Fosca has died, Clara is granted permission to marry, and Diana leaves to start a new life for herself. This “repair of deviance”² ensures an ending which is not tragic and fulfills the audience’s desire for resolution.³

Disability rights activist, Susan Nussbaum states that “the disabled characters we’re presented with usually fit one or more of the following stereotypes: victim, villain, inspiration, or monster.”⁴ To further support the argument that non-disabled characters

¹ David Mitchell, Sharon Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), p.49.

² *Narrative Prosthesis*, p.53.

³ Blake Howe, “Music and Disability Studies: An Introduction,” February 9, 2014.

⁴ Susan Nussbaum, “Disabled Characters in Fiction,” *Huffingtnpost.com*, Updated January 23, 2014.

are changed for the better as a result of their interactions with disabled characters, Nussbaum provides the following formula: “Disabled Victim + Self- involved non-disabled protagonist = Cured Victim + Redeemed non-disabled Protagonist.”⁵ Indeed, Fosca (*Passion*) and Diana (*Next to Normal*) are both victims in the story while Clara (*Piazza*) is an inspiration. As all three stories conclude, the non-disabled characters have, in some manner, transformed due to their involvement with these disabled characters.

The representation of characters with disabilities in theatre, for the most part, rests solely on the actor’s (or director’s) interpretation. While actors may carry out research and conduct interviews with people living with disabilities with the intent to present a character that is authentic, in the end, likeability is usually chosen to depict the disability. Audience reaction, especially during previews, can not only modify the content of the musical, but can also drastically alter characterizations involving disability. Kelli O’Hara (*Piazza*) ultimately chose to present Clara’s disability as childlike innocence and director James Lapine (*Passion*) suggested that actress Donna Murphy lessen Fosca’s deforming makeup. Lately, there has been a call for theatre companies to create opportunities for artists with a variety of intellectual, physical and emotional disabilities to be cast in major theatrical productions, thus illuminating the human experience for actors and audience alike.⁶

In recent years, Broadway has begun to include disabled actors in major productions.⁷ In September 2014, Deaf West Theatre premiered a new concept of *Spring*

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ KC Wright, “9 Theatre Companies Celebrating Actors with Disabilities,” *Backstage.com*, February 16, 2016.

⁷ Theatre companies such as Detour Company Theatre, Phamaly Theatre Company, National Theatre of the Deaf, Identity Theatre, Theater Breaking Through Barriers and That Uppity Theater Company are creating projects which promote inclusion for artists with disabilities.

Awakening which incorporated nineteenth-century appropriate aspects of oralism in deaf education to complement the existing themes of miscommunication, lack of proper sex education, and denial of voice.⁸ The production, which garnered rave reviews for its inclusion of disabled actors and themes, was a bold departure from the original Broadway production. Other recent productions, such as *Marathon of Hope: The Musical* (2016), were not as successful in their depiction of disability. The new musical, which centers on the story of Terry Fox and his famous fundraising journey from St. John's to Thunder Bay, was panned by both activists and reviewers for casting an able-bodied actor in the role of Fox. As part of the costume, the actor's real right leg was covered in a black stocking – and a replica of Fox's famous prosthetic was attached to the front of it.⁹ In a review of the Canadian premiere, J. Kelly Nestruck commented that it sends a message that “while a young man with one leg may be able to run 5,373 kilometres, there is no room for anyone with atypical abilities in musical theatre.”¹⁰ The depiction of disabled characters in musical theatre continues to be problematic when representation is largely reliant on research that is carried out by able-bodied actors and directors.

Musicology, including ethnomusicology and music theory, has been slow to embrace the discipline of disability studies, which has witnessed an impressive burst of scholarly activity since around 2005.¹¹ Disability, once interpreted as a defect or abnormality, is now understood to be an important and valuable component of identity

⁸ Deborah Vankin, “Deaf West Theatre makes Tony winner *Spring Awakening* all its own,” *The LA Times*, September 25, 2014.

⁹ J. Kelly Nestruck, “Marathon of Hope: The Musical undermines Terry Fox's inspiring story,” *The Globe and Mail*, October 12, 2016.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Blake Howe, Stephanie Jensen- Moulton, Neil William Lerner, and Joseph Nathan Straus, editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.) p.3.

akin to gender, sexuality, and race.¹² The perspective that disability is a deviant condition and that people with such should be relegated to the treatment of specialized professionals is still prevalent today. The label “disabled” is still widely associated with abnormality and incompetence and society, in one way or another, continues to view this as a weakness or failure.¹³ Through current narrative and musical research, the goal is to change the perspective that disability is a deviant condition and this collective research focuses on how disability is defined and represented in society. Composers such as Sondheim, Guettel and Kitt offer valuable insight into the role of the individual in the musical depiction of disability and the scores of *Passion*, *The Light in the Piazza*, and *Next to Normal* all act as a starting point in examining current musical representation of females characters with mental impairment in musical theatre. A fresh perspective of Disability Studies continues to be constructed though the medium of musical theatre and much as a cultural understanding of disability can teach us about music, music also has much to teach us about the culture of disability.¹⁴

¹² *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, p.3.

¹³ Colin Barnes, “Disability Studies: What’s the Point?” (Presentation, Centre for Disability Studies Department of Sociology and Social Policy University of Leeds, September 4, 2003).

¹⁴ *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, p.8.

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