

REQUIRED FORMAT

REPORT FOLLOWING SABBATICAL

Directions are in Italics

Name: ██████████ Campus/Department: ██████████/Music

Period of Sabbatical Fall 2014

Attach the Statement of Purpose as approved by the Sabbatical Review Committee.

A. Narrative on Activity and Findings

(Describe your activity in detail and attach supporting documents of outcomes—e.g. transcript, manuscript outline and/or chapter course proposal, and research/project report, survey responses. Be certain to directly address and report upon the activities outlined in your sabbatical proposal.)

My proposed sabbatical project was to compose a one-act opera (2 scenes) based on an unfinished drama by Austrian Expressionist poet Georg Trakl (1887-1914) during the Fall 2014 semester.

Fall 2014 was an extremely turbulent and difficult semester for me personally—my wife and I welcomed a new baby this summer, my mother passed away on 11/11, one of our senior cats developed serious ocular issues requiring many trips to the emergency vet and eventually surgery to remove his eyes, and our other senior cat developed diabetes. Despite all of these exhausting issues, I was able to complete the piece as expected. Attached is a PDF copy of the score to the piece.

The original text (libretto) is in German, which I decided to translate and set in English. Trakl's play was left incomplete due to his death from a cocaine overdose in 1914 and there are two versions of the first scene. I began work on the translation during the summer and completed it relatively quickly. I received some assistance on the most difficult and abstract sections from a friend who is a native German speaker.

Trakl's first scene exists in two drafts, which I decided to combine in order for the story, which is wildly abstract, to be more of a narrative than in either of Trakl's drafts. The two scenes proved more difficult to merge than I originally anticipated, but I was able to complete libretto in time to begin composing the music on the first day of the fall semester.

Synopsis:

Scene 1—hut at the edge of a forest, a castle in the background. It is evening

Kermor arrives at the home of Peter and The Tenant and tells them that he just murdered his horse in the woods and was threatened by nature. Kermor, high on opium, passes out. Speaking aloud in his sleep, he describes being pursued by a bleeding moon and that he hears a strange singing. The Tenant and Peter continue

their discussion, almost unfazed by Kermor's arrival. They discuss the body of a monk that was found at the mill earlier in the day, which causes the Tenant to recall the death of his wife and wrongful death/injury of his first child. Peter describes Johanna singing in the thorn bush (just as Kermor does in his drug-induced sleep).

The Tenant laments his lot in life and questions Peter about why he mysteriously leaves the house each morning. Both are crippled by guilt for actions not mentioned. Johanna, sleepwalking, steps out of the bedroom and The Tenant asks from what pilgrimages does she return. Kermor wakes, sees Johanna and flees in terror, as he recognizes her from his dreams. A very tense Johanna accuses Kermor of breaking into her dreams.

Scene 2-Thorny wilderness, rocks, a spring. It is night.

Johanna describes a memory of her sister's murder and her own assault at the hands of the same assailant. An apparition of her sister appears, sees her murderer in the shadows, and flees. Johanna then falls unconsciously in the thorn bush and sings as it closes around her. In her dream, the Traveler complains that he was reminded of his dead wife and child. It is revealed that he suffers the same nightmares as Johanna and has a similar relationship to the Murderer as she does. The Murderer, angry for being awakened from his own dreams, finds the murder weapon in his hand, attacks and kills the Traveler then coldly searches his satchel.

What is not inherently clear in the second scene is are The Traveler and The Murderer different names for Peter, Kermor, and/or The Tenant? I like the mind-warping, open-ended effect this creates in the story. In performance, the same singers who play the role of The Tenant and Peter will play the roles of The Traveler and The Murderer.

Obviously, the story is presented in an extremely abstract way, but one gets the impression of heinous and vile crimes committed by male characters, but the question of who is guilty is ultimately left open-ended. The story represents the often hidden problem of domestic violence, as well as crimes against innocent victims. This subject matter is in line with much of my recent music, which often focuses on humanitarian issues, but not necessarily in a direct way. The experimental nature of this project is in line with many recent operas; including *Criminal Element* by David Smooke, which utilizes a language created by the composer and *Soldier Songs* by David Little, which combines elements of opera, musical theater, and rock into a multimedia event.

Although the music was a lot more difficult to compose than I imagined (it is never easy), with the exception of a few measures, I completed work on the piece a few days before the end of the fall semester. The piece is approximately 33 minutes long, about eight minutes longer than I originally anticipated.

Since I do not yet have an ensemble that has agreed to perform the piece, I decided to compose mainly for voices and piano, rather than fully orchestrating the piece from the beginning. Working this way allows me flexibility if, and when a group agrees to perform the piece, in that I can tailor the orchestration to a specific group of

instruments, rather than try to find an ensemble that is an exact fit. Composing for piano/voice first is more practical than working in full score, because smaller excerpts will likely be performed with just piano, rather than with a full ensemble. There are a few sections of the score where instruments besides piano are indicated. This is known as short score and I used it because it is impossible to execute some of the passages with only piano.

Singers:

Kermor-baritone

Peter/Traveler-tenor

The Tenant/murderer-bass

Johanna-soprano

The Apparition-mezzo-soprano

B. Professional Benefit to Applicant

(Discuss how the activity made you a better teacher or other professional or scholar.)

Chamber operas, for smaller performing forces, have received renewed attention among composers and performers in recent years, with many small new opera companies popping up across the country. These smaller, more flexible companies focus their energies on performing newly composed operas in unexpected venues, rather than the standards performed in places such as the Metropolitan Opera. I now have music that will hopefully be performed by such groups in the near future.

While composing the work, I spent some time familiarizing myself with recently composed vocal music and opera that was unfamiliar to me through recordings and concert attendance. I have plans to incorporate these new to me works into the music theory and Understanding Music curriculums. Too often, the study of music is mistakenly thought of as the study of a dead art. The truth is, there are thousands of composers living and creating amazing music all over the world. One of my missions as a teacher is to open this world to my students, both music majors and non-majors, and show them there is more out there than they could have ever imagined.

Although I am primarily a composer of vocal music, having composed songs, song cycles, choral pieces, and large-scale works for voice and orchestra, this was my first attempt to compose an opera. It fills a large void in my catalog of works and will give me greater visibility and legitimacy as a composer of vocal music. By structuring the opera so that shorter excerpts may be performed independent of the entire opera, I now have a number of new pieces to submit to conferences, new music festivals, composition competitions, and other professional performers. I am confident this project was an important step in my development and evolution as a composer because it allowed me to work with large-scale musical structures for the first time since I began teaching at SCCC, as well as sort out issues of pacing and drama.

I typically teach six or seven classes per semester and run the music computer lab, leaving me little time to compose. Taking on project of this magnitude and expecting to complete it during a summer or semester while teaching would be virtually impossible. This sabbatical allowed me the time to rejuvenate and refocus my creative energies, but also to reflect and gain better perspective on my recent compositions. Composing new pieces is analogous to writing short stories, a novel, or a book of poetry as it takes an incredible amount of time, energy, and focus to formulate and see ideas through to completion.

My sabbatical allowed me necessary time to reflect on my teaching. I missed my kids terribly, and returned this semester with an even greater appreciation of my classes and with renewed energy and drive. While I love composing, I love teaching more.

I have remained in contact with Rhymes With Opera director, George Lam throughout the process. We had plans to meet in November or December so I could share my progress with him, but a number of personal issues prevented me from doing so. We will likely meet shortly after the semester ends to discuss my work and the possibility of a performance.

In my proposal, I indicated I would try to do a residency at The Virginia Center for the Creative Arts in order to really focus and work on the piece intensely for a few days or weeks. I was unable to do so because of my mother's illness, my cat's illness, and because I really needed to be home to help out with my newborn.

C. Benefit to the College

(Discuss the impact your sabbatical activity will have on carrying out your professional responsibilities e.g. to teaching; to student learning; to programs, courses or curriculum development; to retraining, or to an institution specific project.)

Musicians must continuously remain active in their field of specialization. Students need their professors to be role models. Once students graduate, they will be expected to remain professionally active as well. I am an extremely active composer. My compositions are performed regularly throughout the United States, and occasionally in other countries. While this is important for me professionally, it is equally important for students that my compositions are occasionally performed at SCCC, by SCCC faculty and student ensembles, as well as professionals at Performing Arts Series events. I am a member of the Performing Arts Series committee and am responsible for bringing in approximately a dozen different ensembles to SCCC in the past few years. It is my hope that the group or that anyone who performs the opera, or excerpts from it, will also perform it at SCCC as part of our Performing Arts Series.

Having a professionally active and visible faculty in the music department not only helps our students' ability to transfer, but also enhances the academic reputation of SCCC and the cultural life of Suffolk County.

The field of contemporary classical music is so vast that one cannot possibly keep up with every genre, and I used the semester to research and study recent developments in opera. This will translate directly to my courses at SCCC for both majors and non-majors, as I teach opera in MUS 101 (Understanding Music), as well as in my four-semester music theory sequence. I plan to assign excerpts from some of the music I discovered during my sabbatical this semester and beyond.

Now that my sabbatical is over, I am interested in proposing a Special Topics course in modern classical music that would be open to both music majors and non-majors to fulfill either an elective or Fine Arts credit. Part of my mission as a music teacher is to show students, majors and non-majors that the contemporary classical music is a living, thriving art form. This course would allow me another forum to do so. A few years ago, I offered a Special Topics course in Music Composition that was extremely popular. A number of students who took the course have successfully transferred into composition programs at other schools, one of whom won a major composition award last year. I would eventually like to turn this into a permanent course offering at SCCC.

D. Describe the Current Status of the Project
(Indicate when the project will be completed.)

As I stated above, I completed the piece just before the fall semester ended. My normal compositional process is to compose and edit simultaneously, so that when I reach the end of a piece, it is complete and needs little or no revision. I approached this piece differently to ensure its completion before the end of the semester. The music is complete and can be performed as it is, but I would really like to spend some time doing revisions. I have not worked on this piece much since December, and I hope that some distance will allow me to view the editing process with more clarity and detachment than if I were to edit immediately after composing. It can be very difficult to revise or delete ideas, but it becomes easier over time.

My next step is to edit and prepare some smaller sections of the work for performance, independent of the rest of the opera.

Notes:

The report should be submitted to the Sabbatical Review Committee (c/o Vice President for Academic Affairs) within eight weeks of your return. Your report will be reviewed by the Sabbatical Review Committee to make certain that you completed the work proposed in your sabbatical application. You should be aware that your report may be subject to public inspection and may be shared with the Board of Trustees and your colleagues. Upon review and acceptance by the Sabbatical Review Committee and your dean, the report will be forwarded to the President.

A faculty member is expected to complete his/her sabbatical as awarded, or as modified or waived with committee approval. A faculty member granted and accepting a sabbatical who fails to complete the sabbatical as awarded, or modified or waived with committee approval, shall be required to reimburse the College for all monies paid under this provision to the faculty member during the period of said leave.

Upon return from sabbatical leave, the faculty member agrees to remain in a full-time faculty position for a minimum of one (1) year. Prior to the commencement of a sabbatical leave, a faculty member shall be required to execute documentation to assure repayment to the College of all costs related to the sabbatical leave in the event the faculty member does not return to the employ of the College. At the conclusion of one year of full-time service following sabbatical leave, the documentation will be returned to the faculty member.