THE BANSHEE: A CHAMBER OPERA IN ONE ACT

by

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A THESIS

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This opera is the composer’s fanciful speculation on the origin of the banshee, a character out of Irish legend whose keening is a herald of death. In three scenes, the opera tells the story of a witch whose quest for power leads her from one depravity to the next and ends with the destruction of her family. When the witch finally confronts the ruin she has caused, she wails with grief and transforms into the banshee. The work is scored for soprano, mezzo-soprano, baritone, dancer, and chamber orchestra, and it is approximately one hour in duration.
CURRICULUM VITAE

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INSTRUMENTATION

Soprano
Mezzo-soprano
Baritone
Dancer

Flute
Soprano Saxophone
B-flat Clarinet/Bass Clarinet
Bassoon

Horn
B-flat Trumpet
Trombone

Percussion [vibraphone, Tom Toms (mid and low), Chinese Cymbal, Suspended Cymbal]

Violin 1 (3)
Violin 2 (3)
Viola (2)
Violoncello (1)
Contrabass (1)
SCENE 1
No. 1 "I am ready"

Pressured

Flute

Soprano Saxophone

dark, passionate

Bass Clarinet

Bassoon

Horn

Bb Trumpet

Trombone

Percussion

JENNA

[Night. An ancient stone chamber, deep in the forest. ZEELAH addresses an unseen presence.]

ZEELAH

SAM

Pressured

Violin 1

Violin 2

dark, passionate

Viola

mf, molto vib.

Violoncello

mp, dark

Contrabass

mp, dark

Daniel Daly
Composer and Librettist

The Banshee
A Chamber Opera in One Act

C Score

Night. An ancient stone chamber, deep in the forest. ZEELAH addresses an unseen presence.
mounting aggression

Bsn.

Zeelah

I am ready, I am ready, Every spell has failed

me The stones The stones of my house Are stained, Are stained

with blood with blood All beasts,
All beasts have fled the forest. Afraid. Afraid of my knife. Not even the crows follow me.

Not any more. They are afraid.
[ZEELAH stands at a table and flings its contents to the ground. She looks around her fair and sees something that reminds her of her failure -- a bottle or totem. She crosses to it and destroys it. Next she clutches her spell book and attempts to tear it. She fails, and sinks to the ground.]
Somewhat Slower

Tempo 1

Fl. 87
Sop. Sax.
B. Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tpt.
Tbn.
Vc.
Cb.

Somewhat Slower

Tempo 1

Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
B. Cl.

Zeelah

mp, desolate, mournful

I have no pow - er left. My daugh - ter ne - ver speaks. Al - ways

Vla.

110

B. Cl.

Zeelah

f, angry

do I thank for a mute daugh - ter? Born to me, to

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.
zeelah


Somewhat Slower

$\text{Zeelah rises, protesting.} \ p$

me, the strongest of the strong! I am strong!

Somewhat Slower

Slightly Slower, yet Charged

You were strong, I am strong!

Slightly Slower, yet Charged
Zeelah

blood, spill his blood! No power without blood!

For my daughter, I am ready, I am

Tempo 1

Slightly Faster

Tempo 1
No. 2 "Somewhere in those woods"

Brooding

[Sam twists under the sheets. He sits up against the headboard. He casts off the bedclothes and gets up. He drifts toward the window overlooking the forest.]
Sop. Sax.
Tbn.
Vib.
Sam
Vc.

Somewhat Slower

189
Sop. Sax.
Tbn.
Vib.
Sam
Vc.

You are out there, Naked, Pinned against a tree.

190
Tbn.
Sam
Vc.

Wolves are circ - ling. So frightened, So cold. Trem - bling, all a -

202
Tbn.
Sam
Vc.
Slightly Slower

Sam

lone. I will find you! I will crush the wolves! And then, I will

H

hold you. And then, And then, And then...

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.
 Abruptly, he begins preparing to leave; he laces his boots, dons his coat.

He allows himself one more gaze out the window.
His face changes from rapture to horror, and he looks down at his coat and boots. He backs away from the window and sits on his bed.
In a grove surrounded by sputtering torches, ZEELAH stands, arms upraised. MAIA shivers at her side.

---

No. 4 "Come to me"
Run to me, To the grove of ancient oaks.

Cross the water, Climb the stones. In the deepest shadow, In the darkest night, Seek the glow of the ritual torch, and come to me. [Rapt, SAM rises from his bed and crosses to the window.]
Gathering

Somewhat Faster

Some place in those woods, I will find you, naked, all alone. I will find you.

Faster Yet

Your blood flows hot, Your loins are burning. Your beloved is
Jenna appears in the forest, searching for Maia.

[Someplace, waiting, waiting!]

Much Faster

poco rit. \( \approx \) 112

[Yet Faster]

Maia, Maia, Maia!
Some where in those woods!

Ma - ia!
Ma - ia!

Ma - ia!

Ma - ia!
I will find you!

I will find you!

Maria, Maria!
Come, Come to the grove! Run, Run to the torch! Bare your flesh for the sacrifice!
No. 5 “You will ruin my magic!”

Slower

Fl.

mp, passionate

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Jenna

mf

[JENNA and MAIA run together and embrace]

Zeelah

No! No! You will ruin my magic! You will wreck every thing!
No. 6 "Be silent!"

Fl.

Bsn.

Jenna

Be si-ent, Be si-ent. Take your hands a-way from my

Zeelah

daughter. Get out. Get out of my sight. Do not fol-low, Do not fol-

Vln. 1

Vc.

Ch.
Jenna

Zeelah!

ZEElah grips MAiA's and and starts to lead her away.

way! Get out of my sight!

pizz.

ZEElah grips MAiA's and and starts to lead her away.

way! Get out of my sight!

mf
JENNA takes hold of MAIA's other hand and stops her.

[ZEELAH jerks MAIA's arm, once, twice...]

[Score and text notation for the instruments are shown.]
[At ZEELAH's last jerk, MAIA and JENNA fall to the ground.]
Suddenly distracted, ZEELAH turns in circles as though searching.

Lost...
Zeelah

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Vib.

Cb.

I have lost him,
I can-not see him
He is
gone.

My spell is brok-en.

You, You have set him free,
Get out,

Get out,

You, You have set him free,
Get out,

You, You have set him free,
Get out,

You, You have set him free,
Get out,
ZEELAH collapses to her knees.

Ah!
Somewhat Slower

Somewhat Slower

SCENE 2

No. 7 "Do you remember?"

[Dawn in the desolate forest. MAIA is curled in a ball on the ground. JENNA holds her.]
Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

\(474\)  

\(\text{Moving} \quad \text{poco rit.} \quad \text{j} = 58\)

Jenna  

wood, were full, full of song birds, a chorus in every tree, every

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

\(482\)  

\(\text{poco accel. -} \quad \text{j} = 62\)

Jenna  

dew in your eye-lashes? Do you remember the fox and the little bear, following

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

\(485\)  

\(\text{Slightly Faster} \quad \text{f} \quad \text{j} = 62\)

Jenna  

you, nuzzling your hands? Oh, Maria, remember these things. Remember
lieve, be, lieve the woods will be full again. There will be, There will be singing at

The woods will be full again. Do you remember, Do you remember, Do you remember? Do you be

Slightly Slower Yet

MAIA dances, progressing from cringing and despair to rejoicing.

There is a slight increase in tempo, progressing from cringing and despair to rejoicing.
[SAM, drawn by the dance and the singing, appears. He is dazed, confused, lost.]

\[ = 40 \]
Somewhat Faster $q = 72$

Suddenly Faster Yet $q = 82$

Somewhat Faster $q = 72$

Suddenly Faster Yet $q = 82$

Somewhat Faster $q = 72$

Suddenly Faster Yet $q = 82$

Slightly Slower $q = 78$

I won’t touch you.

I just want- ed to see you,

Slightly Slower $q = 78$
No. 8 "A witch nearby"

Somewhat Slower

\[ \text{\textit{Jenna}} \]

She has cursed you.

You must leave these woods.

\[ \text{\textit{Sam}} \]

to see you...

Wait, there is a witch nearby.

[SAM retreats from JENNA and MAIA.]

\[ \text{\textit{Jenna}} \]

[558]

Somewhat Slower

She has cursed you.

You must leave these woods.
Jenna goes to Sam. [Sings]

You don't understand; she did this to you. She made you come here, she made you

[Cl.]
It was a dream! You had an evil
Stay away from me, Stay away!

Stay away from me, Stay away!

Only a dream, only a dream.
No. 9 "Last night"

\[ \text{Hn.} \]
\[ \text{Tpt.} \]
\[ \text{Vln. 1} \]
\[ \text{Vln. 2} \]
\[ \text{Vc.} \]

Finally, the music remains slow and melancholic, with the cello
continuing to play the slow,悲伤的 melody.

In the final measures, the music
builds to a climactic
point, with the orchestra
building up to a
powerful,励志的 crescendo.

At last, the music
ends with a
final, serene
resolution.
Last night I searched for you until thorns cut my hands, And my whole body ached, But I am always achieving for you.
Suddenly
Somewhat Faster

\[ \text{Suddenly} \quad \text{Somewhat Faster} \]  
\[ j = 72 \quad \text{molt legato} \]  
\[ \text{poco acc} . \quad \text{poco accel.} \quad \text{Slightly Faster Yet} \]  
\[ j = 80 \]

**Hn.**

**Tbn.**

**Sam**

I know you. I saw you. Long ago, Not far from here. A young woman, Gaz -

Suddenly
Somewhat Faster

\[ \text{Suddenly} \quad \text{Somewhat Faster} \]  
\[ j = 72 \quad \text{molt legato} \]  
\[ \text{poco acc} . \quad \text{poco accel.} \quad \text{Slightly Faster Yet} \]  
\[ j = 80 \]

**Vln. 1**

**Vln. 2**

**Vla.**

**Vc.**

\[ \text{Brightly} \quad j = 92 \]

**Hn.**

**Tbn.**

**Sam**

\[ \text{Brightly} \quad j = 92 \]

**Vln. 1**

**Vln. 2**

**Vla.**

**Vc.**
stand Before me now
Not a vision, Not a dream, But a woman, A

light, joyous

live, breathing, beautiful. Even more beautiful

48
Thought of me, Searched for me, Desired you.

Slightly Faster

Slightly Faster
Jenna and SAM stand very close, facing each other. Will they embrace?

Slightly Slower

\[ \text{sired and remembered me, Remembered me.} \]

Much Slower

\[ \text{[JENNA and SAM stand very close, facing each other. Will they embrace?]} \]
No. 10 "Jenna!"

\[ \text{\textit{Jenna!}} \]

\[ p \text{ to } mf \]

\[ \text{Somewhat Faster} \]

\[ J = 98 \]

\[ \text{accel.} \]

\[ B. Cl. \]

\[ Bsn. \]

\[ Zeelah \]

\[ Vln. 1 \]

\[ Vln. 2 \]

\[ Vla. \]

\[ Vc. \]

\[ Cb. \]
You must go, go! She will kill you if you stay.

Then come with me.
Jenna: I can not go. She al-ways knows where I
Sam: come to where it is safe!

Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.

Slightly Slower

Jenna: am. She will find you! She will find you through me!

B. Cl.

Slightly Slower

Go now.

Slower Yet

BB

mournful, pleading

Go now.

Slower Yet
You can escape! I will stay and distract my sister!
Slightly Faster

poco accel. \[ \Rightarrow \] \( \approx 120 \)

You must go!

Sam

-ing in my head!

Jenna

Go!

Vib.

rapid rotor

Vln. 1

Vln. 2
MAIA runs to JENNA.

Go to the edge of the forest! Maria, do this for me.

This passage reflects the emotional and dramatic tension of the scene, emphasizing the urgency and importance of Maria's request.
No. II "Whatever comes"

Unhurried

Ma - ia, What ev - er comes, Keep danc - ing, Keep re - joic - ing. Let

delicate vibrato

Vla.

Vc.

Slightly Faster

poco accel. - \( \text{m} \) \( \text{p} \) = 76

Jenna

no - thing steal your joy.

Oh Ma - ia, What-ev - er

Sam

Help me...

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.
Slightly Faster Yet

\( \text{accel.} \quad j = 80 \)

**Fl.**

Vla.

Jenna

day, some-thing will change!

Slightly Faster Yet

\( \text{accel.} \quad j = 80 \text{ solo} \)

**Vln. 1**

**Vln. 2**

**Vla.**

DD

**Fl.**

Jenna

Ma - ia, What-ev - er comes, Re-mem-ber, I am with you. You are_strong - er than,

**Vln. 1**

**Vln. 2**

**Vla.**

**Vc.**

Broad

\( j = 72 \)

Slightly Faster Yet

weighty, resonant

f

weighty, resonant

weighty, resonant

weighty, resonant

weighty, resonant

rit.

Oh

section

rit.

 expressive!

rit.

mf

mf
ev'ry evil! Stronger than any curse!

Oh Maria, What

(solo cont.)

Suddenly
Slightly Faster

It will come, It will come a blessing, a blessing.
Somewhat Slower
q = 60

MAIA leads SAMS away.
SCENE 3
No. 12 "Where is he?"

Much Faster

775 [ZEELAH enters in a fury.]

Fl.

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Zeelah

Much Faster

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Where

782 detached

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tbn.

Zeelah

is he?

Where is the man?

I heard.

Pizz.

Vc.
Zeelah

Vln. 1

B. Cl.

Tbn.

Vc.

Zeelah

I heard voices ringing, ringing in the forest! What are you plotting?

Tell me, tell me now!

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.
Suddenly
Slightly Faster

poco rit. $\frac{d}{2} = 116$

Tpt.

mp, uncertain

becoming certain

Jenna

To-day, some-thing is dif-ferent. To-day, some-thing will

Suddenly
Slightly Faster

poco rit. $\frac{d}{2} = 116$

Vln. 1

f $\rightarrow$ p

p

Vln. 2

f $\rightarrow$ p

p

Vl.

f $\rightarrow$ p

p

B. Cl.

mf

Bsn.

sf $\rightarrow$ mf

sf $\rightarrow$ mf

Tpt.

mp

Tbn.

sf $\rightarrow$ mf

sf $\rightarrow$ mf

Jenna

change

Stop your whin-ing! Lis-ten Lis-ten to me now!

Zeelah

Vln. 1

mp

mf

Vln. 2

mp

mf

Vla.

mp

mf

pizz.

Vc.

mf

68
Suddenly Slightly Faster $q = 126$

Where are you hiding him?

Today, something will change.

Suddenly Slightly Faster $q = 126$

today, something is
Fl.

Jenna

day, something is different. Something will change.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Fl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tbn.

Zeelah

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Stop!

I command you! Be
Suddenly
Slightly Faster

\( \text{\textit{B. Cl.}} \)
\( \text{\textit{fl.}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Jenna}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Zeelah}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Vln. 1}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Vln. 2}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Vla.}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Vc.}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Cb.}} \)

855

\( \text{\textit{fl.}} \)
\( \text{\textit{B. Cl.}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Jenna}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Zeelah}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Vln. 1}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Vln. 2}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Vla.}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Vc.}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Cb.}} \)

\( \text{\textit{fl.}} \)
\( \text{\textit{B. Cl.}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Jenna}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Zeelah}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Vln. 1}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Vln. 2}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Vla.}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Vc.}} \)
\( \text{\textit{Cb.}} \)
Today, something will change.

Where are you hiding him? Tell me, tell me now.
No. 13 "Again and again"

Somewhat Slower

= 116

Tell me now!

Somewhat Slower

= 116

mf, pained, astonished, angered

A. gain and a.-gain, A.
Zeelah

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Slightly Slower

poco rit. \quad \text{\textit{j}} = 108\quad \text{accel.}

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Zeelah

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Slightly Slower

poco rit. \quad \text{\textit{j}} = 108\quad \text{accel.}

880

886

892

\text{\textit{j}} = 116

\text{\textit{j}} = 116

\text{\textit{j}} = 116

A - gain and a - gain, you op - pose me!

A - gain and a - gain, you - in - creasingly embittered
cross me!

give and I give: ev - ry thing to make a home for us, for

But your on - ly an - swer, a - gain and a - gain, is be - tray - al,
Zeelah

Vln. 2

B. Cl.

Toms

Bsn.

Vla.

Vc.

Ch.

Somewhat Slower

rall. \( \dot{=} 92 \)

mf sf sf sf sf \( \dot{=} \) pp mf \( \dot{=} \) pp

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Ch.

f, resolve

be - tray - - - - - - - al! Nev -

Somewhat Slower

rall. \( \dot{=} 92 \)

mf sf sf sf sf \( \dot{=} \) pp mf \( \dot{=} \) pp

Suddenly Faster

\( j = 116 \)

B. Cl.

Toms

Jenna

Zeelah

Somewhat Faster

\( j = 116 \)

mf sf sf sf sf \( \dot{=} \) pp

Ch.

pizz.

mf sf mf
and JENNA struggle. [ZEELAH seizes JENNA's throat. ZEELAH and JENNA struggle.]
Know me for who I am!

strong est of all!

Know me for who I am!

strong est of all!

Most power-ful of the most power-ful!

most power-ful of the most power-ful!
Slightly Faster
\[ \text{Sop. Sax.} \]
\[ \text{B. Cl.} \]
\[ \text{Bsn.} \]
\[ \text{Vib.} \]
\[ \text{Zeelah} \]

\[ \text{Slightly Faster} \]
\[ \text{Vln. 1} \]
\[ \text{Vln. 2} \]
\[ \text{Vla.} \]
\[ \text{Vc.} \]

\[ \text{SAM enters with MAIA, and forces her nearer ZEELAH. MAIA struggles against him.} \]

[SAM enters with MAIA, and forces her nearer ZEELAH. MAIA struggles against him.]

\[ \text{Sop. Sax.} \]
\[ \text{Hn.} \]
\[ \text{Tpt.} \]
\[ \text{Tbn.} \]
\[ \text{Vib.} \]
\[ \text{Zeelah} \]
\[ \text{Vc.} \]
No. 14 "Dark Queen"

Suddenly Faster

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Zeelah

Speak my name.

Sam

Dark Queen of the Forest! Goddess

Vc.

unis. v

pp

Ch.

pp

972

Fl.

Vib.

Zeelah

mf

Sam

mp

980 poco rit. - - A tempo

Fl.

Tbn.

Vib.

Zeelah

mf, demanding

Sam

Come to me, Come to me. Worship me.

of the night! 

Dark Queen of the

poco rit. - - A tempo

Vc.

div.

pp

Cb.

mp

pp
Fl.  
Sop. Sax.  
Cl.  
Bsn.  
Tbn.  
Vib.  
Zeelah  
Vc.  
Ch.

A tempo

poco rit.  -  -  A tempo

Bow, enamored with self

Bow to me.

before the Goddess, Goddess,

Forest! Goddess of the night!

poco rit.  -  -  A tempo
ZEELAH touches MAIA and imparts a blast of power. MAIA screams and collapses on Jenna's body, where she continues to scream and weep.

name! Lift your voice and cry out!

mm
I have done everything for you. But I'm here, Maia. Your mother.

ZEELAH: [spoken]

That's why I was silent...

You only curse!

MAIA: I need you... I have done everything for you.

ZEELAH: But I'm here, Maia. Your mother.

That's why I was silent...
MAIA (continued):
You cursed me... I was crying on your lap...
You shrieked at me: Be Silent! Not another sound from you, Not another sound!

I obeyed...
Jenna knew... Jenna danced with me...
[MAIA falls again on JENNA’s body and weeps.]
No. 15 "A cold wind"

Wandering
\( \frac{d}{= c.60} \)
con sord.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Vln. 1} \\
pp \rightarrow mp \rightarrow pp \\
\text{whispering}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Vln. 1} \\
pp \rightarrow mp \rightarrow pp \\
\text{Vc.}
\end{array}
\]

Slightly Faster
\( \frac{d}{= 66} \)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Cl.} \\
mp \rightarrow p \\
\text{Zeelah} \\
mp \rightarrow p \\
\text{Zeelah} \\
mp \rightarrow p \\
\text{Vln. 1} \\
mp \rightarrow p \\
\text{Vln. 2} \\
mp \rightarrow p \\
\text{Vla.} \\
mp \rightarrow p \\
\text{Vc.} \\
mp
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Vln. 1} \\
pp \rightarrow mp \rightarrow pp \\
\text{con sord.} \\
\text{Vln. 2} \\
pp \rightarrow mp \rightarrow pp \\
\text{con sord.} \\
\text{Vla.} \\
pp \\
\text{Vc.} \\
mp
\end{array}
\]
Zeelah

leaves! Already falling, falling, falling. A grey

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

poco accel.

hand, Scabbed and cracked Blood, wet blood

poco accel.

Slightly Faster poco rit. A tempo

un-der my nails! Ev-ry-thing I touch Ev-ry-thing is dy-ing!

Slightly Faster poco rit. A tempo
accel. \[\rightarrow \text{100 rit.} \rightarrow \text{80}\]

Oh! Oh! My daughter, My daughter is

crying, crying, crying! Oh!

con molto rubato

Oh! Oh! rall. ---
Much Slower

Cl.  \( \approx 56 \)

Zeelah  \( \approx 56 \)

Vln. 1  \( \approx 56 \)

Vln. 2  \( \approx 56 \)

Vla.  \( \approx 66 \)

Vc.  \( \approx 66 \)

Ch.  \( \approx 44 \)

accel.  \( \approx 66 \)

rit.  \( \approx 56 \)

rall.  \( \approx 56 \)

[ZEELAH slowly exits]
No. 16 "I am not afraid"

Moving

[A single swallow darts by. Soon it is followed by another, and another.]

She is gone; I am not afraid, I am not afraid any more.

Look at the sky!

Hun -
- dreds of swallows,  
Fly-ing for  
you!
Re mem-ber,

Re-mem-ber what  Jen-na  said. 
The curse  that  touch-es  you  will,
... You are healing the forest! Making it new! Oh!

SS

A tempo

... You are healing the forest! Making it new! Oh!

A tempo
Maia, go to Jenna. You can heal her!

MAIA (shouts): Jenna!... You can heal her!
MAIA (continued):
I am with you!...

MAIA (continued):
You were right!...

MAIA (continued):
I am stronger...

MAIA (continued):
Jenna...

MAIA (continued):
I am stronger...
MAIA (continued):
Stronger than any curse,

any curse!

Come back!
MAIA (continued):
Wake up!

MAIA (continued):
Jenna,
MAIA (continued):
Jenna!...

MAIA (continued):
Come back!

[JENNA awakes]

rit. --------------- A tempo

Jen na, Jen - na!
Bsn.
Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Jenna
Sam
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

Sam! you are with me!

Oh Jenna, Oh Jenna, My love!
Your voice...

Ma... ia, your voice... I thought I heard an
woods, Today, in these woods, Some thing is chang ing,

ma... some thing is chang ing, chang ing,

woods, Today, in these woods, Some thing is chang ing,

Somewhat Slower

Ang... Oh Maria... To day, in these

To day, in these woods,

Slightly Slower

poco rit. \( \rightarrow \) \( \begin{array}{c} \text{Jenn} \\ \text{Sam} \\ \text{Vln. 1} \\ \text{Vln. 2} \\ \text{Vla.} \\ \text{Vc.} \end{array} \)

Slightly Faster

p, reverent joy

\( \rightarrow \) \( \begin{array}{c} \text{Jenn} \\ \text{Sam} \\ \text{Vln. 1} \\ \text{Vln. 2} \\ \text{Vla.} \\ \text{Vc.} \end{array} \)

p, reverent joy

Today, in these woods,
CAST OF CHARACTERS
JENNA (soprano): A young woman (25) who lives in the forest with her sister,
ZEELAH: (mezzo-soprano): A witch (33).
MAIA: (dancer): The witch’s mute daughter (15).
SAM (baritone): A young man (31).

SCENE 1

No. 1 “I am ready”

[Night. An ancient stone chamber, deep in the forest. ZEELAH addresses an unseen presence].

ZEELAH
I am ready.
Every spell has failed me.
The stones of my house
Are stained with blood.
All beasts have fled the forest:
Afraid of my knife.
Not even the crows follow me,
Not anymore.
They are afraid.

[ZEELAH stands at a table and flings its contents to the ground. She looks around her lair and sees something that reminds her of her failure – a bottle or totem. She crosses to it and destroys it. Next she clutches her spell book and attempts to tear it. She fails, and sinks to the ground.]

I have no power left.
My daughter never speaks.
Always silent,
Not a word for her mother!
Whom do I thank
For a mute daughter?
Born to me,
The strongest of the strong!

[ZEELAH rises, protesting.]

I am strong!

You are right:
Beasts are weak.
Their deaths are meaningless.
Give me a man!
Drive him into my forest!
Let me possess his will!
When I have him,
I will spill his blood!
No power without blood!
For my daughter!
I am ready!

[ZEELAH contemplates the plan. She goes to fetch MAIA to the grove.]

No. 2 “Somewhere in those woods”

[The same night. A bedroom. SAM twists under the sheets. He sits up against the headboard. He casts off the bedclothes and gets up. He drifts toward the window overlooking the forest.]

SAM
Somewhere in those woods,
You’re out there,
Naked,
Pinned against a tree.
Wolves are circling.
So frightened, so cold.
Trembling, all alone.
I will find you!
I will crush the wolves!
And then,
I will hold you.
And then…

[SAM stands still, wearing a strange grin. Abruptly, he starts to leave; he laces his boots, dons his coat. He allows himself one more gaze out the window. His face changes from rapture to horror, and he looks down at his coat and boots. He backs away from the window and sits on his bed.]

No! She’s not like that!
She is pure, as a child.

[SAM removes his boots and coat. He curls up in bed, weeping.]

No. 3 “Maia!”

[In the forest, JENNA searches for MAIA and ZEELAH.]

JENNA
Maia!
Come to me,
Oh Maia!

[In a grove surrounded by sputtering torches, ZEELAH stands, arms upraised. MAIA shivers at her side.]

No. 4 “Come to me”

ZEELAH
Come to me,
Run to me,
To the grove of ancient oaks.
Cross the water,
Climb the stones.
In the deepest shadow,
In the darkest night,
Seek the glow of the ritual torch,
And come to me.

[\textit{Rapt, SAM rises from his bed and crosses to the window.}]

SAM
Somewhere in those woods,
I will find you:
Naked, all alone.

ZEELAH
Your blood flows hot,
Your loins are burning.
Your beloved is waiting.

[\textit{JENNA appears in the forest, searching for MAIA.}]

JENNA
Maia!

SAM
Somewhere!

JENNA
Maia! Somewhere in those woods! I will find you!

ZEELAH
Come to the grove!
Run to the torch!
Bare your flesh for the sacrifice!

[\textit{JENNA sees MAIA and shouts her name. JENNA and MAIA run together and embrace.}]

No. 5 “No!”

ZEELAH
No! You will ruin my magic!
You will wreck everything!

JENNA
Zeelah! Your daughter is shaking with terror.
Will you shed blood before her eyes?

ZEELAH
I will heal her!
She will speak to me!
JENNA
She will run from you.
No miracle is worth this cost!
Be loving, and she will cling to you.

No. 6 “Be silent”

ZEELAH
Be silent.
Take your hands away from my daughter.
Get out of my sight.
Do not follow me.

JENNA
Zeelah, please…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZEELAH</th>
<th>JENNA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enough!</td>
<td>Zeelah, be loving!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get out before I strike you!</td>
<td>No!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be silent!</td>
<td>You will hurt her!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not another word!</td>
<td>Zeelah!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give me my child and go!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go away!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get out of my sight!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[ZEELAH grips MAIA’s hand and starts to lead her away. JENNA takes hold of MAIA’s other hand and stops her. ZEELAH jerks MAIA’s arm once, twice…At ZEELAH’s last jerk, MAIA and JENNA fall to the ground. Suddenly distracted, ZEELAH turns in circles as though searching.]

ZEELAH
Lost…
I have lost him.
I cannot see him.
He is gone.
My spell is broken.

You have set him free.
Get out of my sight!

[ZEELAH screams in frustration, and collapses to her knees. JENNA whispers, “Come, Maia.” JENNA and MAIA exit. ZEELAH is alone with a dark presence.]

SCENE 2

No. 7 “Do you remember?”

[Dawn in the desolate forest. MAIA is curled in a ball on the ground. JENNA holds her.]

JENNA
Do you remember
When these woods were full of songbirds,
A chorus in every tree?
Do you remember
Waking to their song,
Watching the dawning sky
With dew in your eyelashes?

Do you remember
The fox, and the little bear,
Following you to the stream,
Nuzzling your hands?
Oh Maia,
Remember these things.
Remember, and believe
The woods will be full again.
There will be singing at dawn again.
Do you remember?
Do you believe?

[MAIA dances, progressing from cringing and despair to rejoicing. SAM, drawn by the dance the singing, appears. He is dazed, confused, lost. MAIA sees SAM and flees to JENNA.]

SAM
Please,
Don’t be afraid.
I won’t touch you.
I just wanted to see you…

[SAM retreats from JENNA and MAIA.]

No. 8 “Wait!”

JENNA
Wait, there is a witch nearby.
She has cursed you.
You must leave these woods.

SAM
I am not afraid of witches…
I am afraid of myself.

JENNA
No, you don’t understand;
She did this to do.
She made you come here.

[JENNA goes to SAM.]

SAM
Stay away from me!

JENNA
It was a dream!
You had an evil dream.
Only a dream.

A dream.

No. 9 “Last Night”

Last night,
A dream of you
Possessed my mind,
But I am always dreaming of you.

Last night,
I searched for you
Until thorns cut my hands,
And my whole body ached,
But I am always aching for you.

I know you.
I saw you,
Long ago,
Not far from here:
A young woman,
Gazing into the sunrise,
Serene.

But here you are
In the forest where I saw you.
Here you stand
Before me now:
Not a vision,
Not a dream,
But a woman,
Alive, breathing, beautiful.
Even more beautiful than I remember
Or could imagine!

You saw me,
You remembered me,

And all of my life,
I thought of you,
Searched for you,
Desired you.

You saw me,
You remembered me,

Desired me.
Desired and remembered me.
JENNA and SAM stand very close, facing each other. Will they embrace?

No. 10 “Jenna!”

ZEELAH [off]
Jenna!

JENNA
You must go!
She will kill you if you stay.

SAM
Then come with me,
Come to where it is safe!

JENNA
I cannot go.
She always knows where I am.
She will find you through me!

Go now.
You can escape!
I will stay and distract my sister!

ZEELAH [off]
Jenna!

SAM
That voice,
Ringing in my head!

JENNA
Go! You must go!

Maia, lead him.
Go to the edge of the forest!
Maia, do this for me.

[MAIA runs to JENNA.]

No. 11 “Whatever comes”

JENNA
Oh Maia,
Whatever comes,
Keep dancing.
Keep rejoicing
Let nothing steal your joy.

ZEELAH [off]
Jenna!
SAM
Help me…

JENNA
Oh Maia,
Whatever comes,
Keep hoping.
Keep believing
That today will be different.
Today, something will change!

Oh Maia,
Whatever comes,
Remember, I am with you.
You are stronger than every evil!
Stronger than any curse!

Oh Maia,
Whatever comes,
Whatever curse may touch you,
It will change.
It will become a blessing.

Go!

[MAIA leads SAM away.]

SCENE 3

No. 12 “Where is he?”

[ZEELAH enters in a fury.]

ZEELAH
Where is he?
Where is the man?
I heard voices ringing in the forest!
What are you plotting?
Tell me now!

JENNA
Today, something is different.
Today, something will change.

ZEELAH
Stop your whining!
Listen to me now!
Where are you hiding him?

JENNA
Today, something is different.
Today, something will change.
ZEELAH
Stop!
I command you!
Be silent!

JENNA
Today, something is different.
Today, something will change.

ZEELAH
No!
Be silent!
Stop your whining and listen to me!
Tell me:
Where are you hiding him?
Tell me now!

No. 13 “Again and again”

ZEELAH
Again and again,
You oppose me!
Again and again,
You cross and double-cross me!
I give and I give:
Everything I have
to make a home for us!
But your only answer,
Again and again,
is betrayal!

Never again
Will you betray me!

JENNA
No…
Zeelah…
Sister!

[ZEELAH seizes JENNA’s throat. ZEELAH and JENNA struggle. JENNA dies.]

ZEELAH
Behold my power!
Know me for who I am!
I am strongest of all!
Most powerful of the most powerful!

Come to me.
Worship me.
Speak my name,
My holy name!

[SAM enters with MAIA, and forces her nearer ZEELAH. MAIA struggles against him.]
No. 14 Dark Queen

SAM
Dark Queen of the Forest!
Goddess of the Night!

ZEELAH
Come to me.
Worship me.
Speak my name.

SAM
Dark Queen of the Forest!
Goddess of the Night!

ZEELAH
Come to me.
Worship me.
Bow to me.
Bow before the Goddess!

ZEELAH
And now,
With all my power,
I command you:
Speak my name!
My holy name!

ZELA
[Lift your voice and cry out!]

[ZEELAH touches MAIA and imparts a blast of power. MAIA screams and collapses on JENNA’s body, where she continues to scream and weep.]

ZEELAH [spoken]
Maia?

MAIA [sobbing over JENNA]
Come back…I need you…

ZEELAH [spoken]
But I’m here, Maia. Your mother. I have done everything for you.

MAIA [spoken]
You only curse! That’s why I was silent…You cursed me…I was crying on your lap…I shrieked at me: Be silent! Not another sound from you!…Be silent.

I obeyed…Jenna knew…Jenna danced with me…

[MAIA falls again on JENNA’s body and weeps.]
No. 15 “A cold wind”

[ZEELAH wails wordlessly]

A cold wind.
An empty forest.
Look, the leaves!
Already falling.

A grey hand,
Scabbed and cracked.
Blood, wet blood under my nails!

Everything I touch is dying!
My daughter is crying!

Maia…

[ZEELAH slowly exits.]

No. 16 “I am not afraid anymore”

[A single swallow darts by. Soon it is followed by another and another. Hundreds of birds, looping joyously.]

SAM
She is gone;
I am not afraid anymore.
Look at the sky!
Hundreds of swallows,
Flying for you!

[MAIA rises, gazing at the birds. They gather around her, flying fast and thick.]

Remember what Jenna said.
The curse that touches you will change!
It will change into a blessing!
Oh Maia, you have power!
From your mother to you!
You are healing the forest!
Making it new!

Maia, go to Jenna.
You can heal her!

MAIA [shouts]
Jenna! I am with you! You were right! Jenna…I am stronger! Stronger than any curse! Come back! Wake up! Jenna, come back!

[JENNA awakes.]

SAM
Jenna!
JENNA
Sam! You are with me!

SAM
Oh Jenna,
My love!

JENNA
Maia, your voice…
I thought I heard an angel!
Oh Maia…

SAM/JENNA
Today, in these woods,
Something is changing.

[MAIA leaves the embrace of SAM and JENNA. She stands with her eyes to the heavens and allows herself to smile. Birds and beasts cluster around her. The opera ends.]