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## The University of Southern Mississippi

# PREPARATION AND PERFORMANCE OF A TWENTIETH CENTURY OPERATIC MONOLOGUE

by Danielle Leigh Adams

## A Thesis

Submitted to the Honors College
of the University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Music
in the College of the Arts and Letters
School of Music

oproved by	
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#### Chapter I

#### Introduction and Biographical Information

#### Introduction

Celebrated as having written "songs for the ages", twentieth century American composer Lee Hoiby is known for having composed tonal, lyrical music in a time when his peers were exploring serialism and atonality. Now regarded as a monumental contributor to American music, he composed songs, operas, and choral works as well as instrumental and chamber music. Hoiby's compositions are especially revered by singers, many of whom state that Hoiby was gifted at writing highly crafted songs because he "knew the voice". Although his works did not achieve as much fame in his lifetime as the atonal works of his contemporaries, Hoiby's death in March 2010 sparked a renewal of interest and acclaim for his music.

The purpose of this thesis is to present the process for preparing an operatic role inspired by a celebrity public figure in a twentieth century operatic monologue: character study, examination of musical style, and the use of staging. These elements of preparation and performance will be manifested both in the methods chapter of this thesis as well as through a public performance. Lee Hoiby's operatic monologue delivered by an actress portraying Julia Child entitled *Bon Appétit!* will be the focus of this project.

As an opera performer, it is imperative for one to be able to assume a character with different physical and vocal mannerisms from her own. I will present information on Julia Child and traits of her persona that I observe in watching footage of her cooking show *The French Chef*, and I will use this research to build a recognizable character. I will transcribe portions of the text of *Bon Appétit!* using the International Phonetic

Alphabet so that I may more accurately imitate the vocal sounds of Julia Child. I will analyze Hoiby's musical style and attempt to make connections between his compositional choices and the character of Julia Child. I will also research previous performances of the work to obtain ideas about how to stage the work and how to effectively utilize the comedic aspects of the opera's text. The process of preparing this opera role will be presented through research, preparation, and the performance of Lee Hoiby's *Bon Appétit!*.

### **Biographical Information**

## Lee Hoiby

Lee Hoiby was born on February 17, 1926 in Madison, Wisconsin. He began playing piano at 5 years of age and planned to become a concert pianist until he was invited to study with acclaimed opera composer Gian Carlo Menotti at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. He aided Menotti in the Broadway productions of *The Consul* and *The Saint of Bleeker Street*. In turn, Menotti helped Hoiby in presenting his first opera *The Scarf* at Italy's Spoleto Festival in 1957. *The Scarf* premiered in the United States later that year with New York City Opera.

Hoiby's operas gained attention from opera companies and artists all over the country. Playwright Tennessee Williams recognized so much talent in Hoiby that he gave Hoiby consent to turn any of his plays into an opera. Hoiby chose *Summer and Smoke* which premiered at New York City Opera in 1972. Hoiby's earliest works were also presented by Des Moines Metro Opera and Dallas Opera. In addition to his full-length operas, Hoiby is well-known for his shorter works, both one-act operas and musical monologues.

Lee Hoiby's *Bon Appétit!* was completed in 1987 and was premiered in 1989 as a double-bill with *The Italian Lesson* at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. *The Italian Lesson*, also a musical monologue, was composed first, but only ran 45-minutes long. Because Hoiby felt that audiences would be disappointed with a musical evening that lasted less than an hour, he set out to compose approximately fifteen minutes of music to pair with *The Italian Lesson*. Hoiby's partner Mark Shulgasser adapted episode 228 of Julia Child's cooking show *The French Chef* into the libretto for *Bon Appétit!* after gaining permission from Julia Child who sent Shulgasser video-tape footage of her PBS show. In episode 228 which aired in 1961, Child makes "Le Gateau au Chocolat l'Eminence Brune". Comedienne Jean Stapleton premiered the role and subsequently performed it in New York City, Des Moines, Baltimore, Los Angeles.

#### Chapter II

#### **Character Background**

#### Julia Child

Julia Child was born Julia McWilliams on August 15, 1912, in Pasadena, California to Princeton graduate John McWilliams, Jr. and paper-company heiress Julia Carolyn Weston. Because of her family's wealth, she was educated at an elite private school in San Francisco, the Branson School for Girls. She went on to attend Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts and planned on becoming a writer; however, none of the manuscripts she produced were published.

After being fired from a job in advertising for "gross insubordination", Child moved to Washington D.C. where she volunteered as a research assistant in the Office of Strategic Services, a precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency, within the United States government. She was sent on assignments around the world communicating top-secret documents between government officials and intelligence officers. It was in this position that she met fellow OSS agent Paul Child, and after the end of World War II, the two returned to the United States and were married. Because Paul was reassigned to the American Embassy Service in Paris in 1948, Julia was able to attend the Cordon Bleu cooking school.

In 1961, along with cooking school colleagues Simone Beck and Louisette Bertholle, Julia Child authored *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. Soon after, Child began hosting a public-broadcasting cooking show called *The French Chef* which set out to demystify French cooking for an American audience. This production was the first of

its kind, and episodes were produced from 1963 to 1976. Child went on to write two more cookbooks, *From Julia Child's Kitchen* in 1975 and *The Way to Cook* in 1989.

Because of the publicity she earned as a result of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* and *The French Chef*, Julia Child earned many awards and honors. She received a Peabody award in 1965, and in 1966 she became the first Public Broadcasting Service personality to win an Emmy Award. She received a National Book Award in 1980 and France's Legion of Honor in 2000. In 2003, she became the first chef to receive the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom. Julia Child died on August 13, 2004, in Montecito, California.

#### Chapter III

## Musical and Theatrical Preparation

Preparing an operatic role for public performance is a scholarly and time-consuming process. A successful singer will likely spend hundreds of hours preparing a single role, of which he or she might only have one or two performances. Much of this preparation must occur before any singing occurs and usually includes researching the composer and librettist of the work, researching characteristics and customs of the period in which the opera is set, translating the opera into the singer's native language, and transcribing foreign languages into IPA. Beyond historical and contextual study, a singer must spend time analyzing the character which he or she is portraying in order to communicate that character to an audience.

Lee Hoiby's *Bon Appétit!* presents an unusual challenge in that its solitary character is a celebrity figure. In order to highlight the comedy within the operatic monologue, the performer must establish to her audience that she is portraying Julia Child. One important part of convincingly depicting Julia Child is accurately imitating her vocal nuances. I watched footage of Julia Child in *The French Chef*, and after aurally analyzing Julia Child's diction, I used the International Phonetic Alphabet to transcribe portions of the *Bon Appétit!* libretto to match my aural observations.

Another important factor in effectively portraying Julia Child is the accuracy of her physical mannerisms. I observed her mannerisms while watching footage of *The French Chef* and took notes, then with the aid of a stage director, I incorporated my observations into my opera score as stage directions. I strove to naturalize these

idiosyncrasies throughout my rehearsal period so they were integrated into my character and did not seem awkward to an audience.

#### **Music Rehearsals**

My rehearsal period for Lee Hoiby's *Bon Appétit!* was approximately six weeks long. I worked individually for about an hour daily to learn and memorize the score and to incorporate Julia Child's vocal and physical traits into my performance. I worked once a week during the six weeks leading up to the performance for an hour each session with collaborative pianist Gustavo Schafaschek to enhance the musical ensemble of pianist and singer. Because *Bon Appétit!* was written neither for an opera singer nor about an opera singer, I did not want to sing virtuosically. I wanted to allow the character Julia Child to speak through the text, so I spent the first rehearsal with my pianist speaking the text in rhythm with approximations of the pitch. Over the course of the remaining rehearsals, I gradually added more sung phrases but attempted to maintain the inflection and character of the spoken text.

#### **Staging Rehearsals**

Staging rehearsals for *Bon Appétit!* began approximately three weeks before the performance. I asked J. Elliot Yates to act as the stage director for the project. He researched Julia Child's mannerisms through observing archived footage of her cooking show and created a staging plan and aided me in compiling a list of necessary set pieces and props. Because I suffer from a food allergy to eggs, we decided to use no edible ingredients in this production of *Bon Appétit!* other than a vegan chocolate cake which I

prepared before the performance. We met two times to accomplish initial staging, then three additional times to run-through the show. The presence of a director enhanced the stage-related aspects of the opera, especially blocking and comedic timing. The culmination of this project was a live performance with limited costumes and props.

#### Challenges of Preparing Bon Appétit!

Bon Appétit! was an undertaking that I found challenging because of both musical and theatrical aspects of the project. Musically, the piece was challenging to learn because it was more rhythmically and harmonically difficult than any other work I have ever attempted to learn. It contains frequently-changing tempos, meters, and key signatures, and I was only seldom able to work with a collaborative pianist, meaning that I was solely responsible for much of the musical preparation of the work. This was made even more difficult by the lack of availability of an accurate recording of the work due to its relatively recent date of composition.

I also found it challenging to interpret the musical score and make decisions regarding the degree to which I could imitate Julia Child without losing the integrity of the music that Lee Hoiby wrote. I believe that Hoiby did not intend for much of the work to be sung virtuosically, but he instead wanted the music to recall the naturally theatrical vocal mannerisms of Julia Child. I spent many hours deciding which lines should be sung and which lines should be spoken on pitch, attempting to achieve a balance of imitation and musicality within the confines of Hoiby's musical score.

#### Chapter IV

#### Performance

#### Presentation

I performed Lee Hoiby's *Bon Appétit!* on Tuesday, November, 29, 2011, at 12:15 p.m. in the Thad Cochran Center on the campus of the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The operatic monologue was presented as a part of the Presidential Brown Bag lunch concert series sponsored by the University of Southern Mississippi School of Music. Gustavo Schafaschek collaborated on piano. The performance lasted approximately 20 minutes.

## **Set Pieces and Props**

- One oblong table with a shorter table hidden underneath, used to simulate a kitchen counter
- Bowl pre-filled with chocolate icing
- Chocolate cake, pre-baked on cake stand
- Plastic egg
- Fork
- Two round cake pans lined with wax paper
- Large mixing bowl
- Plate with slice of chocolate cake
- Four ramekins
- Sauce pan and lid
- Sifter
- Spatula
- Stand mixer
- Stick of butter
- Toothpick
- Wine bottle
- Wine glass
- Wooden spoon

#### **Appendix**

#### Bon Appétit!

This is the rich buttery brown batter for Le Gâteau au Chocolat l'Eminence Brune!

Today we're going to make chocolate cake.

And it's a very special, very chocolately bittersweet lovely cake. And for it you have to have melted chocolate, and melted chocolate you have to do very carefully, or it's going to turn grainy and hard.

Now, we want mocha flavoring.

So start out with two teaspoons of instant espresso and one quarter cup of hot water.

And then it's going to have seven ounces of semi-sweet chocolate and two ounces of bitter chocolate.

I like the combination.

And in they go...and off the heat...and you just stir it around... and then you cover it and go on about your business, chocolate is much more complicated than any of us suspect.

When you're going to do a cake, you really have to have a battle plan. First, start the chocolate, then preheat the oven to three hundred and fifty degrees and the rack is in the lower middle. Then get out all the ingredients, and all of your equipment so that you can just go right through the cake.

You don't want to go out and play croquet in the middle, for instance. And then, the next thing to do is to prepare the cake pan, and that means buttering it . . .

...thoroughly ...and the waxed paper, too.

And then the flour . . . and then turn the pan . . . thoroughly . . .

And (she knocks the pan) knock out the flour on the floor ...

if you have a self-cleaning kitchen like mine . . .

and this is so the cake won't stick.

When the cake is done, it would be nice to be able to get it out of the pan.

Now, this is a two-pan cake, and it's a very delicate cake.

And like most cakes, it has eggs in it . . . separated eggs . .

and that makes it a sponge cake, or what the French call a beeskwee, or bisquit.

And these are United States grade A large eggs, and you put the yolk into the yolk bowl, and the white into the white bowl, because if you have any yolk in the white, you'll find that the eggs won't mount up. Now, we have four egg yolks here, and I'm going to gradually beat in two-thirds cup of this instant superfine sugar...

 $\dots$ till they are thick and lemon colored and they make the ribbon. See there  $\dots$ 

how it gradually begins to turn thick and lemon colored.

Now, let's take a look . .

There! The thick, dissolving ribbon! Now, the chocolate . . .

should . . .

in all conscience be melted . . .

and it is!

What now is going to be in this chocolate is one stick of the best butter, and I can beat the whole business in, because it's nice and soft.

I've got a little pan for the drippies . .

Now, just look at this lovely, silky, soft, beautiful sheen.

IPA	SEE Examples	ASCII	Selected Phonetic Features
[i]	heel, me	IY	{vowel, voiced}
[I]	hit	IH	{vowel, voiced}
[8]	met, head	EH	{vowel, voiced}
[æ]	hat	AE	{vowel, voiced}
[ə]	<b>a</b> bout, af <b>ter</b> , f <b>er</b> n	AX	{vowel, voiced}
[A]	<b>u</b> p, f <b>u</b> n	UX	{vowel, voiced}
[u]	3 <b>00</b> n	UW	{vowel, voiced}
[ʊ]	p <b>u</b> t, foot	UH	{vowel, voiced}
[0]	fork, taut	AO	{vowel, voiced}
[0]	hot	ОН	{vowel, voiced}
[a]	bath, bar	AH	{vowel, voiced}
[eɪ]	w <b>ai</b> t, c <b>a</b> ke	EI	{vowel, voiced}
[aɪ]	kite, buy	AY	{vowel, voiced}
[IC]	coin, toy	OY	{vowel, voiced}
[08]	b <b>o</b> ne, <b>o</b> pen	OU	{vowel, voiced}
[aʊ]	cow, out	AW	{vowel, voiced}
[19]	ear, sheer	IA	{vowel, voiced}
[e3]	air, share	EA	{vowel, voiced}
[62]	tour	UA	{vowel, voiced}
[p]	pin, spin	P	{stop, bilabial, voiceless}
[b]	<b>b</b> 00	Ъ	{stop, bilabial, voiced}
[t]	top,stop	t	{stop, alveolar, voiceless}
[d]	dog	đ	{stop, alveolar, voiced}
[k]	can, scan	k	{stop, velar, voiceless}
[g]	gate	g	{stop, velar, voiced}
[m]	<b>m</b> at	m	{nasal, bilabial, voiced}
[n]	<b>n</b> ot	n	{nasal, alveolar, voiced}
[ŋ]	ki <b>ng</b>	ИG	{nasal, velar, voiced}
[f]	<b>f</b> at	f	{fricative, labiodental, voiceless}
[٧]	♥at	V	{fricative, labiodental, voiced}
[8]	<b>th</b> umb	TH	{fricative, dental, voiceless}
[6]	<b>th</b> at	DH	{fricative, dental, voiced}
[8]	<b>s</b> at	3	{fricative, alveolar, voiceless}
[z]	zip	Z	{fricative, alveolar, voiced}
[3]	me <b>sh</b>	SH	{fricative, palatal, voiceless}
[3]	mea <b>s</b> ure	ZH	{fricative, palatal, voiced}
[h]	<b>h</b> ot	h	{fricative, glottal}
[t[j]	<b>ch</b> air	СН	{affricative, palatal, voiceless}
[dʒ]	e <b>dg</b> e, jam	JН	{affricative, palatal, voiced}
[1]	lot	1	{approximant, voiced}
[r]	rot	r	{approximant, voiced}
[j]	<b>y</b> awn	У	{approximant, voiced}
[w]	₩in	W	{approximant, voiced}

#### Libretto

And that's just the way melted chocolate should be. And if you're very careful about the melting of it, you're never going to have any trouble, because you're never overheating it, and that's what's dangerous to do. And now the chocolate goes into the egg yolks. (She drops the pan) Glub . Well! (She wipes her eye) And if it's hot, pour it in gradually. Mmm ... It's good enough to eat just as it is. And stir it all around. Soft and smooth . . You don't want the batter to harden up. Now we're ready to beat our egg whites, so be sure and order an extra set of blades. Otherwise at this point you'd have to wash and dry the beaters. Frankly, I find that you can beat the eggs just as efficiently with a hand beater as with . . . anything! So today I'm going to have some fun. I'm going to have a race between the unlined copper bowl and the I've got four egg whites here and four egg whites here, and we're going to see who wins. And I think maybe I'll win . . . because I'm bigger. But I don't know. (turns on machine) You want to start rather slowly at first, until they foam up. Whites take a bit of time. They've started foaming. Now add one quarter teaspoon cream of tartar, every good kitchen should have cream of tartar. Because you want them to mount seven times their original volume. Smooth and silky . . . And set it at a moderate speed. Now I'm going to start in on the copper bowl, with a pinch of salt . . . (starts beating) You want the biggest whip in the smallest bowl. Round and round and round . . . They'll mount faster at room temperature. (yawn) And if you're in good physical trim, it shouldn't take more than a couple of minutes to beat up your egg whites. Now let's see how our machine is doing. There are the soft peaks . . . sec ... so now we'll put in a little bit of sugar . . . and turn it up on high . . And back to the copper bowl. Beat them 'till they make stiff peaks. They're almost ready ... Not quite ... It's holding in the whip . . . We're almost there . . .

ľ

Cooking's just a series of the same old thing; sometimes there's chocolate and sometimes there's fish in it; but the principles are the same. That's it!

See the little peaks that stand up by themselves?

Or you can turn it upside down and they stay in the bowl. (turns bowl upside down)

And our machine has probably done exactly the same thing. (turns off machine)

Yup ...

See?

I don't know who won, but the egg whites in the copper bowl will keep this lovely, velvety texture, but the ones in the glass bowl will soon turn granular and lose that lovely sheen.

So if you do them in the machine, you must use them right away.

Now ready to assemble the rest of the batter.

And rather than flour, this cake is going to have comstarch in it because chocolate is heavy, and we want a very light, delicate cake . . . almost like a soufflé.

So, three quarters cup of cornstarch, and you sift it right into the cup.

And then sift about a quarter of it in to the batter . . .

tie that in

Now, particularly in chocolate cakes, you want to be very sure that your batter is . . .

... fairly liquid ...

or you might have to beat it up again.

And take a third of your egg whites and stir them right in to lighten up the batter.

And then a little more cornstarch . . .

then put the rest of the egg whites on top.

And we're going to alternate folding egg whites and comstarch . . .

Not as neat as it could be ...

Now, here is your spatula, and you go down into the mixture . . .

and up and over . . .

bringing a little chocolate over the egg whites . . .

Very important part . . .

a scooping motion . . .

rather fast . . .

Up and over . .

The whole mixing business shouldn't take more than a couple of minutes.

Now, ready into the cake pans!

Half in each.

Do it eyeball to eyeball, or whatever they say.

Push it out to the sides so it won't hump up . . .

barely half full ...

and a little bit left for the cook who would like to lick the pan!

And then bang! bang!

Drop 'em on the counter just to settle everything. (she puts a pan in the oven)

And then right into the oven, (puts second pan in the oven) diagonally for air circulation for fifteen, sixteen, eighteen minutes . . .

And I want you to see . . .

(I hope these are gonna be just right) ... how they look when done. (opens second oven and looks inside) This is not quite done. I shall put it back again. Let's look at this one. (she takes it out) The French chocolate cake is always . . . fairly moist. It shakes a little in the pun. Take a toothpick or something and . . . it should almost be set at the sides. That's not quite set. So these need another two or three minutes. (she puts the pan back in the oven) Watch them very carefully at this point. They'll puff up, then they sink down. (She looks in the oven . . . then takes the uniced cake on cakestand and bowl of icing out from under the counter.) They're probably done. Now, this is a very delicate cake, so you'll un-mold them right on the cake stand. You may want to chill them a bit before un-molding, and then we'll have a chocolate and butter icing. (She starts to apply the icing) And this is exactly the same chocolate mixture that we had before. Now we have the top layer . . . we hope . . . Better too much than too little . . . nicely and evenly . . . and it goes around carefully . . . This could really be quite a mess . . . Smooth off that top. (She walks with the cake into the dining area in front of the preparation table.) And in she goes. We're just having a cake party today, and I'm going to serve you some. Let's see how that looks. See that lovely soft texture . . . almost like a soufflé . . and it's picer than a soufflé, because it doesn't fall. And you can serve it with whipped cream if you want to go the whole way, and it's nice with coffee. So this is really a wonderfully chocolately and amazingly light soufflé-like cake that doesn't fall . . . le Găteau au chocolat l'Eminence Brune, really one of the best chocolate cakes I know. And that's all for today. Bon appétit!

-JULIA CHILD (adapted by Mark Shulgasser)

## **Musical Markings and Stage Directions**

In this score, staging notes are indicated with \*asterisks, musical notes are indicated with (parentheses), and diction notes are transcribed into IPA and enclosed by [brackets].













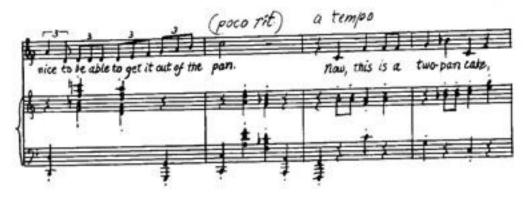


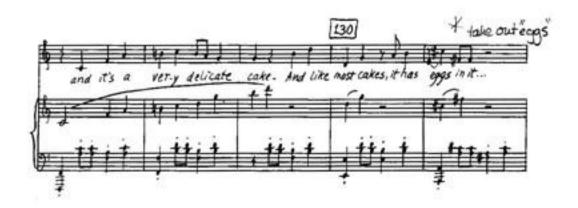
























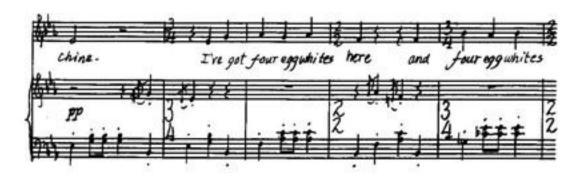


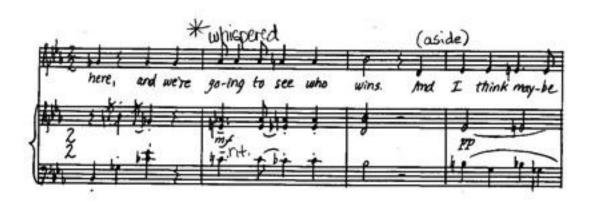








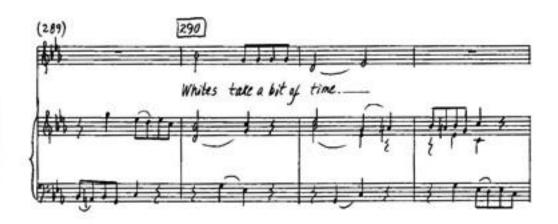


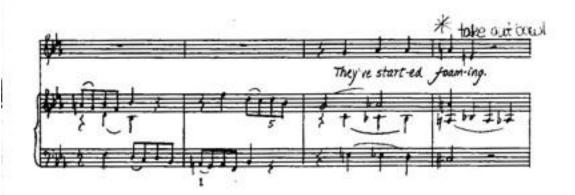


















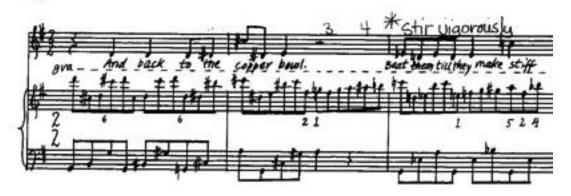




























































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