

PHENOMENAL QUEEN: CORETTA SCOTT KING

Unit 3: Examining the Text



John Mathew Smith & www.celebrity-photos.com



Phenomenal Queen as a Song Cycle

What's a Song Cycle?

- A Song Cycle is a musical form commonly used in vocal composition.
- It consists of a series of related songs that are connected by a theme, emotion, or narrative and are arranged to create a unified musical experience.

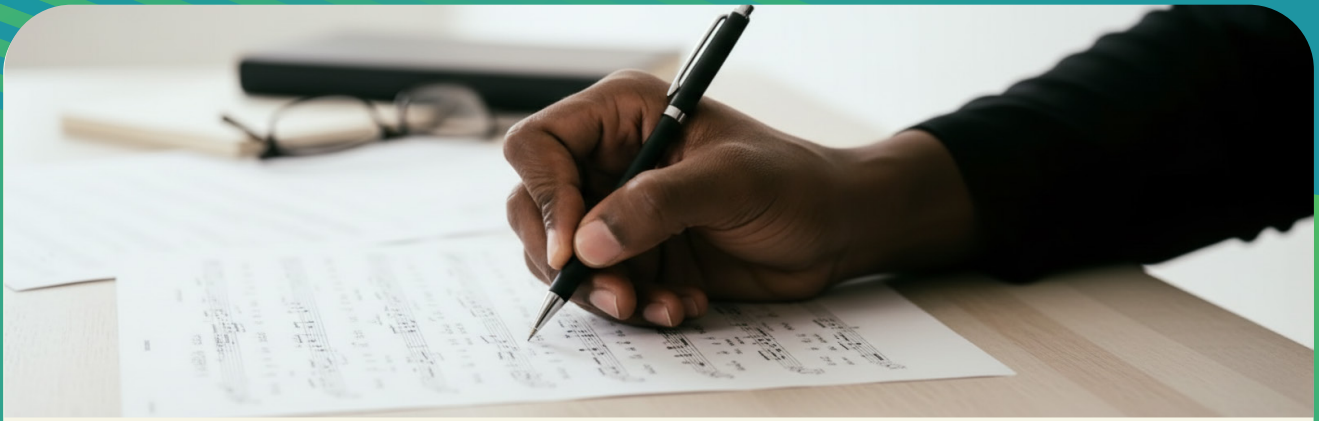
Phenomenal Queen: The Libretto

What's a Libretto?

- A libretto is the text which is paired with a dramatic musical work.
- Libretti are quite simply the words which pair with the music to bring a story to life.



- Many people associate the concept of the libretto specifically with opera and the operatic tradition.
- The libretto may be written before the music, or in cooperation with the composer as he or she works on a piece.



- Ideally, the text of the libretto meshes perfectly with the music, creating a harmonious and beautiful performance of song and music which captivates viewers of the performance.

Understanding Music with Composer Notes



Composer notes are written descriptions that accompany a performance or event.



They provide context and insights about the pieces being performed, the composers, and the historical or thematic significance of the music.

Components of Composer Notes

THE CONTENT



explains the structure or themes of the pieces to enhance audience understanding of the music while offering background information on composers and compositions.

THE PURPOSE



is to share biographical and historical details about the composer and subject of the piece to help analyze the musical styles and influences within the work.



Composer Notes from James Lee III

Phenomenal Queen: Coretta Scott King is inspired by the life of Mrs. Coretta Scott King regarding her legacy of social action, peace, justice, and work toward peace, and love. This is a work in four movements which utilizes texts from James Weldon Johnson, the Bible, James Lee III, and a Negro Spiritual.



Coretta Scott King studied voice as a music major in college. Her musical background informed her work as an advocate for justice and peace.

During the mid-late fifties, Mrs. King performed concerts and recitals throughout the South.

She also conceived and organized a series of Freedom Concerts as fundraising efforts to benefit the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) throughout the 1960s.

These critically acclaimed concerts combined poetry, narration, and music to tell the story of the Civil Rights Movement.





Mrs. King carried the message of nonviolence and the dream of the Beloved Community. She lived a phenomenal life as a woman of wisdom, faith, determination, compassion, hope, and healing.

Her vision for the Beloved Community and her commitment to nonviolence placed her at the forefront of leadership for peace, love, and social change.

A “Beloved Community” refers to a vision of a society where everyone is cared for, free from poverty, hunger, and hate, with a focus on racial justice and equality.



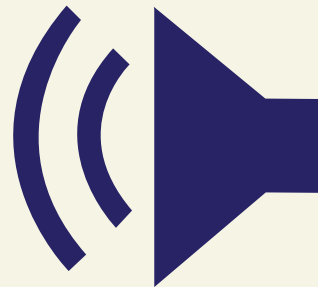
- These four songs,
1. "...and I can sing"
 2. "Movements"
 3. "Choose Justice"
 4. "The Beloved Community"

address the various aspects of the life and mission of Mrs. Coretta Scott King.



How to Listen to Phenomenal Queen: Coretta Scott King

For this portion of the lesson plan, listen and watch the video recording of Phenomenal Queen as you read the text from each of the four movements in the song cycle and consider the questions that follow.



How does the libretto help enhance the music in each movement?*

How does the music help you understand the libretto/lyrics?*



*Omit this question if the video recording is not available.

Composer James Lee III uses a musical technique called “text painting,” using words to create a visual mood for understanding.

How well does the music and text paint the libretto?*



*Omit this question if the video recording is not available.

How does each movement demonstrate Coretta Scott King's commitment to non-violence and justice/equality for all?



How does composer James Lee III use Biblical scripture, Negro Spirituals, and his own words to summarize the impact of Coretta Scott King?



What musical elements do you hear that sound 'unique' to the culture and social climate of Coretta Scott King?*

What do you hear that is relevant to today?*



*Omit this question if the video recording is not available.

**The Libretto of
Phenomenal
Queen:
Coretta Scott
King**



MOVEMENT 1:
“... and I can sing”
(from *The Gift to Sing* by James Weldon Johnson)

Sometimes the mist overhangs my path,
And blackening clouds about me cling;
But, oh, I have a magic way
To turn the gloom to cheerful day—
I softly sing.

And if the way grows darker still,
Shadowed by Sorrow’s somber wing,
With glad defiance in my throat,
I pierce the darkness with a note,
And sing, and sing.

I brood not over the broken past,
Nor dread whatever time may bring;
No nights are dark, no days are long,
While in my heart there swells a song,
And I can sing.

MOVEMENT 2:
“Movement”
text by
James Lee III,
Habakkuk 1:2,
and a Negro
Spiritual

Injustice, oppression, deception!
O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear?
Even cry out to You,
“Violence!” and You will not save?
Why do you show me iniquity,
and cause me to see trouble?

I am reminded of Queen Esther, how can I be silent?
I am here for such a time as this.
How can I move forward? What must I do?

I’m gonna do what the Spirit says do!
I’m gonna march if the Spirit says march!
I’m gonna love if the Spirit says love!
And if the Spirit says sing, I’m gonna sing, oh, Lord,

I’m gonna sing if the Spirit says sing!
I’m gonna do what the Spirit says do!

MOVEMENT 3:
“Choose Justice”
texts from
Zechariah 7:9,
Psalm 82: 1, 3-5

Thus says the LORD of hosts:
Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion
Everyone to his brother.

God stands in the congregation of the mighty;
He judges among the gods.

Defend the poor and fatherless;
Do justice to the afflicted and needy.
Deliver the poor and needy;
Free them from the hand of the wicked.
They do not know, nor do they understand;

They walk about in darkness;
All the foundations of the earth are unstable
Arise, Oh God, judge the earth;
For You shall inherit all nations.

MOVEMENT 4:
“Beloved”
Community”
texts by
James Lee III,
Mark 12:31,
Revelation 22:1-2,
Revelation 21:4

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Ah, the beloved community. My brother, my sister,
may we love and respect each other unconditionally.
I long for the day when there will be no more hunger or hate.
As the scripture says,
“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

One day in paradise,
may we rest by the river when all our labors are over.
There is indeed...a balm in Gilead. Our souls will be healed.

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life,
clear as crystal, proceeding out of the
throne of God and of the Lamb.
In the midst of the street of it,
and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life,
which bare twelve manners of fruits,
and yielded her fruit every month:
and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes;
there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying.
There shall be no more pain,
for the former things have passed away.

Yes, the true Beloved Community.
An eternal community of peace, light, and love.