

# The High Line

Elena Specht

2018

Duration: 30 minutes

Opera

*The High Line* takes place in Tennessee and New York in 2006 and 2016. The first scene introduces the Dixon family, Maryann and Marshall, and their 19- and 17-year old sons, Sam and Jacob. They live in a small town in Tennessee called Cedar Valley. The opera begins just after the Dixons have received news that Sam was killed in Afghanistan. In his grief, Jacob blames his parents and leaves the home. Ten years later, Jacob is living in New York City and has left his old life entirely behind him. He hopes to get married to his fiancée, Clara, a lifelong New Yorker. But with the prodding of her maid of honor, Grace, Clara finally confronts Jacob on the unknowns of his past before their wedding. Despite her desire to ignore the problem, Clara realizes something must be done to reconcile Jacob to his family.

My hope is that *The High Line* touches on both contemporary and universal themes. I chose Tennessee and New York for this opera in part because I have lived in both states, but also because the differences in values and culture between rural and urban Americans too often results in misunderstanding and conflict in American society. I also speak to the devastating deaths of young Americans in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which have caused substantial pain to many families.

But I also hope that this story is one that reaches beyond contemporary American life. I often find that how we respond to adversity and crises reveal to ourselves and others who we are – and what we are capable of – on a more fundamental level. Sometimes experiences of hardship, grief, or injustice bring out an inner strength and reveal a deeper capacity within ourselves for endurance, patience, and love than we knew existed. In this story, however, Jacob’s crisis of grief gives rise to anger, which turns to deep shame as he eventually realizes the devastating effects of his own behavior. With the passage of time, it becomes more and more difficult for him to even consider apologizing for his choices, which prolongs his feelings of shame and regret. But this story is also about the hope of reconciliation and the goodness of choosing forgiveness, even after the most painful offenses.

The title, *The High Line*, is the name of a park in Manhattan, where an old elevated rail line has been converted into a beautiful outdoor space with great views of the city. It is where Jacob and Clara have their best moment together – the proposal – but also one of their most difficult, when Clara confronts Jacob about his family and they have to make a decision about what to do. The High Line is a crucial space in this story, as it is both where they imagine their future together and where Jacob must reckon with his past.

*The High Line* was written as a part of the University of Colorado Boulder’s New Opera Works – Composer Fellows’ Initiative. It was premiered on June 16, 2018.

Parts:

Soprano

Mezzo-Soprano

Tenor

Baritone

Piano