RUSSELL STEINBERG

Rucksack

Monodrama for Mezzo Soprano and Piano

Text by Juliane Heyman

Op. 78a

Duration: 14 minutes

Blown To Bits Publications

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Rucksack Melodrama for Mezzo Soprano and Piano Music by Russell Steinberg Text by Juliane Heyman

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NOTES

Rucksack is a single movement monodrama that interweaves two stories from Juliane Heyman's book From Rucksack to Backpack. The first story details her harrowing year and a half long escape from the Nazis, beginning with the arrest of her parents in 1938. In semi-comic relief, her next story describes her first hiking experience just a few years later in the United States. The police arrest her and her girlfriend, believing them to be prostitutes because they were walking alone with backpacks! Apparently, hiking was only popular in the US after the 1940s.

The parallels and confusion juxtaposing these two stories is meant to provide both a dramatic counterpoint as well as the urgent importance of allowing immigration in a free society.

For The Singer

The vocal part switches continually between three different styles: bel canto, rhythmic speech, and dramatic speech. Bel canto is exclusive to Julie's hiking story in the Poconos mountains. The speech is used mostly to relate her difficult journey of escape from the Nazis. Bel canto is notated as conventionally. Rhythmic speech is notated with crossed notes (x) beamed rhythmically. It should be spoken in a clipped manner, monotone, and with precise rhythm. The dramatic speech includes narration and dialogue and appears in boxes sometimes over a single held chord, and other times spaced out above measures of music. Experiment with the pacing of this speech with the piano, as well as the pacing between all three vocal styles, to create the most effective musical drama.

For The Pianist

The piano part switches between two different styles—

- I) an Americana style, for Julie's hiking story in the Poconos mountains (popular with composers in the 1940s like Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, Harold Shapero, etc.)
- 2) an Expressionist style (tritones, fourths, and fifths) for her difficult hourney of escape from the Nazis (associated with many German composers in the first half of the 20th century)

The Americana style should be played in a lyrical manner with beautiful tone. The Expressionist style should be played "orchestrally," with the 16th note triplets emulating a percussive snare drum and disjunct passages with leaps of 7ths and 9ths soundling like woodwinds.

Rucksack

text by Juliane Heyman adapted by Russell Steinberg

Sung:

Lovely wildflowers covered the rolling mountains; the beautiful landscape and the silence on the trail of the Poconos.

Spoken:

I was born in the free city of Danzig Poland in 1925. I survived the Second World War and was extremely fortunate to have escaped the Nazis. My luck was always with me and I felt I was invulnerable. In 1935 when Jewish children were no longer permitted to attend public school, I transferred to a newly established Jewish school. During the ten minute walk each day the Nazi boys harassed me and sometimes even hit me. In 1938 the Nazis imprisoned my parents. Several months after their release, we departed in the middle of the night, leaving everything that was dear to me.

Sung:

Spring of 1943, New York city, a college holiday. Lisbeth and I decided to go for a hike in the country to the Poconos mountains in Pennsylvania. Lisbet prepared sandwiches, I brought fruit and cookies. We planned to spend a couple of days surrounded by nature.

Lovely wildflowers covered the rolling mountains.

Spoken:

I was sent to school in Switzerland. I traveled by myself and at the border was subjected to a strip search by the Germans. After a term, I joined my parents in Brussels, Belgium. On May 10, 1940 we heard the sound of gunfire outside our apartment. We went to the balcony and realized the Germans had invaded Belgium. We left by train and headed to the coast. We crossed the French border on foot... with our rucksacks on our backs.

Sung:

The beautiful landscape and the silence on the trail of the Poconos.

At the trailhead, the bus took us to the town of Wilkesbar. With our rucksacks on our backs, we found no signs of a room.

Spoken:

We arrived in Dunkirk where we spent three days in a cellar. The family continued, with no idea where we were going. We repeatedly were caught in the crossfire between French and German forces. One day I was lying in a ditch and the man next to me lost a leg in the fire... We worked in a bakery, then on a farm. Mother and father finally succeeded in receiving visas for the U.S. My parents obtained false documents to enter the unoccupied zone of France. But at the border, the train was stopped...and the Nazis began a search.

Sung:

All of a sudden a police car stopped next to us.

I could not understand why.

"We are taking you to the police station for some questioning."

[&]quot;Get in!"

[&]quot;What have we done?"

Spoken:

The German authorities did not discover that our papers were forged. To my great relief we had escaped the Nazis again.

Sung:

"Well, well, what are you bringing us here?" said the police captain in the interrogation room. He did not seem mean like a Nazi in Europe.

"Why are you in Wilkes-bar?"

"We have been hiking in the Poconos. We were looking for a room to spend the night." He could not understand. Hiking was only popular in the United States after the war.

The captain explained:

"Knapsacks on your backs looked like you were runaway girls, runaway girls, heading, heading toward prostitution, toward prostitution."

Spoken:

We spent several months on a farm near Bordeaux in the wine country. I learned to make wine, which I enjoyed. Mother and Father finally succeeded in receiving visas for the U.S. Many, including most of my relatives, did not make it and were killed in the concentration camps. We did not learn of this till the end of the war... While waiting for the freighter for America, I felt free and secure and gorged myself on food, which I had not been able to do for over a year. When our boat passed the Statue of Liberty in New York, cliché or not, it was and remains to this day the symbol of our family's deliverance. I was moved beyond words and looked forward to a new life in the United States without the dangers of the past.

Sung:

The captain asked the officers to take us to a respectable boarding house.

The lesson that I learned was not to walk with a rucksack in a city.

Lovely wildflowers covered the rolling mountains; the beautiful landscape and the silence of the Poconos.

Rucksack



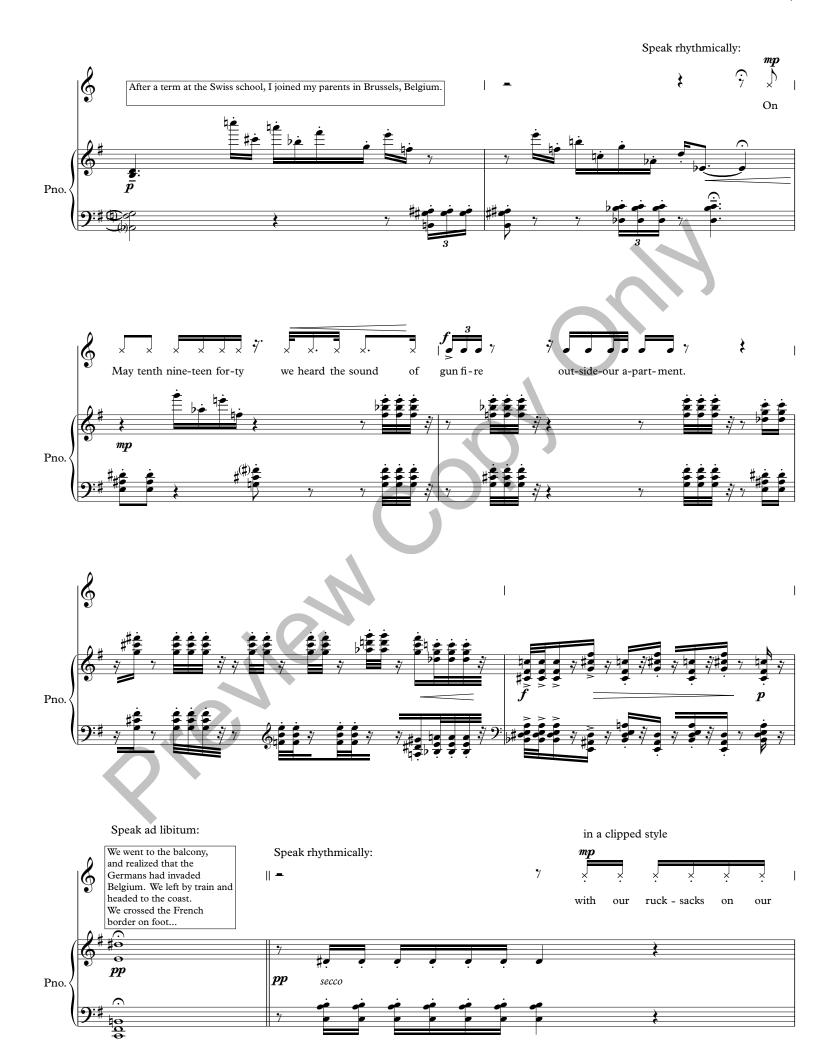






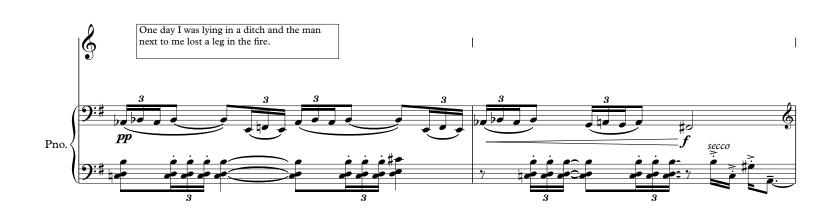










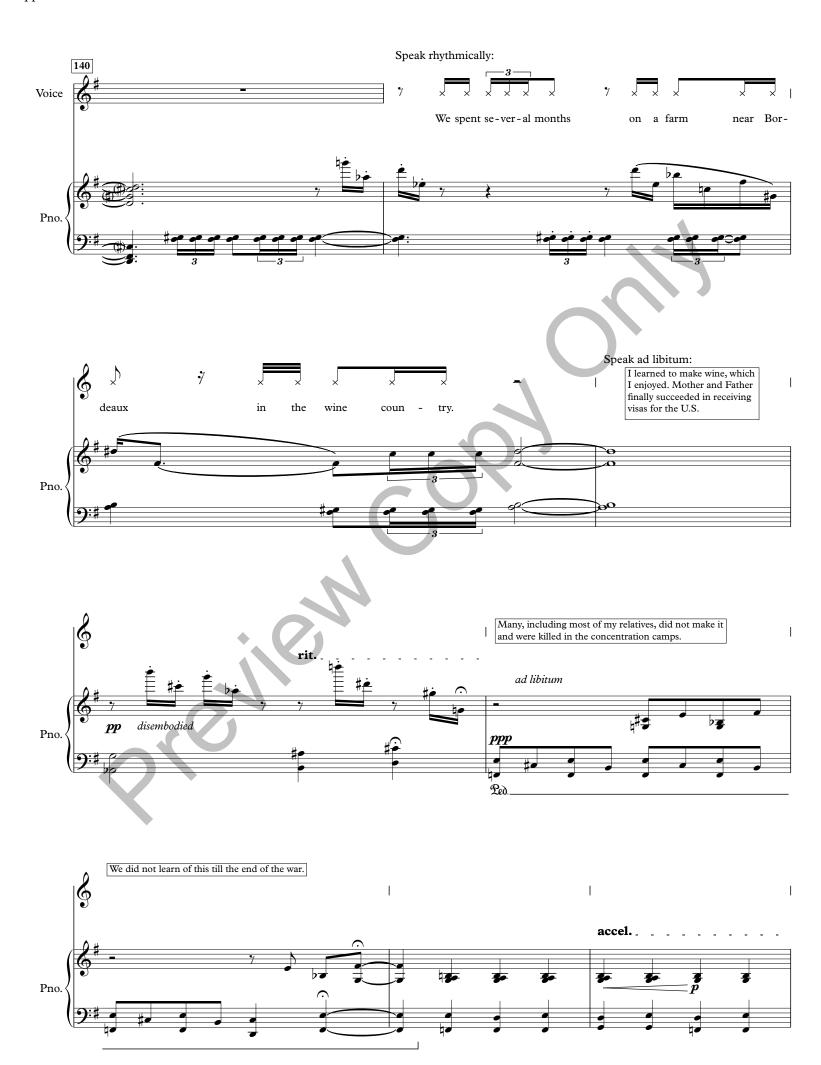


















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