

# Jacob Thomas Composition Recital

## Program Notes

### **Between the Empty Spaces:**

“Between the Empty Spaces” is a tribute to the idea of separation and explores the different connotations that idea carries. Described as “Copland-esque,” this piece features the rich, lower register of the bass as it carries the listener through the piece’s narrative. With choreography by Stephen Loch, this piece was conceptualized and crafted as a duet for dancers, hence the music lends itself to be envisioned with a lyrical and percussive dance between the piano and bass as well. After an improv-like introduction from the piano, the bass enters with its rich, lyrical theme – as it unravels, we enter different variations of it, becoming ever more intense, bitter, and percussive. Ultimately, we find a new “dance” in the rhythm and our lyrical theme returns to sweep us away, dissipating into a final droplet of air in the end.

### **Ballade des Pendus:**

Literally translating to “Ballad of the Hanged,” this piece sets the first four lines of the Francois Villon’s “Ballade des Pendus” – these same lines were notably printed at the beginning of Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*. The ghosts of those who have had their lives taken from them come back to beg the question: should someone else have the power or moral assurance to take the life of another under whatever circumstance?

In playing with such a haunting and somber atmosphere, the music creates a sense of unease as the narrator half-whispers to the audience – calling them in before groaning their pain and warning them of the consequences they may face. The music teeters between a simple, melancholy song (from the singer) and a dissonant, musically-confused swelling (from the piano). As if overexcited or out of breath, the singer reiterates the last two lines of the poem with growing intensity

until peacefully caressing the last word: yearning and turning it over – “mercy.” Then, as if the wind is carrying one final warning, the sweetness turns sour, and we are left with an ominous whisper – just as we started.

*Frères humains qui après nous vivez,  
N'ayez les cuers contre nous endurcis,  
Car, se pitié de nous pvores avez,  
Dieu en aura plus tost de vous mercis.*

*Human brothers who live after us,  
Have not hardened hearts against us  
Because, if you pity us poor men,  
God will sooner have mercy on you.*

### **Selections from *Entangling Alliances***

#### **Overview:**

*Entangling Alliances* is a musical comedy about the life of interns at the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. The story follows an American intern, Jack, who is desperate to work his way into the history books. Alongside him are his fellow interns from all different countries and cultures found in the organization – France, Poland, Romania, Canada, etc. – all of whom struggle together through the often-demoralizing workdays. All is going well for Jack until he is locked in heated debate with a Russian intern, Katerina, who is visiting the headquarters for a week-long retreat. As the two of them hash out their grievances with the other’s country and ways of thinking, they find themselves falling for each other – further complicating each of their goals and changing their preconceived prejudices of each other. While upbeat in its narrative, the story also touches on more earnest issues of xenophobia, sexism, and antiquated systems & their power dynamics.

### **Resumé Requiem:**

Evi, a Dutch intern, laments over the work she's assigned, knowing that she is more than qualified for more important work, but never having the "right" experience that would prove that on a resumé. To her it seems as if the organization only sees her as someone to throw clerical work at. As Evi works through her thoughts, the music follows her strife and moments of hope. The pace quickens, then relaxes continuously through the song, following Evi's uncertainty and her lack of surefootedness through this whole ordeal – from a recitative, to waltzing, to a power ballad.

### **Daily Grind:**

The weary, tenured interns take turns explaining to the newbies how the system of operation can drive them insane – how even the simplest or most standard task requires a long and tedious process. Even the full-time staff never truly grow callous to the frustration either. It begs the question: is it all worth it? A fun, upbeat rhythm takes over the ensemble as they quickly dispel any glory in the work they do. The bass and drums bring a funky life to the piece with some rock-like moments in the piano. As the piece goes on, the interns all put in their two-cents before bursting out in frustration, the music driving underneath them – turning it up to "11" until it lets loose at the end.

### **Easy Come, Easy Go:**

Jack and Evi have just been betrayed – Jack by Katerina, who he thinks leaked sensitive information to the public after being vulnerable with her; and Evi, by her mentor whose promise to keep her as a full-time staff member was unfulfilled. After having their trust broken, they feel foolish for ever having trusted in the first place. With a combination of elements from Jack and Evi's own respective songs, the music mixes between a ballad and a jazz waltz.

### **Articles of Commitment:**

The finale number of the show – the song follows our characters as they reminisce on the bonds they've shared, the memories they created, and how they might've

made some positive change to organization. It implores the audience to open their minds, hearts, and ears to the voices of those around you, and to value the chance to work interdependently together – to make even the smallest bit of change with those around you. With a light, open beginning, the piano sings alongside the soloists, having small responses of its own to the characters. The bass and drums join in, giving the piece more energy and groove as it goes on. As everybody joins in together, the music opens up – widening and freeing itself. We build to the end as the ensemble implore you to “let the future in” with a final swell from the band.

### **Thank You for the Music:**

Written by the popular band, ABBA, this song has always been dear to my heart growing up, speaking on the importance of passing on music and being a humble person with a voice to share. The music of ABBA has been heavily popularized through the movie-musicals *Mama Mia!* (2008) and its sequel *Mama Mia! Here We Go Again* (2018). While this song wasn't used in either of the final cuts of the movies, it was included in the original film's soundtrack. This arrangement (done by ABBA's own Benny Anderson) has a slightly jazzier and jauntier feel than the original studio recording – this coupled with the simple voice plus accompaniment instrumentation makes for a fun and intimate setting of the song.