

KATHRYN WALAT - GREGORY SPEARS

PAUL'S CASE



**BASED ON THE STORY BY WILLA CATHER
ROBERT WOOD - URBANARIAS - AMERICAN MODERN ENSEMBLE**

In Willa Cather's remarkable story "Paul's Case" (1905) an enigmatic high school student, on the cusp of maturity with no productive outlet for his artistic energies, cultivates a dandy-esque demeanor in response to his Pittsburgh surroundings. Paul's interaction with his teachers and his journey to New York culminate in a heartbreaking climax.

In our operatic adaptation, we tried to create an overarching mood that is reflective and expansive, as if the story were being retold in memoriam using Paul's favorite art forms: music and theater. It is our hope that the words and music do justice to this story by creating a strong character who reminds us of our own struggle to come to terms with what Cather calls "the homilies by which the world is run."

— Gregory Spears & Kathryn Walat



PAUL'S CASE

An opera based on the short story by Willa Cather

Music by **Gregory Spears**

Libretto by **Kathryn Walat** and **Gregory Spears**

History Teacher / Opera Soprano One / Maid One **Melissa Wimbish**

Drawing Teacher / Opera Soprano Two / Maid Two **Erin Sanzero**

English Teacher / Maid Three **Amanda Crider**

Paul **Jonathan Blalock**

Boy (Yale Freshman) **Michael Slattery**

Father **Keith Phares**

Principal / Bellboy **James Shaffran**

American Modern Ensemble Conducted by **Robert Wood**

Clarinet 1 **Nicholas Gallas**

Violin 1 **Robin Braun**

Clarinet 2 **Nuno Antunes**

Violin 2 **Victoria Paterson**

Harp **Jacqueline Kerrod**

Viola **J.J. Johnson**

Piano **Geoffrey Burleson**

Cello **Dave Eggar**

Double Bass **Roger Wagner**

Recorded on August 6-8, 2018 at the Recital Hall of The Performing Arts Center,
Purchase College, State University of New York



Willa Cather's story "Paul's Case," which was first published in *McClure's* magazine in 1905, tells of a high-school boy who is fatally at odds with the world in which he was born. He lives on a respectable street in Pittsburgh; his father works for a corporation and hopes that his son will follow a similar path. But Paul is an aesthete, for whom the theatre, the concert hall, and other realms of art are the sole reality amid a world of "stupid and ugly things." He works as an usher at Carnegie Hall in Pittsburgh, and revels in its atmosphere of luxury and sophistication. He wears a red carnation in his buttonhole. His supercilious manner and habit of lying get him into trouble. Eventually, he steals a thousand dollars and goes into New York, where he assumes the guise of a gentleman of means. When his theft is discovered, he cannot abide the idea of returning home in shame, and throws himself in front of a train.

Generations of readers have concluded that Paul is gay. We can easily read between the lines when Paul's night on the town with another young man begins "in the confiding warmth of a champagne friendship" and ends with a parting "singularly cool." Cather herself was a lesbian, and wrote perceptively about ambiguous bonds between men. Her portrait of Paul is hardly an uplifting one; it can be made to fit stereotypes of gay men as duplicitous, unreliable people. Yet Cather is sympathetic to the fury of the misfit—the almost radical rage against convention that drives Paul's rebellion. In that sense, he is one of the great antiheroes of American literature. Gregory Spears, the composer of *Paul's Case*, remembers being taken aback by the story when he read it in college. "My first impression was that I couldn't believe that it existed," he has said in an interview. "I thought it was quite shocking and dramatic, especially having been written in 1905." Many American operas these days lean on classic literary properties. *Paul's Case*—which had its première at UrbanArias in 2013, in Arlington, Virginia, under the direction of Robert Wood—is something other than a slavish reenactment of a familiar text. The libretto, by Kathryn Walat and Spears, takes a more dreamlike approach to the evocation of Paul's fractured world. As they say, it is "as if the story were being retold in memoriam, using Paul's favorite art forms: music and theater."

Born in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1977, Spears is a composer with roots in American minimalism: his music often exhibits slow harmonic motion and hypnotically looping patterns. At the same time, he reaches back to the bittersweet textures of Renaissance consort music and the vocal ornaments of Baroque opera. The orchestra for *Paul's Case* is small by operatic standards—two clarinets, piano, harp, and string quintet—but spacious, slow-unfolding instrumental textures create a wide-open sonic stage for Cather's tight, dark story. While the musical language is

largely tonal, Spears creates tension by adding acidic dissonances and layering voices in claustrophobic ensembles. You can feel the opera's central conflict in the transition from the opera's plaintive, eerie prelude—built on a string of added-note E-major chords in the piano—to the hectic opening scene, in which teachers speculate and fret about the intractable problem of Paul: "There is something about the boy that none of us understands."

The opening scenes show the school's attempts to discipline Paul, his father's determination to set him on a right-thinking path, and his contrary longing for the world of theatre and make-believe. An intricately layered scene at Carnegie Hall shows Paul being pulled into the artifice of the stage, becoming so entranced by an opera duet that he forgets his place as an usher—until his father's voice intrudes, yanking him back into mundane reality. The crucial turn comes in the third scene, when Paul, thrust into a job as a cash-boy clerk, decides upon his act of criminal rebellion: "I will burn my whole life, I will burn it all in three days!" As Paul prepares to board the train to New York with his stolen money, Spears stages a dramatic harmonic shift: a turbulent passage in D-flat-major gives way to a luminous expanse of C major, with ringing piano chords echoing the sonorities heard at the beginning. Paul's high-living adventures in New York—his days at the Waldorf-Astoria, his night on the town with the college boy from San Francisco—have a kind of forced jollity, with dancing rhythms that trip over themselves and exuberant ensembles that grow chaotic. All this does nothing to assuage Paul's essential isolation, especially when that "champagne friendship" frays and cools: the failure of the flirtation is suggested in clashing tonalities and a sudden decrescendo. Paul tries to keep up his ironic smile and haughty poses, sporting his red carnation, but the illusion he has created for himself is shattering against reality. Jonathan Blalock, who created the role of Paul and sings it again on this recording, perfectly caught that brittle pride in Kevin Newbury's inaugural production of the opera.

The ending is as quietly harrowing as anything in recent American opera. Paul, on the point of death, has a split-second glimpse of the life he will not live—he sees "the yellow of Algerian sands, the blue of the Adriatic." In Newbury's production, Blalock lay on his back as overhead lights descended upon him, stopping within inches of his face. The vocal line repeatedly comes to rest on a courtly two-note descent; in its final iteration, the figure is pushed up another step, to a high, hopeful, heartbreaking A. The opera ends as it began, with bell-like E-major chords, dissonant tones sounding in their midst. Impassive, bright and dark at once, they echo Cather's cosmic closing phrase: "Paul dropped back into the immense design of things."

—ALEX ROSS



GREGORY SPEARS is a New York-based composer whose music has been called "astonishingly beautiful" (*New York Times*), "coolly entrancing" (*The New Yorker*), and "some of the most beautifully unsettling music to appear in recent memory" (*The Boston Globe*). In recent seasons he has been commissioned by The Lyric Opera of Chicago, The Cincinnati Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Seraphic Fire, The Crossing, BMI / Concert Artists Guild, Vocal Arts DC, New York Polyphony, The New York International Piano

Competition, and the JACK Quartet. Spears' most recent evening-length opera, *Fellow Travelers*, written in collaboration with Greg Pierce, premiered at Cincinnati Opera in 2016 and was subsequently produced at PROTOTYPE Festival (NYC), The Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Minnesota Opera. Spears' children's opera *Jason and the Argonauts* written with Kathryn Walat also premiered in 2016 at the Lyric Opera of Chicago. His music is published by Schott Music and Schott PSNY.



KATHRYN WALAT is a playwright whose work has been produced Off-Broadway and across the country, including *Creation* (Theatre @ Boston Court, LA Stage Alliance Ovation Award for Playwriting nomination), *Victoria Martin: Math Team Queen* (WP Theater, published in *New Playwrights: The Best Plays of 2007*), and *Bleeding Kansas* (Hangar Theatre, Francesca Primus Citation/American Theatre Critics Association). She has collaborated

with Gregory Spears as co-librettist of *Paul's Case*, which was developed by American Opera Projects and premiered at UrbanArias, in a production presented in New York as part of PROTOTYPE Festival 2014. It was also produced by Pittsburgh Opera later that year. She has also collaborated with Spears as librettist of *Jason and the Argonauts*, commissioned and produced by Lyric Opera of Chicago and performed for over 20,000 young audience members. Most recently, she is co-librettist of *The Echo Drift*, presented at PROTOTYPE in 2018. She received her BA from Brown University, and MFA in Playwriting from the Yale School of Drama.

CAST

JONATHAN BLALOCK is a tenor specializing in twenty-first century repertoire, having created over a dozen roles in world premieres with companies including The Dallas Opera, Washington National Opera, The Center for Contemporary Opera, Fort Worth Opera, The Armel Festival (in Szeged, Hungary), Opéra Théâtre d'Avignon, PROTOTYPE Festival, Fargo Moorhead Opera and UrbanArias. Other recent notable performances include Opera Hong Kong, The Santa Fe Opera, The Atlanta Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, Nashville Opera, Boston Modern Opera Project, Pacific Symphony, Winston-Salem Symphony, Memphis Symphony, Portland Symphony, Arizona MusicFest, Syracuse Symphoria and The Oakland Symphony.



Grammy-nominated Mezzo Soprano AMANDA CRIDER has sung with companies across the US including Los Angeles Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Dallas Opera, New York City Opera, Florida Grand Opera, UrbanArias, Glimmerglass Opera and Florentine Opera. She has appeared as a soloist with ensembles including Apollo's Fire, Seraphic Fire, Charlotte Symphony Orchestra, New World Symphony and the International Contemporary Ensemble. A prize winner in the José Iturbi International, Jensen Foundation, Palm Beach Opera, Oratorio Society of New York, and Center for Contemporary Opera vocal competitions, Amanda is also a recipient of a Richard F. Gold Career Grant from the Shoshana Foundation.





Baritone KEITH PHARES has been hailed by *Opera News* as "an authentic contemporary-American-opera divo" with "an impressive gallery of finely-drawn character portraits". Phares sang the Father in the premiere of *Paul's Case*, Charlie in the premiere of *Heggie's Three Decembers* with Houston Grand Opera and San Francisco Opera and the title role in the premiere and Grammy-winning recording of *Aldridge's Elmer Gantry*. In repertoire from Mozart through today's American composers, he has appeared in leading roles with Los Angeles Opera, Washington National Opera, Seattle Opera, New York City Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and elsewhere.



Baritone JAMES SHAFFRAN's versatility and audience appeal have made him a highly-sought-after performer and perennial favorite. He has sung with virtually every arts organization in the Washington-Baltimore area and many beyond. Described as "a pillar of the company" by former director Placido Domingo, he has amassed over 50 roles with Washington National Opera. A supporter of innovative contemporary opera, he has several world premiere roles to his credit. He is a Grammy winner (solos on Corigliano's *Of Rage And Remembrance*, National Symphony Orchestra) and five-time WAMMIE nominee for Best Classical Vocal Soloist (Washington Area Music Awards).

"Vocally stunning" and "theatrically riveting" (*The Washington Post*), MELISSA WIMBISH is known for her distinctive ability to cross effortlessly between musical genres. The coloratura soprano is a leader in the contemporary music movement, having premiered over 50 works less than a decade into her career. She created the role of Josephine Baker in *Josephine* (Cipullo), Christine in *Lost Childhood* (Hamer), and the History Teacher in *Paul's Case*. Ms. Wimbish was Grand Prize Winner of the prestigious NATSAA Competition resulting in her Carnegie Hall recital debut. She is a songwriter and front woman of the pop duo Outcalls whose album, *No King*, was named one of Baltimore's defining works of 2017.



Recently hailed for her "agile and assured high soprano" (*Washington Post*), ERIN SANZERO is recognized as a "powerhouse" artist with a "voice as agile and tight grained as some exotic harwood" (*San Francisco Classical Voice*). A graduate of Manhattan School of Music and Mannes College of Music, her awards include prizes from the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the Mario Lanza Foundation. Favorite performances include debuts at Santa Fe Opera, Los Angeles Opera, and premiering *Paul's Case* with the PROTOTYPE Festival in 2014.





Tenor MICHAEL SLATTERY's career highlights include concerts at the Royal Festival Hall (London); with New York Pops at Carnegie Hall; Philip Glass's *Akhmaten* with the L.A. Philharmonic; leading roles at the Théâtre du Châtelet, the Berlin Staatsoper, Opéra de Lyon, and the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. He has also performed at the Edinburgh, Spoleto, Holland, Athens and Aspen Music Festivals, with the Philadelphia

Orchestra, the Seattle and Houston Symphonies, and the New York Philharmonic. Michael Slattery's recording *Dowland in Dublin* was chosen by *Opera News* as one of the Best Recordings of 2012.

CONDUCTOR



ROBERT WOOD founded UrbanArias, the DC-area's contemporary opera company, in 2009. Under his leadership the company has achieved national recognition and has undertaken five commissions and ten world premieres. Notable productions include *As One* (Kaminsky), *After Life/Josephine*, and *Glory Denied* (Cipullo), *Paul's Case* (Spears), *Orpheus and Euridice* (Gordon), and *Three Decembers* (Heggie). Maestro

Wood made his debut at the San Francisco Opera with *La traviata*, and has also conducted *L'italiana in Algeri* and several concerts there. He has conducted both standard and contemporary repertoire at Opera Colorado, Wolf Trap Opera, Vancouver Opera, Minnesota Opera, Hawaii Opera Theatre, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, and Kentucky Opera.

SYNOPSIS

Pittsburgh, 1906

Scene One

Paul is seated in front of three teachers and the high school principal to appeal his suspension from school. Paul stammers out the refrain "I do not mean to be polite, or impolite either." The teachers are infuriated by his dandyish behavior and appearance. Paul is eventually dismissed. He bows gracefully and exits.

Scene Two

Later that evening Paul's father is calculating figures at his desk while Paul is changing into an usher's uniform at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Music Hall. The father describes his son's disdain for the mundane while Paul tells of his love for all things theatrical. Unexpectedly, Paul's English teacher arrives at the hall with two tickets given to her by a rich steel magnate. Paul reluctantly guides her to her seat. While waiting for the show to begin, the English teacher recounts a life full of disappointments. The show begins and two opera singers take the stage. Paul and the English teacher are enchanted. Paul's father, still simmering at home, warns that on account of his recent suspension this will be Paul's last night working at the theater.

Scene Three

Paul's father has removed Paul from school and the theater, and sent him to work as a cash-boy clerk. Distraught, Paul describes his contempt for the banalities of work-a-day life in Pittsburgh. He steals the firm's weekend deposit and catches the next train New York.

SYNOPSIS

New York City, 1906

Scene Four

Three hotel maids prepare a sumptuous suite at the Waldorf-Astoria. Paul enters triumphantly and sings of his arrival to New York on the train. He catalogs his purchases from an afternoon shopping spree. Paul then bathes and takes his dinner in the Waldorf's dining room.

Scene Five

The next day, he encounters a Yale freshman down for a weekend visit, and the two join up for a drunken night on the town. Paul wakes the next afternoon hungover. He summons for the Pittsburgh newspapers, in which the maids read of his theft. Paul discovers that he has been spotted at a New York hotel and that his father is coming to take him back home. He then unwraps his final purchase, a revolver, and contemplates his final actions. After putting the revolver away, he heads for the Newark trainyard.

Scene Six

After arriving on an embankment overlooking railroad tracks, Paul buries a red carnation in the snow. He falls asleep and is later awakened by a distant train whistle. As the locomotive approaches he leaps in front of it. Paul's teachers and father lament Paul's death as he dissolves into the landscape.

LIBRETTO

Scene One – Setting: The Principal's office at a Pittsburgh High School, in 1906.

Disc 1, Track 1

(Everyone is frozen. Teachers are arranged behind Paul in a tableaux-like formation, as if posing for a picture. They look stern and disapproving. The Principal is at his desk. Paul is seated before him.)

Disc 1, Track 2

PRINCIPAL

Paul, a high school boy, something of a dandy. I'm the principal of Paul's school, I'm somewhat sympathetic.

(The teachers whisper among themselves.)

TEACHERS (Later joined by PRINCIPAL)

Look, how he smiles; something of the dandy is in him! And the boy's something of a dandy. Look, how he smiles; the glitter in his eyes. He's somewhat sympathetic. *(Paul begins to whistle.)*

PRINCIPAL

Paul, it has been one week since you were suspended from school.

TEACHERS

Just look, how he smiles.

PAUL

A high school boy.

PRINCIPAL

In 1906. It's only 1906. I'm the principal.

TEACHERS

It's only 1906.

PRINCIPAL

In 1906. Something of a dandy. I'm the principal of Paul's school.

TEACHERS

There's something about that fellow wrong.

PAUL

It's only 1906.

TEACHERS

That smile!

PAUL

Something of a dandy.

TEACHERS

Somewhat of a dandy.

There's something about that fellow, wrong!

PRINCIPAL

Now, Paul! Why is it that you are here Paul?

PAUL

I would like to come back, of course, sir.

PRINCIPAL

Teachers please state your case.

ENGLISH TEACHER

It's hard.

DRAWING TEACHER

To put into words.

PRINCIPAL

What is it Paul has done?

Disc 1, Track 3

(The teachers step forward and accuse.)

HISTORY TEACHER

It is his insolence and his smartness.

DRAWING TEACHER

Yes, it is his insolence.

HISTORY TEACHER

His disorder and impertinence.

PRINCIPAL

Yes, but what is it Paul has done?

ENGLISH TEACHER

And the velvet on his collar.

DRAWING TEACHER

Though it's frayed and worn.

HISTORY TEACHER

There's something of the dandy in him.

PRINCIPAL

Yes, but what is it Paul has done?

HISTORY TEACHER

That opal pin in his tie and the red carnation
there in his buttonhole.

ENGLISH TEACHER

Look, how he smiles!

PRINCIPAL

Yes, but what has Paul done?

TEACHERS

Yes that red carnation!

PRINCIPAL

What do you have to say for yourself Paul?

PAUL

I didn't mean to be impolite or polite either.

ENGLISH TEACHER

See how he shrugs.

DRAWING TEACHER

Look how he smiles! .

HISTORY TEACHER

That opal pin in his tie and the red carnation.
There's something of the dandy in him.

DRAWING TEACHER

There in his buttonhole.

PRINCIPAL

Yes, but what has Paul done?

HISTORY and DRAWING TEACHERS

Not the proper not the contrite spirit that
befits a boy under the school ban of suspension.

PAUL

I didn't mean to be impolite or polite either.

HISTORY TEACHER and DRAWING TEACHER

One class he sat with his hand shading
his eyes like so. He looks out the window
through every lecture.

ENGLISH TEACHER

See how he shrugs.

PRINCIPAL

Paul?

HISTORY TEACHER

He makes running comments with humorous
intent!

PRINCIPAL

What do you have to say for yourself Paul?

HISTORY TEACHER

That opal pin in his tie and the red carnation.
There's something of the dandy in him.

PRINCIPAL

Yes, but what has Paul done?

TEACHERS

Yes that red carnation!

Disc 1, Track 4

PRINCIPAL

What do you have to say for yourself?

PAUL

I do not mean to be polite or to be impolite.
It's just...I guess it's just a sort of way
I have of saying things.
I guess it's my way.

PRINCIPAL

Don't you think Paul that it's a way good to
be rid of?

ENGLISH TEACHER

There is something about the boy
That none of us understands.

DRAWING TEACHER

There is something about the boy
That none of us understands.

PRINCIPAL

What do you have to say for yourself Paul?

HISTORY TEACHER

None of us understands.

PRINCIPAL

You may go now Paul.

Disc 1, Track 5

(Paul bows gracefully and exits.)

DRAWING TEACHER

And he bows, how is that?
There is something with the boy, something wrong.

TEACHERS

Look how he bows!

ENGLISH TEACHER

A high school boy!

PRINCIPAL

In 1906. It's only 1906. I'm the principal of Paul's school. Something of a dandy. A high school boy.

HISTORY TEACHER

And Paul's something of a dandy.

TEACHERS

There's something about that fellow, wrong.
That smile! He's somewhat of a dandy.

PRINCIPAL and TEACHERS

Something about him, wrong!
(Teachers disperse, returning to their school duties.)

Scene Two – Setting: Paul's House/Carnegie Music Hall

Disc 1, Track 6

(Paul's father is at home calculating figures at his desk. Paul is changing into his usher's uniform backstage at the theater. The teachers are at home sewing and reading.)

PAUL

Now I'm lighthearted and free!
Not home at Cordelia Street,
But to usher at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Music Hall,
First I tour the lobby to see paintings of Venice
and Paris—

TEACHERS

First the lobby. Venice and Paris. The yellow sands.

PAUL

to lose myself in the blue of Adriatic waters,
The yellow of Algerian sands.

Disc 1, Track 7

(Paul's father sits at a desk at home paying bills.)

FATHER

The Principal told me today
To take Paul out of school.
Must put him to work, he said.
Things surely went, they surely went badly
at school with his teachers.
They betray too much interest.
I don't know what to do with the boy.
Impossible, disinterested, inscrutable
just like his mother, he is gone to me.

TEACHERS

Gone.

FATHER

She had no stomach for Pittsburgh,
Or my loveless comfort
She left without leaving: She left Paul here.
And our problems resisted figuring.

TEACHERS

Figuring.

FATHER

I've tried to interest him,
In the world of business
With legends of the Pittsburgh Iron Kings.

TEACHERS

Legends!

FATHER

The Pittsburgh Iron Kings!
But he just snaps his teeth! Snaps his teeth!
At those newly rich
Who start as cashboys
And years later sail to Egypt
But he has no mind for the cashboy drama.
Nor for life.
He has no mind for the industrial stage

Only the stage at Carnegie Hall.
And paintings of Venetian canals.

PAUL

How I fancy my ushering uniform.

FATHER

If he would just marry!
Like the boy next door
who married a school mistress
(In the theater.)

PAUL

Almost late!

(At home.)

FATHER

Much older than he.
Our neighbor is no boy of fancy
But Paul is a boy of inaction.
And his case resists figuring.
He resists figuring.
And it's not going to be easy, Paul.
One way or another, Paul.
You're going to have to pay and scrimp and pay.
Bill after bill, Paul.

PAUL

This is my favorite part.

FATHER

I promise you Paul.

PAUL

Nothing has started.

FATHER

You're going to pay and scrimp and pay.

PAUL

The whole evening lies ahead.

FATHER

Bill after bill.

PAUL

Only sounds of tuning.

FATHER

And there will be mistakes, Paul.
Little nagging mistakes.
Nothing exciting, Paul.

And you'll take your place Paul,
on the boring stage of life.
Nothing exciting.

Petty purchases, petty economies.

PAUL

Those magical sounds.

FATHER

You'll pay it all in the end,
just like I am right now.

*(At the theater the orchestra is tuning and
warming-up. Theater-goers are walking to
their seats. Paul is taking tickets.)*

PAUL

The notes have not been played or
decayed.

The whole evening lies ahead.

Only sounds of tuning.

Those magical sounds.

It's the sound, the sound of potential.

The sound of nothing yet been spent.

The perfect symphony remains unplayed,

No tempo choices have been made.

No mistakes have been made.

No mistakes must be undone.

*(The English Teacher arrives at the theater to
take her seat. Paul takes her ticket.)*

PAUL

That my English teacher should be here!

ENGLISH TEACHER

Oh dear!

PAUL

That she should be here

And with two prime tickets.

ENGLISH TEACHER

This is so unbecoming.

PAUL

From a steel magnate.

ENGLISH TEACHER

They're from an old friend.

Must I take his arm?

PAUL and the ENGLISH TEACHER

This is the best part, as good as it gets.
 Nothing has started,
 Only imagined,
 The whole evening lies ahead, unplayed.
(Still at home.)

FATHER

Paul's a boy of inaction
 And his case resists figuring.
 He resists figuring.
 And this is going to be your last night, Paul.
 One way or another Paul...
(At the theater.)

PAUL

Pure anticipation!

FATHER

You're going to have to quit these games at school.
 And quit the theater, Paul.
 I promise you Paul.
 You're going to have to quit and work and pay!
*(Paul and the English Teacher walk down the
 theater aisle. As they reach her seat, Paul turns to
 her and bows.)*

Disc 1, Track 8**ENGLISH TEACHER**

Years ago I walked down the aisle
 with a wayward boy
 Soon to be a cashboy, now a Robber Baron.
 Years ago, he was a trifle dissipated.
 With the most becoming glitter in his eye.
 But not a dandy, he.
 But he was a changeable man.
 Back then I saw the potential in him.
 The pure potential

PAUL

Pure potential.

ENGLISH TEACHER

Of box seats every night. If not love.

PAUL

Definitely not love.

ENGLISH TEACHER

He finally left me
 For no good reason.
 With the occasional consolation.
 No marriage vows were ever spoken.
 My whole life lies ahead.
 Only to be imagined
 With my lost Robber Baron.

PAUL

What would an iron king see in her?
 He must have taken pity.
 On her dreary teacher's togs, her ugly togs.
 I didn't mean to be impolite
 Or polite either,
 But it's not that easy. Just look at her.
 She makes me uneasy. Why can't it be easy?

ENGLISH TEACHER

He remained a rich old miser.
 Nothing more.
 Leaving me alone
 So many years ago, to be
 Led down the aisle by
 Paul with his narrow chest
 and that gilded usher's uniform.
 So haughty.
 His tight vest and his burning cheeks.
 Burning with anticipation
 For the show he'll see for free.
 Trust me Paul, you'll be disappointed.
 And alone.
 You'll pay in disappointment Paul.
 Disappointment.

Disc 1, Track 9

(Paul blows his usher whistle, rudely interrupting her reverie. Two sopranos take the stage.)

PAUL

(To the English Teacher)

You've gotten here just in time the show's finally to begin.

Text from the Stephen Crane poem, "And You Love Me" (1896):

OPERA SOPRANOS

"My life,

Caught in the stubble of the world

Like a tender veil,—

This stays me.

No strange move can I make

Without noise of tearing.

I dare not. If love loves, There is no world

Nor word.

All is lost

Save thought of love

And place to dream.

You love me?

I love you."

PAUL

I love you.

OPERA SOPRANOS

"You are, then, cold coward. Aye; but, beloved—"

(Sitting at his desk on Cordelia Street:)

FATHER

No more grand tragedies. Paul you must someday take your own seat. I'll make sure of it.

Text from the Stephen Crane poem, "Should the Wide World Roll Away" (1896):

OPERA SOPRANOS

"Should the wide world roll away,

Leaving black terror, Limitless night,

Nor God, nor man, nor place to stand"

PAUL and ENGLISH TEACHER

Nor god, nor man!

OPERA SOPRANOS

"Would be to me essential,

OPERA SOPRANOS and ENGLISH TEACHER

If thou and thy white arms were there,

And the fall to doom a long way."

Text from the Stephen Crane poem, "Aye, Workman, Make Me a Dream" (1896):

OPERA SOPRANOS/ENGLISH TEACHER/PAUL

"Aye, workman, make me a dream

A dream for my love.

Cunningly weave sunlight, Breezes and flowers,

Let it be of the cloth of meadows. And—good

workman—

And let there be a man walking thereon."

(Still at home.)

FATHER

That's enough! No grand tragedy for you Paul.

That's enough! No more theater for you.

Tomorrow you'll start as a cash boy, a real job

At Denny and Carson's,

No more vague indifference.

You'll have to do something:

good or bad, right or wrong.

It doesn't really matter.

You'll have to do something!

You'll have to grow up sometime!

Scene Three – Setting: Denny and Carson Clerk's Office/The Pittsburgh Train Station

Disc 1, Track 10

(Paul takes his place at a desk.)

PAUL

But now the gauntlet has been thrown

They've forced me out

To figure the bills I'm supposed to pay.

A cash boy.

But now, the gauntlet's been thrown.
No theater, no more school.
Into the blackest night I'm thrown.
I cannot pay little bits, forever,
like he did, like she did.
I will pay it all at once
Tear their world and mine, forever.
In exchange for three days. I want three days
And a train to New York.
Not your banal comfort.
Which each day tears at me.
For you this is the quiet life
But for me the blackest night.
Each day they send me
With cash enough to buy, three days.
Or perhaps even a week
of shiny surfaces, brutal, cool luxury.
In New York at the Waldorf-Astoria.
I will never be a man of moderate means
Sinking back into the ugliness and commonness.
I want to be carried out
Blue league after blue league
Carried out into the hurried toss of thousands
As hot for pleasure as me.
As long as I can remember
There's been a sort of dread
Doled out in little waves
Of lies and unacceptable bargains
And transferred debts
And petty economies
Pulling my muscles tighter and tighter.
To hell with your loveless comfort.
I will renounce it for cool luxury.
If I can't burn for your love,
I'll burn for pretty things.
And steal the weekly deposit.
It will be the only thing I do.
Now I throw the gauntlet

To the dread.
I will burn my whole life
In three days! I will burn my whole life.
I will burn it all in three days!

TEACHERS

Here comes his first train!

PAUL

Here comes my first train.

(Paul leaves with the deposit walks to the back of the stage, hands a ticket to a conductor who walks him a bit further to the train door. Paul bows on each chord walking backwards off the stage.)

Scene Four – Setting: The Waldorf-Astoria, New York

Disc 2, Track 1

(The Maids prepare Paul's rooms.)

Disc 2, Track 2

MAIDS ONE and TWO

At the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City,
All was as it should be at the Waldorf-Astoria

MAID THREE

Is quite—Perfection!

MAIDS TWO and THREE

Here he comes.

PAUL

Not once, but a hundred times.

MAIDS TWO and THREE

Here he is.

PAUL

I planned my entry into this city
With scrapbooks filled with New York hotels
Cut from the Sunday papers.

MAIDS TWO and THREE

Cut from the Sunday papers.

MAID ONE

Your sitting room,

MAID TWO

Your sleeping room

MAID THREE

Your bathroom, sir—

MAID TWO and THREE

At the Waldorf-Astoria

MAID ONE

All was as it should be.

PAUL and MAIDS

At the Waldorf-Astoria...(etc.)

Disc 2, Track 3

PAUL

Draw a bath!

While white snow falls outside and

All was as it should be.

After a long night on the train—

MAIDS

And the lights of the hotel glow brighter
and brighter

PAUL

My new suit of finest linens!

My Tiffany silver.

All chosen with care.

MAIDS

Is quite perfection!

Your new linens!

Your silk underwear.

Your shining shoes.

Your bath awaits

Your red robe with tassels.

PAUL

Perfection! But for—

MAID ONE

Anything—

MAID THREE

Everything!

PAUL

Flowers, I need flowers please...

To be as it should be.

MAID ONE

Of course, the bellboy

Will bring flowers.

MAID THREE (*To the Bellboy*)

Go bring flowers!

MAID ONE

While the white snow falls outside...

MAID THREE

Jonquils and—

MAID TWO

Lilies of the valley!

MAID THREE

Violets and roses.

PAUL

How astonishingly easy it was!

Here I am—the thing is done.

The cold night train to New York,

In the day coach, not the Pullman,

I wasn't dressed for the Pullman—

Must not be seen on the Pullman.

Then entering New York,

In the morning, to

The men's furnishings store,

Just opened for the morning.

To the hatter, to the shoe house,

And finally to Tiffany's...

To select my...

MAIDS

Silver.

PAUL

Yes, but no time to engrave

Yes silver, but no time to engrave!

Wait! Carnations I must have.

MAIDS

Carnations.

Red Carnations... (etc.)

PAUL

And now I watch in the mirror

As I dress in finest linens, silk underwear,

And in my new dress suit...

The air is soft and fragrant at the Waldorf-Astoria,

The white snow whirls fiercely, but my flowers

Are soft and fragrant, the hotel burns bright

I am burning bright, how easy it was!

I paid in advance, in advance! It was so easy.

MAIDS

Fragrant, so fragrant!

PAUL

Did my past ever exist?

What is Pittsburgh?

There's nothing for me there.

I was born for the Waldorf,

No one questions my purple,

Everyone understands:

This is what we fight for

This is what we earn for.

And for me, it was—

Astonishingly easy.

MAID TWO

Too easy.

Much too easy.

PAUL

So easy—astonishingly easy!

MAIDS

So easy—

astonishingly easy!... (etc.)

PAUL

The lights, the chatter, the perfumes, the colors

I almost can't stand it—I burn bright!

The popping of the corks, the orchestra plays

The Blue Danube—I drink champagne

Cool, bubbling in my glass—

I burn bright!

PAUL and MAIDS

At the Waldorf-Astoria... (etc.)

PAUL

Now it's time to go down, to dine.

Scene Five – Setting: The Next Day at the Waldorf-Astoria**Disc 2, Track 4****PAUL**

Sunday morning the city is snowbound.

I breakfast late, I breakfast late, and in the

afternoon,

I fall in with a boy—

BOY

From San Francisco!

A Yale freshman.

Down for a little flyer.

Over a Sunday—

Not supposed to be here. But for excitement...

BOY

Let me show you

The night side of town!

But for excitement.

Let me show you.

Hey, let me show you

The night side of town!

PAUL

The night side of town.

PAUL and BOY

Your side and my side of town.

It's a champagne friendship,

From the start, the confiding warmth

Of a champagne friendship...

PAUL and BOY

Let's tumble into a cab,
And ride off through the snow —

PAUL

To paint the town red!

BOY

All the hot spots in town!

PAUL and BOY

We burn brighter and brighter...

We are the night side of town!

This is the right side of town,

To burn brighter and brighter—

As we paint, as we paint: Look how

We paint the town red,

From hot spot to hot spot.

We stumble through doors:

We tumble into cabs.

BOY

I'm from San Francisco!

PAUL and BOY

All the wild of the West.

PAUL and BOY

And this is my new friend,

For the night side of town!

Let's press palms. Let's slap backs.

We're on a flyer—so let's fly—

(They pour champagne into their mouths.)

Pour the champagne.

As we burn—as we burn—as we—

Burn, brighter and brighter,

More champagne! (etc.)

PAUL

The night begins to fade.

The lights begin to fade.

PAUL and BOY

Take the very last cab back...

To the Waldorf-Astoria

PAUL

And our champagne friendship...

At seven in the morning has gone flat.

BOY

It's seven in the morning and...

PAUL

And our parting—

MAIDS

(In the distance)

Seven in the morning. Go to bed.

BOY

I have a train to catch.

PAUL

In the elevator is...

BOY

I'm not supposed to—

My train is due.

(The Boy exits.)

Disc 2, Track 5

*(PAUL closes his eyes momentarily,
and then opens them with a start.)*

PAUL

And I wake at two in the afternoon,

Still wearing my shoes.

It's two in the afternoon: still wearing my shoes.

I am thirsty and dizzy.

Bring me water and coffee and the

Pittsburgh papers!

*(Maid Two enters, hands Paul the newspapers,
which he burns through.)*

MAIDS

Paul burns through the papers, right there

In the papers, is news of the whole affair,

with a wealth of detail

PAUL

Such sensational detail!

MAIDS

Tell the news of Paul, how his father...
Paid back the full amount

PAUL

Of my theft.
My father paid.

MAID TWO

So the firm will not prosecute Paul.
And the local minister has declared:
He will yet reclaim the motherless lad!
His Sunday school teacher will spare no
effort,
She'll spare no effort to that end!

MAID THREE

Rumor has it: The boy has been seen at a
New York Hotel...

Disc 2, Track 6**MAIDS**

Now, his father will go East...

PAUL

To find him and bring him home.
To find him and bring him back
To Pittsburgh.
From the Waldorf-Astoria,
But I'm not going to get on that train.
If I had to do it over,
Tomorrow—I would do the very same thing.
Tomorrow will come.
And I would do the very same thing
Tomorrow!

(Paul looks about himself at the splendor.)

MAID ONE

Tomorrow.

MAID THREE

Is there anything else you would like?

PAUL

No, there is nothing.

(Maid Three bows gracefully and exits.)

PAUL

But tomorrow will come,
The night train from Pittsburgh will arrive,
With the force of a train,
Tomorrow is coming.
With the force of a train.

My final purchase...

*(PAUL removes a revolver from a shopping
parcel. He sits down and stares at the gun
for a long time.)*

Disc 2, Track 7

*(He finally puts it away and exits. He then
travels to the train yard.)*

Disc 2, Track 8**PAUL**

The red carnation
Its red glory is over, so I'll bury it in the snow.
Tomorrow will come,
Tomorrow is coming.
Tomorrow will come
With astonishing ease—tomorrow is coming,
It's coming with the force of a train,
I can see it now:
The blue of—the yellow—
All that it should be,
That Faraway place!

Scene Six – Setting: The Newark Train Yard

*(PAUL is overlooking the tracks. He buries the red
carnation and falls asleep in the snow. Then he
awakes and prepares to jump.)*

Disc 2, Track 9

PAUL

The...

The... the...

The...the...the...

The money was all spent, on linen and silk...

TEACHERS

The train...came fast (etc.)

PAUL

And Tiffany silver, not yet engraved.

On flowers, beginning to fade.

It was a losing game, this revolt

Against the homilies of the world—

I made the best of it:

I lived the life I was meant to live, and now,

I am insensible to the snow!

(PAUL jumps in front of an oncoming train.)

TEACHERS

The train came fast.

FATHER

But I paid it back—the full amount—

Disc 2, Track 10

FATHER

But it did not bring him back.

He was never meant for this place.

TEACHERS

The train came fast and final

According to schedule—limitless night.

We tried to make him fit—

FATHER

It will never bring him back.

TEACHERS

There's something about that boy

That we never understood.

FATHER

The train came too fast.

He was never meant for this place—

ENGLISH TEACHER

Not our Paul.

FATHER

He just wanted—

PAUL

The yellow of Algerian sands—

And the blue of the Adriatic.

END OF OPERA

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Developed by **America Opera Projects**

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DISC 1

- 1 Scene 1a. Prelude 3:54
- 2 Scene 1b. Ensemble "Paul a high school boy" 4:30
- 3 Scene 1c. Tribunal Song "It is his insolence" 3:14
- 4 Scene 1d. Duet "What do you have to say" 3:19
- 5 Scene 1e. Ensemble "And he bows, how is that?" 3:02
- 6 Scene 2a. Overture "Now I'm lighthearted and free!" 1:15
- 7 Scene 2b. Father's Aria "The principal told me today" 6:56
- 8 Scene 2c. English Teacher's Aria "Years ago I walked down the aisle" 5:21
- 9 Scene 2d. Opera Scene "My life caught in the stubble of the world" 5:20
- 10 Scene 3. Paul's Aria "But now the gauntlet has been thrown" 7:33

DISC 2

- 1 Scene 4a. Prelude 2:06
- 2 Scene 4b. Quartet "At the Waldorf-Astoria" 2:14
- 3 Scene 4c. Quartet "Draw a bath" 6:24
- 4 Scene 4d. Duet "Sunday morning" 6:41
- 5 Scene 4e. Quartet "And I wake at two in the afternoon" 2:14
- 6 Scene 4f. Quartet "His father will go east" 3:20
- 7 Scene 4g. Intermezzo 3:49
- 8 Scene 4h. Aria "The Red Carnation" 3:15
- 9 Scene 5a. Quartet "The money was all spent" 3:46
- 10 Scene 5b. Ensemble "But it did not bring him back" 3:56

MUSIC BY

GREGORY SPEARS

LIBRETTO BY

**KATHRYN WALAT
& GREGORY SPEARS**



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