

The Lower Drawer: Chamber Opera in One Act by Martin Halpern

The cast: Arthur Jenkins, late sixties, baritone

1 *Allegretto* ♩ = 96 (At rise, Arthur is offstage practicing a Mozart piano sonata, under the right tempo.) (He makes a mistake.)

Piano *mf*

9 (He tries to correct the mistake.) *meno mosso* ♩ = 66 (He tries to correct it again, but gives up.) (He enters.) *mf*

Arthur Time was, I could sail straight through

Pno. *meno mosso* ♩ = 66 *f* *ff* *mp*

14 *meno mosso* ♩ = 48 *rit.*

Arthur — that son-a - ta. Right up to tem - po, not a sin-gle mis-take.

Pno. *mf* *meno mosso* ♩ = 48 *rit.*

(He reaches down into the lower drawer of the desk and lifts out a small pile of papers.)

Arthur

17 $\text{♩} = 40$ $\text{♩} = 36$

Got-ta get these fin-gers in shape a-gain. Well now, back to work.

Pno.

17 $\text{♩} = 40$ $\text{♩} = 36$

mp *mf* *mp*

Arthur

20 *(Thumbing through them)*

Ah. These. Well I sup-pose... No.

Pno.

20 *mf*

Arthur

24 *(He drops them into the "Burn" box, then lifts out some other papers.)*

Not worth sav - ing.

Pno.

24 *f* *mp* *mf*

(He drops them into the "Burn" box,
then lifts out another small pile.)

(He drops them
into the "Burn" box.)

27

Arthur

Nor these. Nor these eith-er. My oh my,

Pno.

mp *mf* *mp*

(He lifts out another small pile and thumbs through it.)

30

Arthur

how things do ac-cum-u-late! Well not quite sure a-bout these.

Pno.

mf *mp*

33

Arthur

Might be use-ful. Or might not. I'll think a-bout them,

Pno.

mf *mp*

(He drops them into the
"Undecided" box.)

(He lifts out the faded manuscript
of a musical score.)

Arthur

36

la - ter. Oh my, oh my,

Pno.

36

mf

Arthur

39

this! I near-ly for-got I ev-er wrote this, way back then,

Pno.

39

mp

Arthur

42

when I still dreamed of be-com-ing a fa-mous com-pos-er.

Pno.

42

p

45

Arthur

Oh how brown the pa-per's got - ten. And how fa - ded the ink.

Pno.

mp

47

Arthur

But still, the notes are read - a - ble.

Pno.

(He reads over the first page silently.)

49

Arthur

Not real - ly ver - y good. Rath - er... der - iv - a - tive.

Pno.

51

Arthur

But for a high school ju - nior un - trained in com - po - si - tion,

Pno.

mp

tr

3

3

53

Arthur

cer - tain - ly prom - is - ing. And oh, how am - bi - tious!

Pno.

mf

3

3

55

Arthur

A sym - phon - y no less!

Pno.

f

mp

3

(He thumbs through the first few pages.)

57

Arthur

Or an - y - way, the start of one, such as it is.

Pno.

59

Arthur

Such as it is. Guess I should save this,

Pno.

mf *mp*

(He drops it into the "Save" box.)

61

Arthur

if on - ly for sent - i - ment - al reas - ons. There! It's saved!

Pno.

mf *mp*

63

Arthur

But real - ly, why both - er? On - ly im - port - ant things should be saved,

Pno.

mf

65

Arthur

(He picks it up and starts to drop it in the "Burn" box.)

not mere juv-en - i - lia. On the oth - er hand...

Pno.

mf *mp*

67

Arthur

(He drops it into the "Undecided" box.) *(He quickly lifts a folder out of the drawer and looks into it.)*

All right, in here for now, while I see what's left.

Pno.

3

69

Arthur

Ah now these are im-port - ant. Tax re-turns,

Pno.

mf

71

Arthur

re-tire-ment ben-e-fits, soc-ial se-cur-i-ty forms. These must go here.

Pno.

(He drops the file into the "Save" box.)

74

Arthur

These real-ly mat - ter. Hel - lo?

Pno.

(His cell phone rings. He quickly takes it out of his pocket and opens it.)

ff *tr* *tr* *mp*

76

Arthur

Hi hon-ey. Yes, I'm work-ing on it. The desk will be to-tal-ly emp-ty

Pno.

79

Arthur

by the time those young folks get here. Then it and the pia - no

Pno.

81

Arthur

and ev - 'ry-thing else we've sold them will go out that door,

Pno.

mf

83

Arthur

nev-er to be seen a-gain. Sad? Yes a lit-tle bit. You too?

Pno.

p *mp*

86

Arthur

Well that will pass. Pret-ty soon, our new life will be start-ing,

Pno.

tr

88

Arthur

and all of this will be be-hind us. So on-ward and up-ward with our tasks.

Pno.

90

Arthur

You've left for-ward-ing forms at the post of-fige? Good! Fin - ished clothes shop-ping?

Pno.

93

Arthur

Good! So all that re-mains is to take in the car, have it lub - ri-ca-ted,

Pno.

mf

96

Arthur

and filled up with gas. Yes, you'll fill up

Pno.

mp

98

Arthur

while I emp-ty. Then we'll be read-y — to drive on off

Pno.

mf

3

100

Arthur

to sun - ny Cal-i - for - nia! No more New Eng-land win - ters for us!

Pno.

mp

3

102

Arthur

So there's hard - ly rea - son to be sad. What? Oh.

Pno.

mf

3

(He closes the
cell phone and
puts it back into
his pocket.)

104

Arthur

Well I love you - ou too. See you a-non! O-kay,

poco piu $\text{♩} = 40$

Pno.

107

Arthur

just a few more i - tems, then my task is done.

poco piu $\text{♩} = 40$

Pno.

mp

(He lifts some
papers from the
drawer.)

109

Arthur

Oh ho, oh ho! Term pa - pers from col - lege!

Pno.

mf

111 *(He looks at the title page of the first paper.)*

Arthur

Of course I saved on - ly the "A" ones.

Pno.

mp *mf*

113 $\text{♩} = 40$

Arthur

Good heav - ens, — this! "T. S. El - i - ot's Four Quar - tets:

Pno.

$\text{♩} = 40$

115

Arthur

The Par - a - dox — of Time." I got an "A" for this?

Pno.

117 *(Flipping through the pages)*

Arthur

Well way back then, I was real-ly in-to this stuff.

Pno.

120

Arthur

First Quar-tet. "Burnt Nor-ton." Ah yes.

Pno.

mp

(Reading Eliot's text)

123

Arthur

"Time pres-ent and time past are both per-haps pres-ent —

Pno.

126

Arthur

in time fu-ture, and time fu-ture

Pno.

128

Arthur

con-tained in time past." Yes, that po-em spoke to me, in those days when po-et-ry mat-tered.

Pno.

131

Arthur

(Continuing to read)

"What might have been and what has been

Pno.

$\text{♩} = 36$

134

Arthur

point to one end, which is al - ways pre - sent.

Pno.

137

Arthur

Foot - falls ec - ho in the mem - or - y down the pas - sage

Pno.

139

Arthur

— which we did not take, towards the door we nev - er o - pened,

Pno.

mf

141

Arthur

in - to the rose gar - den."

Pno.

143

Arthur

Well I guess it was a good pa - per.

Pno.

mp *mf*

145

Arthur

But worth pre - ser - ving? Why?

Pno.

147

Arthur

I'm sure I'll nev-er read it a-gain. Or an - y of these.

Pno.

*(He drops all the papers
into the "Burn" box.)*

149

Arthur

So there! Done with! Now one last i - tem,

Pno.

(He lifts a packet of letters in pink envelopes from the drawer.)

151

Arthur

and then the desk will be emp - ty.

Pno.

153

Arthur

Oh my god, oh my god! I'd com-plete - ly for-got - ten I kept these.

Pno.

155

Arthur

Let-ters from Lin-da, first love of my life.

Pno.

158

Arthur

High school sweet-heart, who wrote

Pno.

160

Arthur

doz - ens of these the year I went off to col - lege.

Pno.

p 3

162

(He sniffs the packet.)

Arthur

No, it's gone of course. That scent she'd wear,

Pno.

mp *mf* *mp* *mf*

164

Arthur

that al - ways a - roused me, so she'd spray some on her sta - tion - e - ry.

Pno.

166

Arthur

Lil - y of the val - ley, that's what it was called.

Pno.

p *mp* *mf* *tr*

168

Arthur

How it brought her back, phys - ic - al - ly, as I would read these.

Pno.

mp

170

Arthur

But high school ro-man-ces don't last, an-y more than that scent last-ed. Soon-er or la-ter they fade

Pno.

173 *rit. --- ♩ = 32*

Arthur
as *ours* fin - al - ly fad - ed. — I won - der if *she* kept my let - ters.

Pno. *mf*

175

Arthur
And where she is now! Mar - ried or...?

Pno.

177

Arthur
Hap - py or...? A - live or...? If she is,

Pno. *mp*

179

Arthur

what could she be do - ing ———— this ver - y min - ute?

Pno.

p *mf*

181

Arthur

But e - nough of this! E - nough of this! She mat - tered once,

Pno.

183

Arthur

as po - e - try did, then ceased to mat - ter —

Pno.

185

Arthur

as life went on. Grad-u - a - tion — with hon - ors, —

Pno.

mp *mf*

187

Arthur

em - ploy - ment right a - way, rap - id pro - mo - tions,

Pno.

189

Arthur

mar - riage to Sar - ah, — this love - ly — home

Pno.

tr

191

Arthur

bought and furn-ished, a fam-i-ly raised,

Pno.

193

Arthur

and three health-y child-ren sent out in-to the world.

Pno.

195

Arthur

And soon Sar-ah and I will start our new life,

Pno.

mp

197

Arthur

in that re-ti - re-ment com-mun-i-ty, a-mid the or-ange trees and palm trees,

Pno.

199

Arthur

where we'll buy a bet-ter — pia-no, — and I'll get these fin-gers in shape a-gain.

Pno.

201

Arthur

Yes that is what has been,

Pno.

mf

203

Arthur

and *that* is what *will* be. All the rest is sim - ply...

Pno.

mp

205

Arthur

foot-falls ech - o - ing down pas-sag - es not ta - ken,

Pno.

mf

207

Arthur

to doors nev - er o - pened.

Pno.

f

(He drops the packet into the "Burn" box.)

208

Arthur

So in - to here with these,

Pno.

mf

(He takes the music manuscript out of the "Undecided" box.)

209

Arthur

be-fore Sar - ah — learns of them.

Pno.

mp

(Thumbing through the manuscript)

211

Arthur

Now what a-bout this? Well if those "A" pa - pers

Pno.

mf

213

Arthur

were not worth sav - ing, once po - e - try ceased to mat - ter, —

Pno.

215

Arthur

sure - ly this is - n't eith - er. — Much of it

Pno.

217

Arthur

der - i - va - tive schmaltz. Knew lit - tle a - bout coun - ter - point.

Pno.

219

Arthur

And noth-ing — at all a-bout *mod-ern* — mu-sic! —

Pno.

(He drops it in the "Burn" box.)

221

Arthur

So there! I've de - ci - ded! —

Pno.

(He drops everything else in the "Undecided" box into the "Burn" box.)

222

Arthur

All this stuff too!

Pno.

(His cell phone rings. He takes it out of his pocket and opens it.)

223

Arthur

And that is that! Hel-lo?

Pno.

ff *mp*

225

Arthur

Hi! Car all done? Well good!

Pno.

mf

227

Arthur

Yes, the desk is emp - ty now. I'm gon-na burn most of what was there,

Pno.

229

Arthur

and keep just a few im-port - ant things. I feel quite cleansed.

Pno.

Detailed description: This block contains the first system of music. It features a vocal line for Arthur in bass clef and a piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs. The vocal line starts at measure 229 with the lyrics "and keep just a few im-port - ant things. I feel quite cleansed." The piano accompaniment consists of a rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a more melodic line in the left hand.

231

Arthur

An - y min - ute now those young folks should be here.

Pno.

Detailed description: This block contains the second system of music. It features a vocal line for Arthur in bass clef and a piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs. The vocal line starts at measure 231 with the lyrics "An - y min - ute now those young folks should be here." The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic and melodic structure to the previous system.

233

Arthur

So come home quick - ly. As soon as they're gone,

Pno.

Detailed description: This block contains the third system of music. It features a vocal line for Arthur in bass clef and a piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs. The vocal line starts at measure 233 with the lyrics "So come home quick - ly. As soon as they're gone,". The piano accompaniment features a more active right hand with eighth notes and a steady bass line.

235

Arthur

we can clean up the house for its new own - ers,

Pno.

237

Arthur

fin-ish pack-ing, load the car,

Pno.

239

Arthur

and be off. So come on home.

Pno.

mp

Arthur

241

(He closes the cell phone and puts it back into his pocket.)

Come on back to this house that is ours no long - er.

Pno.

241

mf

(He picks up the "Burn" box and gazes into it for a moment.)

(Then he quickly carries it offstage as lights fade to black.)

Pno.

243

f

Pno.

245

ff