Forget You're Female: An Engineer's Story

by

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A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Musical Arts

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ABSTRACT

Forget You're Female focuses on stories of women pursuing engineering degrees and women in the field of engineering. The main character, Samantha (Sam), comes from a family of engineers and is unsure whether she wants to study engineering in college.

In *Opening-Decision*, a university admissions counselor insists that Sam enters the engineering program. Sam expresses excitement for the degree in *Engineer*. However, she faces discrimination and microaggressions in *First Class* and *Peers*. These experiences lead her to seek a professor's advice in *Forget You're Female*. *Jack's Song* explores the moment when a male student discovers overt sexism in a public part of the engineering building. Finally, in *Graduation*, Sam completes the degree and reflects on her experiences and potential longevity in the engineering field.

There are some staging instructions written into the score, however, lighting instructions are the only required element. Extras and props are optional but help convey the scene of each song. Projecting relevant footage or written descriptors is recommended in place of extras and props. If no extras are available, then spoken lines (male) need to be recorded and played back as indicated in the score.

This work is dedicated to the engineer in my life, my lovely wife, Erin.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee for their feedback and mentorship on my final project. Dr. Rockmaker, thank you for the advice, lessons, and taking time to read draft after draft. Your feedback was integral to the final product. Dr. Temple, thank you for all the advice, feedback, and giving me the confidence to write lyrics – without you this piece might not even exist. Dr. Caslor, thank you for all of your support throughout my time as a student at ASU. I appreciate your time and I highly value your input and perspective. To Dr. Knowles who mentored me through my music theory pedagogy certificate, thank you for being a thoughtful, insightful, and incredible teacher, the experience working with you was a genuine pleasure.

Thank you to my family for always supporting my musical goals. Mom and dad, thank you for making music such a big part of my life from a young age and all the instruments and interests you pushed me to succeed at. I especially want to thank you for the love and support you have shared over the years. Thank you also to my in-laws, who supported me through graduate school, welcomed my bass practice, and invited me to live with them when COVID-19 eliminated in-person classes. Your hospitality always made me feel at home.

Thank you to my friends who have been there to chat, share food, and play games these last few years. Bill Clay, Drew Miller, Evan Pardi, Jake Smith, Spencer Brand, Katrina Clements, and Darren and Stacy Cueva, thank you for the support and camaraderie you provided.

Finally, a big thank you and appreciation to my wife, Erin. Thank you for pushing me to continue with school. Your love and support helped me throughout the years, and I would not want to take this journey through life with anyone else.

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Character Sheet

Characters:

Samantha (Female) (G3–F#5): Begins as an incoming freshman in college and follows her progress through graduation. The story focuses on her experiences with discrimination, misogyny, and microaggressions during this time. She sings five numbers.

Professor (Female) (Bb3–G5): Mentor to Samantha. She shares her experiences in one number.

Jack (Male) (C3–F4): Samantha's friend who sings one song about discovering overt sexism in a public space within the engineering building.

The work can be performed as a semi-staged drama. There are some prop, extra personnel, and simple lighting considerations written in the score. A performance should follow the lighting directions if possible and props are left up to the discretion of the performer. All extra personnel are optional (see note below). The first scene (opening) is important since it chronologically takes place after the rest of the songs. Footage may be used to set this opening graduation scene or any other scenes as appropriate. These songs take place over the course of four years, so some indication of time passing (such as displaying "freshman year") is recommended. See lyrics for the timeline and specific locations. These parameters may be adjusted as needed.

Additional personnel to be used in a semi-staged production: Professor (Male) to speak lines in *First Class*, students (Male) as extras with occasional lines during *Opening*-

Decision, First Class, Peers, Jack's Song, and Graduation and students (Female) as extras in Opening-Decision and Forget You're Female. If extras are not available, then the lines may be prerecorded and played at the appropriate time or spoken by the singer.

Total length:

Approx. 26 minutes

Lyrics

Opening:

(Scene: Stage is dimly lit, decorated with graduation regalia and (optional) people walking around in graduation attire. Time: Just before Samantha's graduation)

[u] [a] Too, too few people Who see What happened to me If they only knew

(Scene: Informal setting. Time: summer after graduating high school)

Decision:

Hello, my name is Sam
I'm like most kids my age
My life goals are hard to gauge
And with any luck
I'll pick a major that doesn't suck

I'm torn between psychology and marine biology Or it would be cool To go to spy school Doing something adventurous Instead of monotonous

I know my parent's choice for me Reflects my family tree, you see

Most of my family is employed In engineering and that's something I'd avoid If possible, I'm not volunteering Myself to that lifestyle Constantly looking at charts and graphs I'll have to give that a hard "no"

I'm tired of learning equations
And science of different persuasions
I want to try something new
I just need time to think it through

But, undeclared is where I land It's not exactly what I'd planned Should I just go the logical route And pick engineering...

Recording:

"I think engineering is a good fit for you" Why don't you sign up for a class or two? It's easier to switch out than in, And we'll talk more after you begin."

Ok. Fine. Whatever.

Is fate calling me to relate To my family? I just want to dictate My own path

I reluctantly switch to engineering I wouldn't have done it Without my adviser's interfering Here's hoping I don't quit

Engineer:

(Scene: outside on a college campus. Time: first day of classes)

I found my classrooms yesterday I search around and guess my way To every place I need to know So, I can understand my flow

From space to space and spot to spot And taking care of what I've got I now know what I have to do Just make the plan and follow through

I'm ready, to start

I guess I could be an engineer
I could follow in the footsteps of mom and dad
Yeah, I could be an engineer,
I could enjoy myself and always be very glad
To be an engineer

I could be a leader in the field of my choice and then I'd be soaring in the clear And I'd be the best, you've ever seen, And never!

First Class:

(Scene: medium-sized classroom, holds around 50 people. Time: first day of classes, later in the day)

I am sitting in a room
Filled with forty-five desks
Filled with forty-four men
Filled with my anxiety times ten

This is my first class Of college This is my first class Ticket to my career

I want to learn
It will all turn
Out ok and I
Doubt myself today
But it will not be that way
For long, I can do this
And I start dismissing
These latent feelings

I open my notebook Ready to start The professor looks at me, Then says

"Greetings guys and, um.. girl"

--- I glance around --- shift nervously in my seat --- my focus is shot

I feel put on the spot My face burns and I want to flee As everyone turns and looks at me His unknowing condescension Made me the center of attention Classes continue with almost no trouble
I make some new friends and get out of my bubble
They give me some crap, but I've got no reason to grumble
'Cause I give it right back and I don't even mumble

Instrumental

But their teasing begins anew
Just after the midterm review
When the professor said,
"You let me know if they're picking on you"

I know he's trying to be nice
But he should've thought twice
Cause I'll have to pay the price
By hearing their jeering
"Are you going to tattle on us now?"
"Are you going to run and hide behind the teacher?"
Prof's remark was a bug disguised as a feature

I want to learn,
I'm sure it will turn
Out OK

And I'm feeling great today
'Cause I know I've earned an A
And then, my friend has the nerve to say
"you only got an A because of your gender"

I wish I talked to fewer men per day

Peers:

(Scene: Samantha is at her desk. She's journaling to work through her feelings about actions from her colleagues. Time: sophomore year)

The quips and jabs continue And just when you think they'll stop Someone verbally cops a feel

They demean me for my "womanly actions"
And look for an emotion, reaction or
Any sort of caption
To confirm their notion
That I'm not part of their broey faction

And like the physical invasion There's no amount of persuasion To make them understand

It's unacceptable to make comments underhand But, my attempts at civilities Results in further hostilities

It's not always directly offensive
But, they are not apprehensive of saying:
"you need to relax - go rub one out or something!"
Or "Eating this burger is making me hard."

I don't mind, but the action of glancing my way
To gauge my reaction to what they say
That makes me feel out of place
And no longer welcome in this space

Changing the subject doesn't stop them either One day I felt sick and needed to take a breather All they could say with their mental thickness Is "are you pregnant? Is it morning sickness?"

"No," I replied still feeling terrible And "yes," they replied, "that must be it!" They thought they were being hilarious, But I must admit, they were being unbearable

So, the only deterrence is Sitting in silence and showing no emotion And blending into the background so they have no notion That I disapprove of their commotion

This worked until a friend
Sought the group's advice about his date
I remained quiet, just a classmate
Not wanting to interfere
"Wait," my friend said, "if you were female, what would you do?"
This wasn't a jeer,
Or some type of mistake,
I couldn't believe I blended in so well
That they didn't even think of me as a female.

Forget You're Female:

(Scene: Women in Engineering informal gathering, such as a coffee club. Time: sophomore year, shortly after the previous song)

Honey, Honey, Don't worry I got this one

Comments like this one just make my blood run Hotter than hell or the face of the sun "There's a girl in the class? I bet you she won't last long" Boy, did I prove him wrong

You've heard the same? Well,

You're a woman, that's the issue You're a woman, they dismiss you You're a woman, and an engineer Their misogyny doesn't end with the school year

Hope men remember that you closed the sale or remember that your projects prevail Maybe you're going to Yale But hopefully, they forget you're female

My male colleagues didn't want me there And to show me how they care On my desk they spread A rose, dull red, dead

I was so sick of their behavior But I could not expect a savior Did they hate my personality? No, there's only one commonality

I'm a woman, that's the problem I'm a woman, that's all to them I'm a woman, that's all their abuse meant And you might feel your presence is a bemusement Hope men remember that you like to sail
Or that you hit it right on the nail
Maybe you sent that vital e-mail
But hopefully, you'll get lucky, and they forget you're female

These stories are no fairy tales
Men hide their feelings behind thin veils
If they make you sick – get some ginger ale
And hopefully they forget you're female

Jack's Song:

(Scene: informal setting. Jack is introducing himself in public, e.g. getting to know the parent of another friend, then later heads to a common area on campus. Time: junior year)

Hello, my name is Jack I'm a junior at State And it's a fact I'm taking eighteen credit hours

It's hard to find time to shower
It doesn't help procrastinating is my superpower
I'm sad I'm on the five... or six-year track
But I'll work hard 'til I can graduate
Hello, my name is Jack

I'm in a study group
We've become pretty close
And here's the scoop
Without them I'd be terrible

'Cause I find quantum physics unbearable Luckily, Samantha's skills are incomparable She just has a knack For explaining without being verbose She always cuts me slack When I don't know... jack

The textbook looks like alphabet soup Alright, I sigh and text my group "Meet up at the library? This homework gave me a coronary" I go to Engineering A anticipating a reply I guess it's been that kind of day where nothing seems to go my way

I'm just your average normal guy Who's looking for someone to say I'll come and help you answer why These problems make you want to die

I look for Samantha, she sometimes works late And truthfully, she should be easy to spot I know there are only a couple of women engineers at State

However, there aren't any women around This place is full, but filled with men I've seen women here, or so I thought But why have they seemed to disappear?

(Overheard from another table) "The only woman I'd hire for my company – is a prostitute! (whole table laughs)

Now I know...

Graduation:

(Scene: right before Samantha's graduation. Time: spring semester senior year)

[æ] [u] [e] [i] [n] Graduation

I came to college ready for some challenges I thought I'd struggle with my courses But the real challenge Is resisting hostile forces

I am now an engineer, but What have I learned?

Always expect to be spurned, Avoid wearing a dress Bright colored clothing should be returned

There's some who you will address

As your friends And, there are some you'll never guess Are your enemies

I can't enjoy my last days here
'Cause I present my work to my peers
And they say,
"Some of us are going to be real engineers"

Am I happy to have the degree?
I guess it's better than nothing and in actuality,
I feel I have the skills and capacity
To compete with voracity
Any company could have this asset, me.

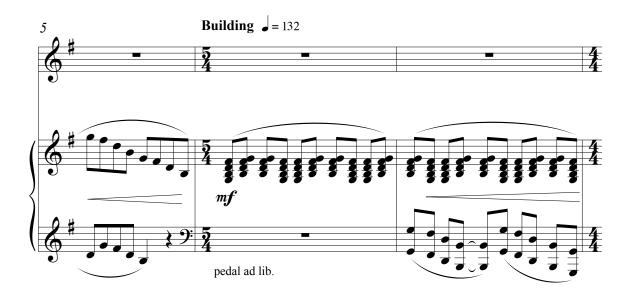
But, if I told you "engineer forever," I'd be bluffing Cause there was too much disgusted huffing, Too many insults, Too many people who saw everything And did Nothing

End.

No. 1 Opening/Decision

Zachary Bush (2021)





























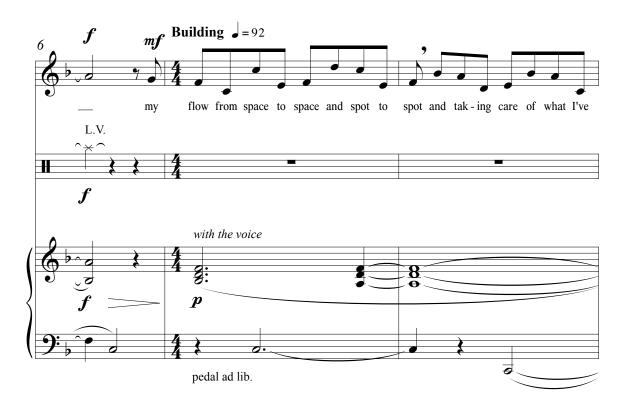


No. 2

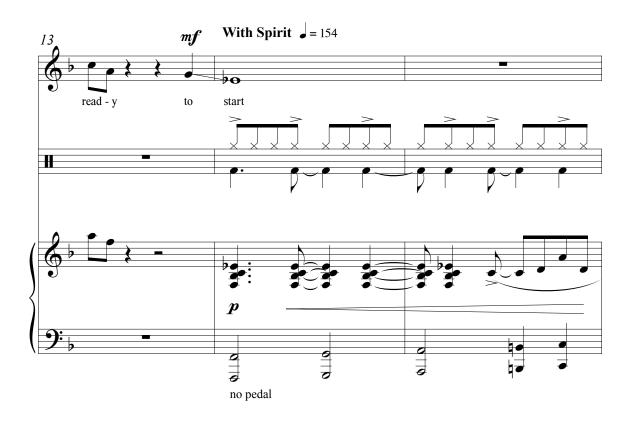
Engineer

(Samantha)











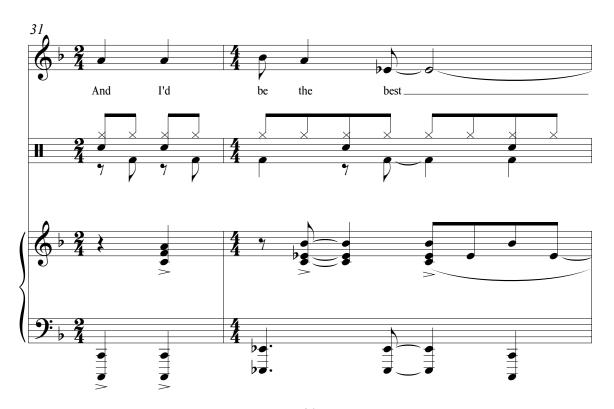




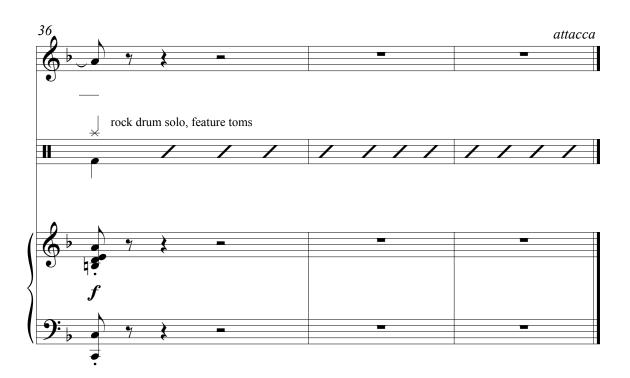




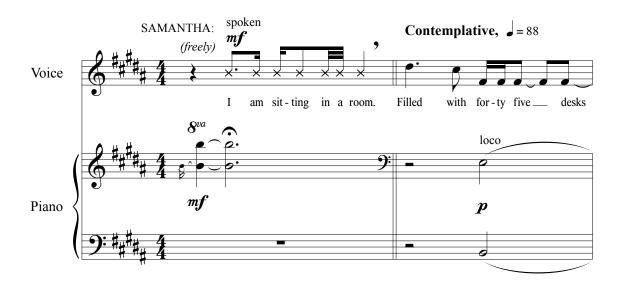


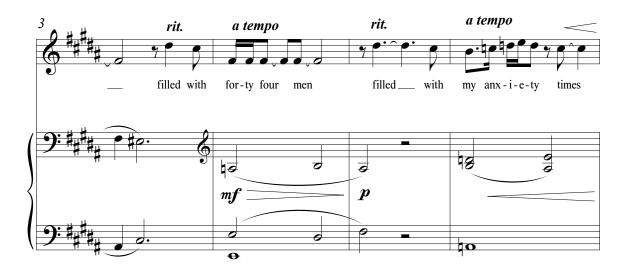






No. 3 First Class (Samantha)



















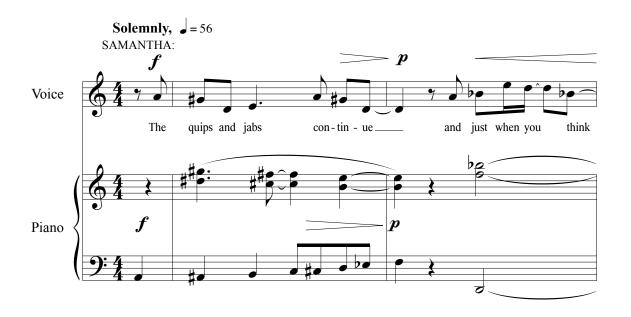


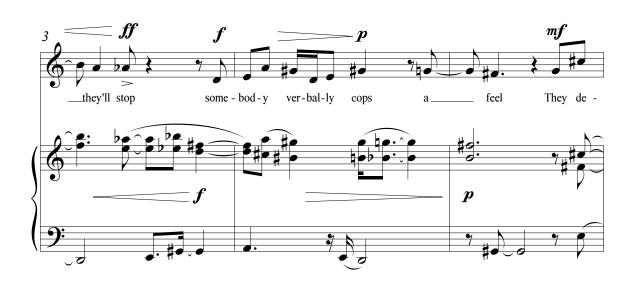






No. 4 Peers (Samantha)







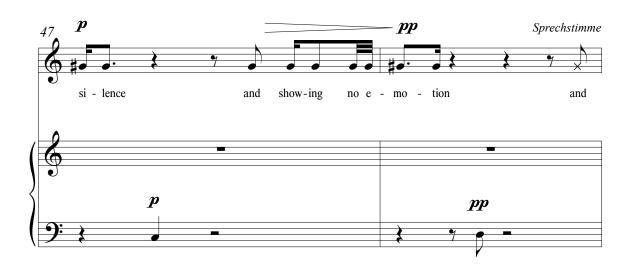


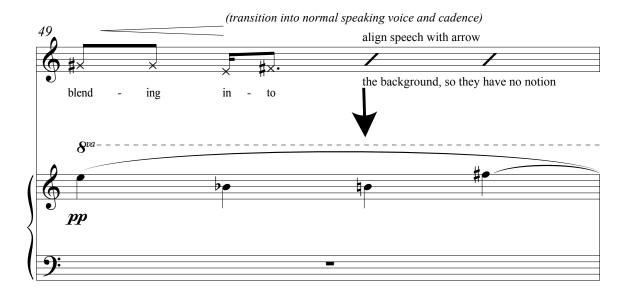


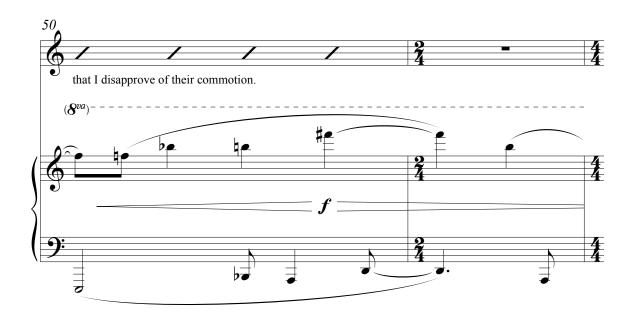


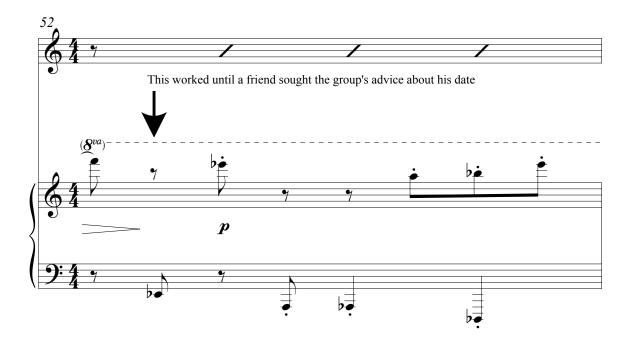


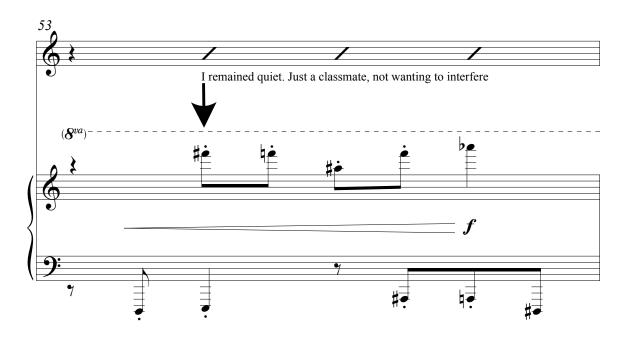


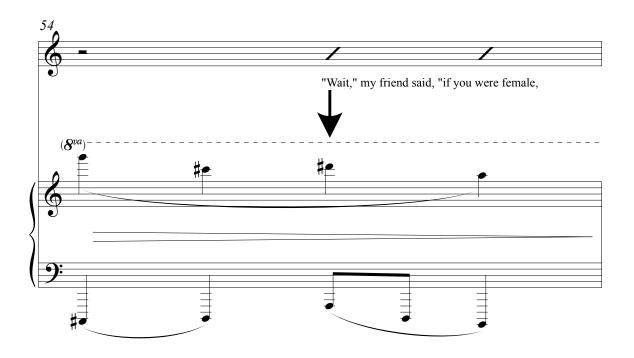


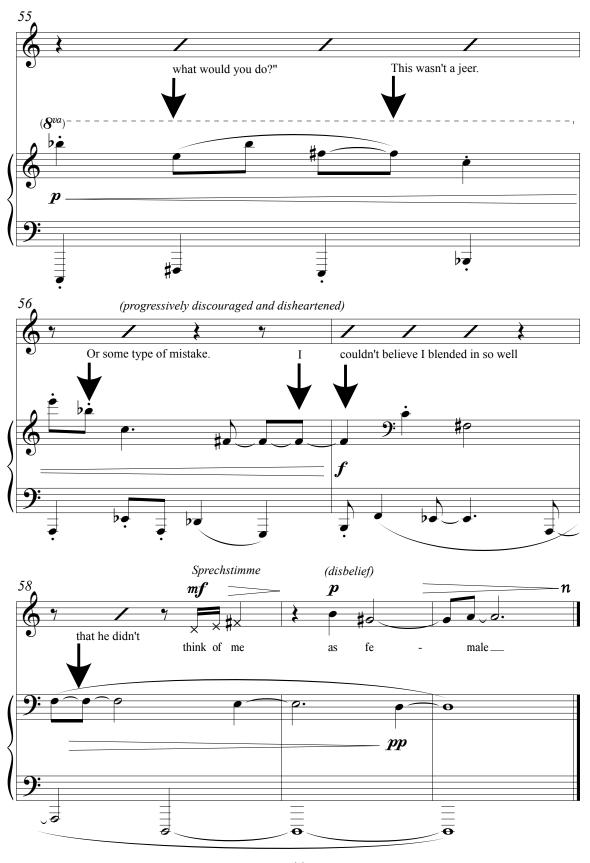








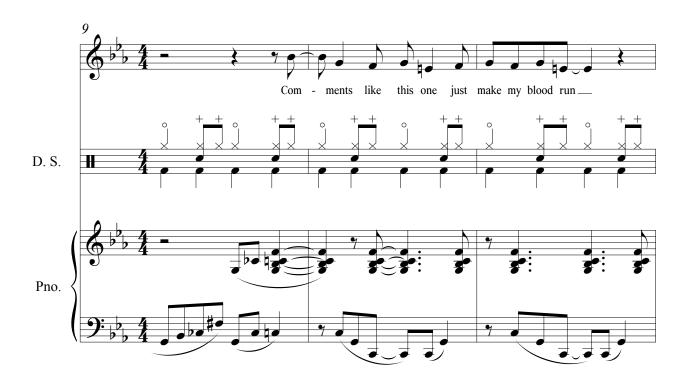


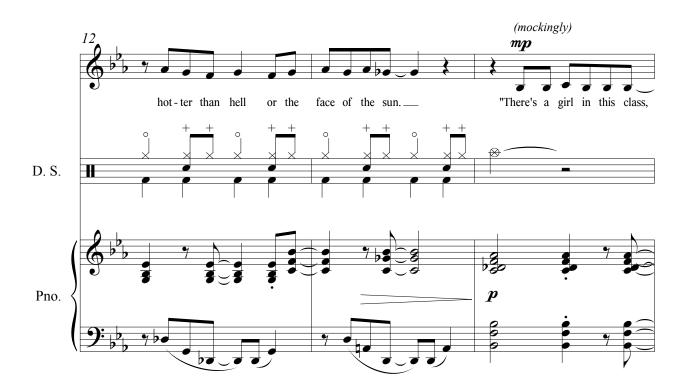


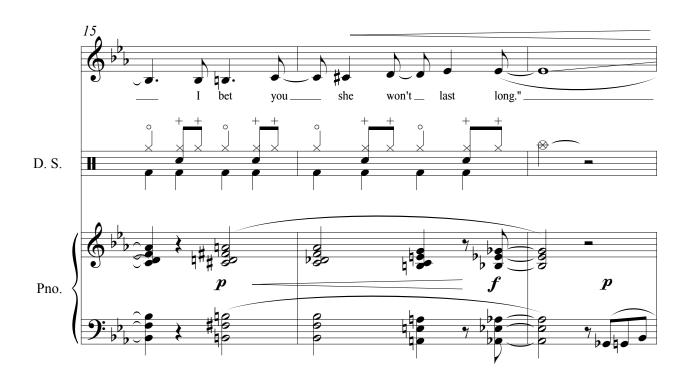
No. 5 Forget You're Female

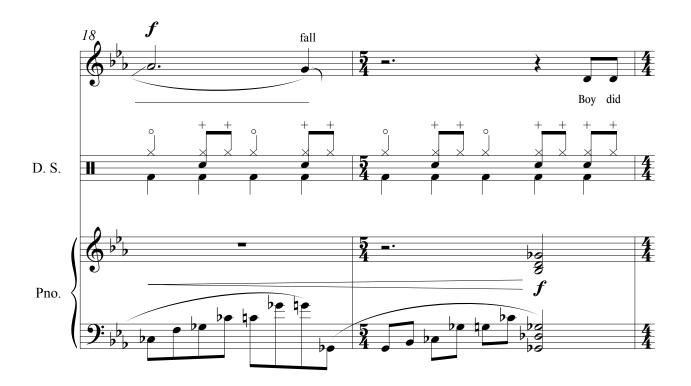
(Professor)

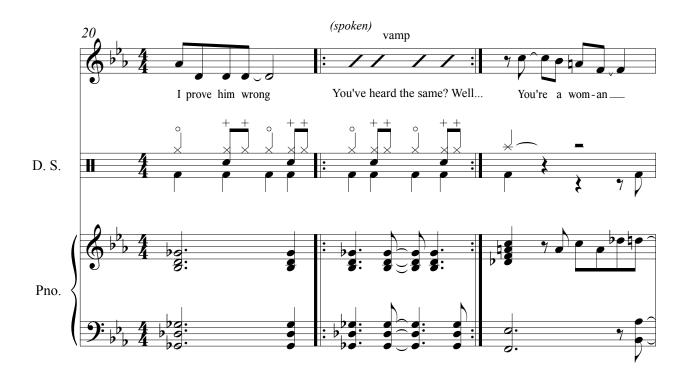


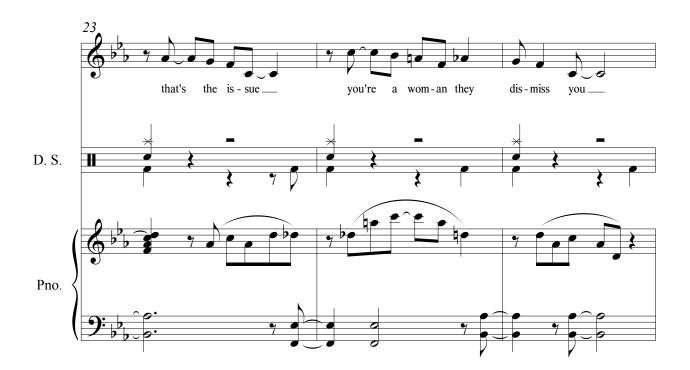






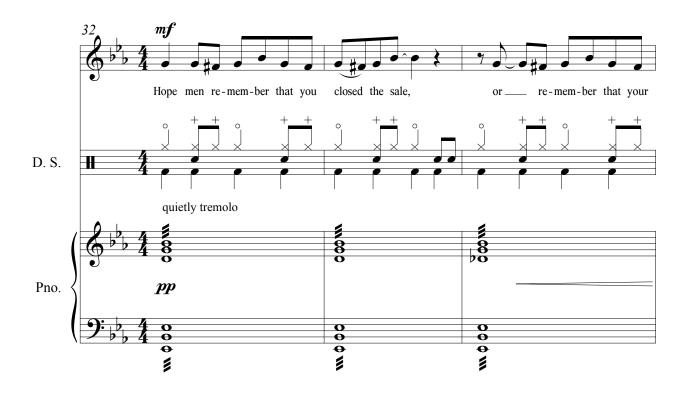


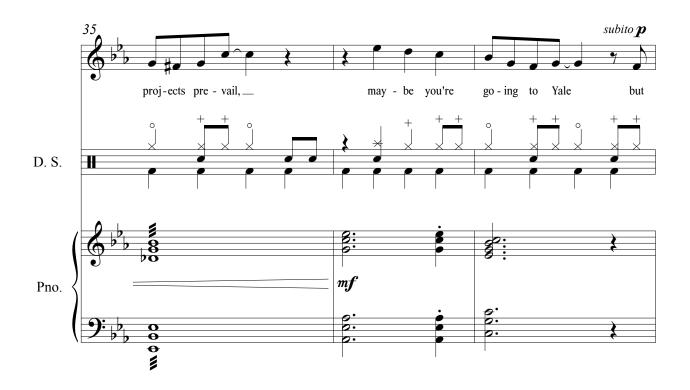






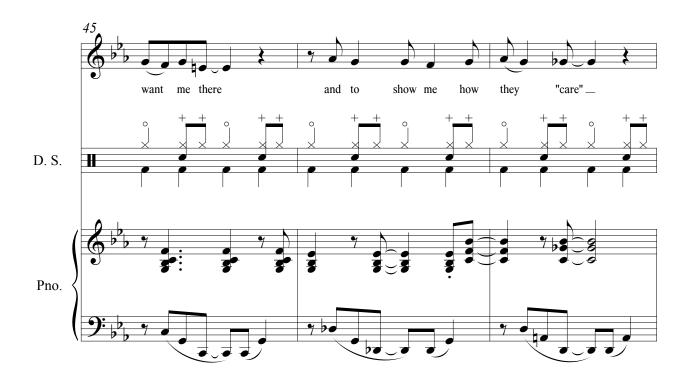












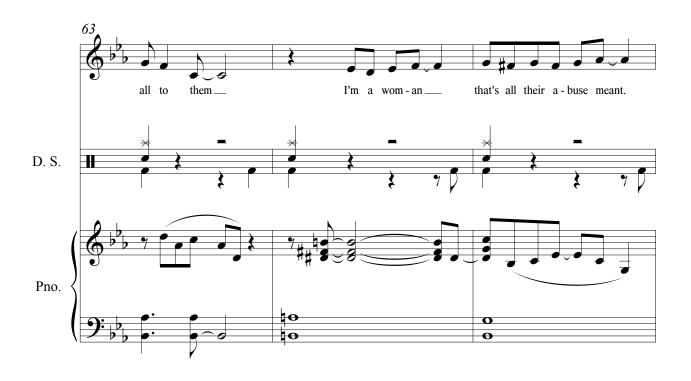


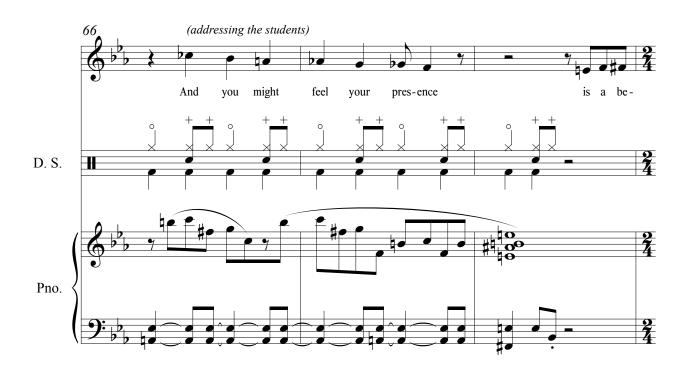


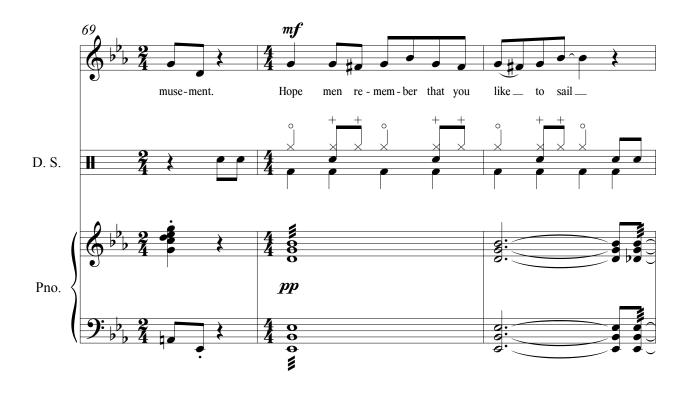


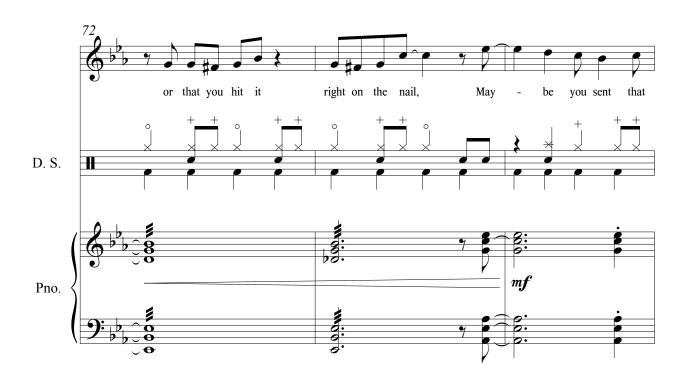




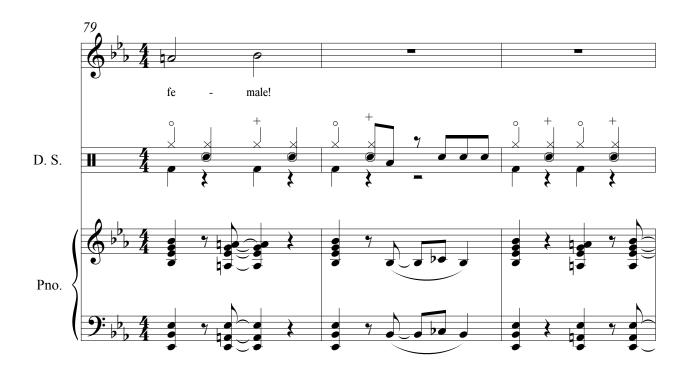








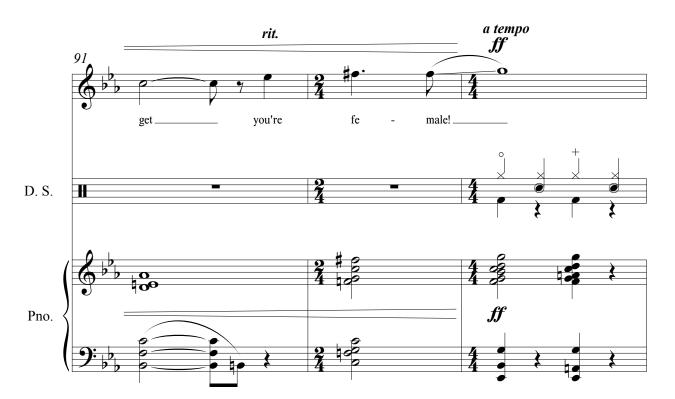
















No. 6

Jack's Song

(Jack)

Relaxed, laid back, = 116





















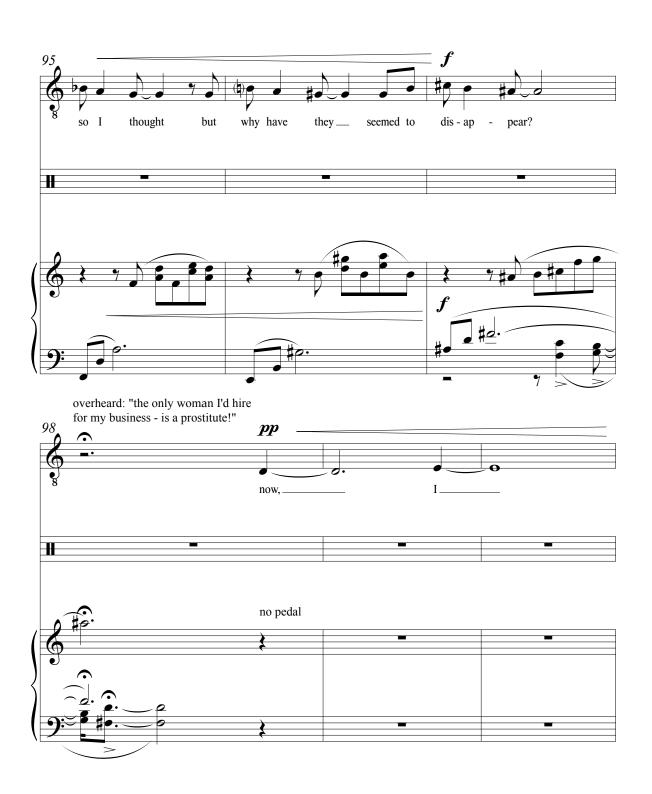














No. 7 Graduation

(Samantha)

