

THE *Lotte Lenya* COMPETITION SONGBOOK

“Mama Cries Into Her Tea” from *Midwestern Gothic* *Music by Josh Schmidt, Lyrics by Royce Vavrek*

SHOW SYNOPSIS

Young Stina, bursting with hormones and no place to put them in the middle-of-nowhere USA, falls hard for her down-on-his-luck step-father Red, never sees her mother Deb, stays clear of the local Sheriff, and embarks on spur-of-the-moment flights of fantasy with a young farmhand named Anderson. With her mother working at a bar in a distant town, Stina is left to her own imagination which gets her into deeper and deeper trouble. Sheriff Dwayne, known to stop by unannounced for coffee, has noticed an increasing amount of crime in the area, but has no idea Stina is behind the vandalized mailboxes and murdered cats. Stina’s petty crimes evolve into something more sinister as she involves Anderson in dangerous roleplay, first by tying him up to a fencepost in his underwear, performing the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian, and then as a drugged up participant in a deadly bathtub burlesque. Stina will stop at nothing to get her mother’s attention, but will Deb get to her daughter before too much blood is shed?

SONG CONTEXT AND SCENE DESCRIPTION

“Mama Cries Into Her Tea” is the penultimate number in the show, where Stina unravels, living out the traumatic memory of her father leaving the family, watching her mother fall into depression only to throw on a red dress and bring home the first local stud who notices her – a pattern she both abhors and wishes to imitate. All of this is performed with Stina wearing a yellow swimsuit and a home-made tiara fashioned from scrap. The song takes place among the carnage in an abandoned farmhouse, decorated with garish taxidermy and featuring a very old bathtub, perfect for a burlesque. Although there are other characters on stage, the song is an inner monologue and the spotlight is on Stina alone in this moment. It’s an opportunity for us to give context as to the reason Stina’s life tumbled out of her control, and it is as intimate and self-contained as the show gets, unspooling our heroine’s inner psychology in a direct, dramatic and linear way so that we as an audience understand all of her violent and outlandish behavior amplified by isolation prior to this moment. It should be sung with as direct a delivery as possible, as if Stina had instantly reverted to a child reliving these images in real time.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

Young Female Adult (or at least appearing/acting as such. Ages 19 to 24, or a plausible visual substitute. Vocal range: middle C to 2 Eb’s above middle C.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Much of the music in *Midwestern Gothic* lives at the intersection of Alt-country folk rock and roll, Weimar Cabaret music, and American Musical Theatre song forms. There is an exhibitionist quality to Stina that allies with her emulation of performers like Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel*, or Liza Minelli in *Cabaret* — yet maintaining the innocence of one who has not stepped through adult life in any meaningful way. The composer's inclination is to sing this music as “raw” as possible in a pop/rock and roll context, free of refined musical theatre quality, free to vary timbre and amplitude to fit the storytelling intention of the line as much as possible.