

# THE *Lotte Senya* COMPETITION SONGBOOK

## “An Ocean Away” from *The Family Resemblance* *Music and lyrics by Masi Asare*

### SHOW SYNOPSIS

Akos and her family are expecting an ordinary Christmas back home in central Pennsylvania, but heavy winds, a corporate crisis, and a visitation from an ancestor mean things do not go as planned. This semiautobiographical musical centers on three generations of one cross-cultural family—a white mother (Betsy), Black immigrant father (Kofi), two mixed race daughters (Akos and Sylvie) and the spirit of an African grandmother (Valentina) who is only visible to Akos. A realist and businesswoman who feels out of place in a family of idealists and activists, Akos comes to realize that she has much in common with the entrepreneurial Valentina and that although each family member looks as different as the squares in a patchwork quilt, the resemblances they share are much more than skin deep. Even when your heritage is all over the map, Akos finds, you have to go back to your roots to find your way forward. The score includes American folk and popular song, west African highlife, and Akan classical music.

### SONG CONTEXT AND SCENE DESCRIPTION

It is the day before Christmas, and Akos, a mixed race young woman is on the train from New York to her parents’ home in central Pennsylvania. A nosy woman (Valentina) boards the train and strikes up a conversation with Akos. When she realizes they both have roots in the west African nation Ghana, Valentina asks Akos if she has ever been to the country, and if so, what she thought of it.

In this song, Akos grapples with longing to be close to her family, while fearing that the news of her pregnancy will only push them farther away from her. She also reaffirms her confidence in the choices she has made, in the ability to drive her own destiny ("I chart my course"), and to take on the responsibilities she faces. Sometimes we can confide in a stranger something which feels impossible to tell those we are closest to. By song's end, Akos is on the verge of revealing the news of her pregnancy and impending single motherhood to this stranger, Valentina, but is interrupted when Akos's sister arrives on the train. At that point, Akos realizes that her new friend Valentina is invisible to everyone but herself.

### CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

Akos (*uh-KOHS*), mixed race young woman. Buttoned-up, professional, the older sister, the one who gets things done. A director of communications for a global firm. She is three months pregnant and soon to be a single parent but has not yet told her family.

There is one lyric that refers to Ghana, but this could be changed to a country reflecting the performer's heritage in a cabaret or concert context. When performed outside the context of the full musical, casting is flexible but the performer should identify as a person of color and/or come from an immigrant background.

The voice range is Bb3 to Bb4. The voice type is a belt voice with some contemporary pop energy.

## **PERFORMANCE NOTES**

The song works best when the singer is not too worried about "sounding pretty" or flooding the sound with vibrato, but instead closely follows the intent of the lyrics like an acting monologue. The performance should be less about a smooth vocal line and more about locking into the rhythms to sing in a way that is percussive and grounded. The score describes the tempo and feel as "Bright and Matter-of-Fact" because this is not a song where the character is feeling sorry for herself; she is a kind of grit-your-teeth-and-get-it-done person. At the same time there are moments of wistfulness and frustration. This is a person who really needs her family to help her grapple with a major challenge in her life (a new, unexpected baby on the way). The push/pull of the song is that she wants her family's love and wants to be closer to them, but at the same time anticipates that she won't live up to their expectations and will feel as distant from them as she has for a long time. It is also the experience of confiding in a stranger (whom you think you'll never see again) and expressing yourself in a radically honest and vulnerable way.