

THE *Lotte Lenya* COMPETITION SONGBOOK

“If I Didn’t Know Better” from *The Luckiest Girl* *Music and lyrics by Sonya Hayden*

SHOW SYNOPSIS

The Luckiest Girl tells the story of a determined young woman discovering her sexuality and independence in 1920s New York City. When her mother dies, Sarah is expected to be her elderly father's caretaker and marry into a wealthy family, but she longs for the types of opportunities and freedom her twin brother has. She finds a temporary escape from her life when she becomes secretly involved in a women-led experimental theater troupe in Greenwich Village. There, Sarah finds a new sense of independence through playing self-confident women on stage, and a new kind of family with the troupe.

Sarah unexpectedly develops romantic feelings for another female member of the troupe, Sam, a free-spirited writer who is more confident in herself and her sexuality than Sarah. Sarah struggles to understand her feelings and suppresses them, particularly when troupe member James, embodying everything she previously thought she was looking for in a romantic partner, pursues her.

Sam is also developing intense feelings for Sarah but thinks Sarah is more interested in James. When James proposes to Sarah, she surprises herself by turning him down and goes to stay in Sam's nearby apartment. She and Sam kiss, leaving Sarah confused about her feelings. The next morning, Sarah is shocked to learn that her father has passed away and blames herself for not going home to care for him. She lashes out at Sam, who is left alone and hurt, and returns home.

When Sarah hears that the troupe's leader has abandoned the financially struggling troupe, she returns and persuades the remaining members to give it one last go. But in Sarah's youthful determination to put on a successful show, she becomes overly controlling and strains her relationship with the troupe. On opening night, Sarah performs a risqué number where she finally gains the confidence to fully express herself. Backstage, she confidently kisses Sam, and they spend the night together.

After closing night, the troupe discovers that the theater remains in debt, and they all confront Sarah about how she handled the rehearsal process. Sam encourages Sarah to take time to figure out who she is and what she wants, leaving the door open for a relationship in the future. Sarah, alone in the theater, reflects on how telling someone else's story on stage has been easier than writing her own story, something she is now resolved to do.

SONG CONTEXT AND SCENE DESCRIPTION

Leading up to this song, Sam has developed a strong romantic interest in Sarah, but Sarah appears more interested in James, a dashing male member of the theater troupe. In the previous scene, it seems to Sam as if their attraction might be mutual, but her hopes are dashed when Sarah leaves with James. Sam is left alone on stage, and in this song, she fully admits her feelings for Sarah for the first time but wrestles between hope and futility over whether Sarah could ever return them. As a consequence of this song, she has realized the depth of her feelings and subsequently resolves to tell Sarah how she feels, even if this leads to rejection.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

Sam is a free-spirited female playwright in her mid- to late-20s and member of a women-led experimental theater troupe in 1920s New York City. She has had one previous serious relationship, which ended messily. Since then, she has worked hard to regain her self-confidence and control over her life, so when she begins to develop feelings for Sarah, she tries to keep them in check. Though she is afraid of getting hurt again if she lets herself open up to someone new, she is unable to suppress the intensity of her feelings for Sarah.

Voice type: Mezzo-soprano.

Vocal range of song: A3 - Eb5.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

The push and pull between hope and futility drives the song forward. Find the moments where Sam allows herself to hope before reigning her feelings back in. The composer has been detailed in her music notation, and there are clues there about the character's shifting emotional state and journey. Similarly, you can think about how the details of the lyrics change over the course of the song (for example, from "you'll never want me" to "you'll never love me"). The setting of the lyric is also broken up with pauses and hesitations at the beginning of the song and becomes more legato and connected as Sam increasingly lets her true feelings come through.