

THE *Lotte Lenya* COMPETITION SONGBOOK

“The Switch” from *The Willard Suitcases* *Music and lyrics by Julianne Wick Davis*

SHOW SYNOPSIS

The Willard Suitcases is the story of the forgotten suitcases of The Willard Asylum for the Chronically Insane that was in operation in upstate New York from the 1877 to the 1995. When the asylum was closed in the 90's, they discovered over 400 suitcases that belonged to patients who entered Willard between 1900 and 1968. Meticulously catalogued, these suitcases contained evidence of lives interrupted during a time when mental health in the United States was misunderstood. Many people were wrongly committed – immigrants, the homeless, people of color, women. *The Willard Suitcases* explores the stories inside these suitcases and spans the decades of history in which they were packed.

SONG CONTEXT AND SCENE DESCRIPTION

“The Switch” is from the perspective of a woman living with someone with mental illness. It is 1949. Anna is married to a man who suffers from bipolar/borderline personality disorder; however, at the time, there was no label for the kind of behavior that Anna describes. We see Anna step out of the ensemble with a suitcase in her hand. She sets the suitcase down and begins to sing about her life with her husband, Ronnie. As she sings, Ronnie appears next to her, and is part of the action she is describing – driving the car, bringing her a coat with a fur collar, etc. We begin to believe that the person who is going to end up at the asylum is Ronnie. Yet, like so many women of her time with no agency, we find that Anna is the one dropped off and left at the asylum with a suitcase in her hand that her husband packed.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

Anna is a young woman somewhere between early 20's and late 30's; Mezzo/Alto; Vocal Range from G3-E5; The quality of the voice should feel natural and not too legit. The song is about storytelling and not vocal production.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

“The Switch” is like an epic journey for the performer. You should use as much range of emotion as the character of Ronnie. Therefore, the singer as actor should feel free to take some liberties in tempos and fermatas. In the verses, Anna should be hopeful, tolerant, and forgiving. In the choruses, she should feel the danger, but always transitions back into hope and tolerance and forgiveness. We should see/hear/feel a switch in the music and the singer between these sections. Ultimately, she's a victim of her circumstances and has no agency in her life. There is no escape...no chance for a different life, so her being dropped off at the asylum should leave

Anna and the audience with feeling a mix of betrayal, security, resolve, and the question: Is Anna better off at the Willard Asylum than she is living the rest of her life with Ronnie?