

Lisa Bielawa

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Note

Premiere: September 28, 2007 Seward Park, outside the Seward Park Library, on East Broadway at Jefferson Street, NYC
Duration: 35'
Instrumentation: soprano and 12 instrumentalists

Chance Encounter is a site-specific musical work, co-conceived by world-renowned soprano Susan Narucki and myself, in which Susan and 12 instruments convene, one or several at a time, in and out of the texture and context of public spaces. Susan will sing songs and arias constructed of texts we have collected in transient public spaces, thereby enacting the listener's private (yet collective) experience of the performance space itself. Each performance 'venue' will require a re-mapping of the spatial and movement elements of the piece onto the new location.

A single musician sits down and begins to play the opening, solo section of the piece. It is a flexibly timed section, expandable. Several minutes later, another musician shows up at the site from some highly visible location: pulls up in a taxi or comes out of the subway or bus, comes out of a nearby deli or store. This person begins playing, across the street or plaza from the cellist. Some people on the street can only hear one player. Walk across the site, or across the street – the piece changes.

There will be no 'backstage' from which players wait for entrances etc. The players will have synchronized their watches earlier in the day via conference call – their entrances can be governed by absolute time.

The soprano soloist is not the first to arrive, nor the last. She may emerge from a second-story window or sing from a fire escape. She sings about nostalgia ("Do you ever go to your old apartment?" "We used to have a house here, but then my father lost his job. I never go there now.") and strangely resonant commonplaces ("What kind of place are you looking for?" "Are you by yourself?") Some players arrive in groups. Once a critical number of people have convened in one location, the piece becomes more structured in its orchestration. The large group migrates, over the course of the piece, away from the soprano to where the smaller group is, and others migrate back towards her. It is impossible to stand in any one location and hear the whole piece.

Players will stagger their exits – walk away, hail different cabs or become listeners for the rest. The soprano, in the balcony, will end the piece alone, decisively but without ceremony.

– Lisa Bielawa

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