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Subject: Regarding libretto and music sound effects for David T. Little's *Soldier Songs* Friday April 5 2019 Paramount Theatre

Dear Ashley, if I may, (and Annie and David)

I have *aphantasia*, which means, for me, that I have no visual memory and no capacity to conjure up any images in my mind. So excuse me if I am sending this to you by mistake.

First, I want to thank you all for bringing *Soldier Songs* to Austin and staging it with such ingenious artistry. David Little's structural framework is unique among the by now many hundreds and hundreds of war stories I have studied from the 8th c. BCE onward. I thought immediately of the 8 stages in Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. Bill Morrison's images had a Michael Lesy quality to them. See my review below of the images in the mind of a 100% PTSD diagnosed Vietnam vet just published. Glenn Towery was right during Q&A when he said you have given us, more than visually, a simulation of PTSD.

I believe, Ashley, we spoke briefly in the aisle at the Paramount Friday night after the Q&A session after David T. Little's *Soldier Songs*. I believe that most audience members could not hear many of the words being sung. Several audience members around me said they missed the supra-titles that are common in foreign-language operas. The opera was reduced to a sound and sight collage.

Please read this. It is only 750 words and pertinent.

<http://lifeandletters.la.utexas.edu/2018/11/consider-war-stories-without-romanticizing-them/>

I have taught and written about stories of war and worked with veterans for over twenty-five years. In the audience with me Friday night was Dr. Stephen Sonnenberg, who was an early champion of PTSD treatment for vets (and had team taught in honors seminars with me) and Glenn Towery, a Vietnam-era veteran who is a member of the veterans-only NEH program Warrior Chorus I conduct here at UT Austin as one of three national nodes (Austin, LA, and the mother ship Aquila Theatre in NYC). Glenn is founder and driving force behind the Austin Veterans Art Festival.

We should all have been able to hear what was being sung.

In any case, what I wanted to say is that ancient Greek theaters were designed to be as acoustically sound as possible. In their heyday (460-404 BCE), tragedies were performed with minimal staging 'enhancements', aka 'distractions'. The focus was kept on the words sung by the actors and the chorus. What they were saying was crucial in this oral culture whose two greatest enculturating works were giant oral songs shaped and distilled over centuries of performance and dealing with men at war (*Iliad*) and men returning from war (*Odyssey*).

The audiences were soldier citizens virtually all of whom had firsthand experiences of combat, wars being fought by the Athenian democracy almost yearly from 490 BCE until 404 BCE as Athens built up an

empire through constant and brutal application of force. The one thing American democracy of the last century and Athenian democracy of the 5th century BCE have in common is that MLK's words about us would apply to the ancient Athenians. Each is the 'greatest purveyor of violence in the world' in which each lives.

Hearing what was said was key to helping the soldier veterans work through what they had been through individually and collectively. See: C H A P T E R T W E L V E "When War Is Performed, What Do Soldiers and Veterans Want to Hear and See and Why?" Thomas G. Palaima in Meineck Konstan attached pp. 261-284.

That is why it was a shame that the small sample group I polled of audience, like me, was able to hear at most about 20-30% of what David Adam Moore was singing.

The fine libretto is drowned out by the music and sound effects and even to some extent the visuals.

If you have the means to do so, please forward this to David T. Little. You really should make sure the noise does not overwhelm the words. I know that is what happens in the combat areas of wars and in the hysteria that leads us into wars and makes us continue supporting them. But in this opera these words are key and should be respected.

It cannot be done by someone who knows the words. It is well known that our minds put together what our ears hear even partially. So a sound-checker by anyone who has read or heard the libretto will be inaccurate.

Many thanks.

Regarding XI. War after War (Age 58-66)

I thought immediately of Hemingway's "To Good Guys Dead." His war poems were long neglected. I believe only first pulled together and published in a collection in 1979. Of course, his short story "Soldier's Home," and his novels are big. But these poems are small and brutally blunt. Not the kind of thing our educators let into even high school classrooms.

Here is the poem that *Soldier Songs* XI made me think of:

They sucked us in;
King and country,
Christ Almighty
And the rest.
Patriotism,
Democracy,
Honor—
Words and phrases,
They either bitched or killed us.

I have attached some easily read pieces of mine that bear upon war trauma and what creative responses there have been to it.

See also: <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/classics/events/warrior-chorus.php>

<http://www.miwsr.com/2019-013.aspx>

<http://www.miwsr.com/2018-057.aspx>

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