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The Characters

Evangeline Bellefontaine – Soprano

Benedicta Bellefontaine (mother of Evangeline) – Alto

Gabriel Lajeunesse – Tenor

Father Felician (the village priest) – Baritone

Synopsis

Evangeline tells the story of the expulsion of the Acadian people from Nova Scotia in 1755–64. Forced into exile by the British, the Acadians were separated from one another, and traveled the US and abroad in search of loved ones. Many Acadians resettled in Southern Louisiana, and became known as “Cajuns.”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote his poem “Evangeline” in 1847. Although the characters are fictitious, their story represents a very real and tragic series of events.

The opera focuses on the plight of Evangeline, a young Acadian woman. She is betrothed to her childhood sweetheart, Gabriel. However, before they can marry, the British soldiers come to their town and force the residents from their homes. Evangeline and Gabriel are separated. They travel the United States searching without success for one another, from the Western plains to Southern Louisiana. As her hope of finding Gabriel diminishes, Evangeline turns to her Catholic faith to sustain her. During the last years of her life, she becomes a Sister of Mercy, tending to the poor and the sick. It is there, nursing the ill, that she finds Gabriel, on his deathbed. Their hearts join forever, and Evangeline bows her head to say “Father, I thank Thee.”

Several Acadian musical elements are woven into this opera. A French/Acadian dance tune, “*Tous Les Bourgeois de Chartre*,” opens and closes the music. This song was mentioned within the Longfellow “Evangeline” poem as a fiddle tune associated with Acadian culture. In addition, the chant (plainsong) “*Ave Maris Stella*” (“Greetings to the Star of the Sea”) appears throughout the story. In the nineteenth century, French words were added to this song to form the Acadian national anthem.

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Performance Notes

Stage Directions

Many instructions have been notated in the score. Often, gestures and movements of the singers correspond to specific musical motives. Therefore, it is expected that the performers will pay close attention to the directions, adding additional staging as seems appropriate.

Musical Language

The style of the music is generally tonal, simple and inspired by the folk nature of the story. Perhaps the New England character of Longfellow's poem speaks through the New England musical language of the composer. Several French dance tunes are played by the violin (fiddle) to hearken back to Acadie. These are the only imported elements.

The Accompaniment

The piano writing often comprises tremolando chords. This idiom allows for some rhythmic flexibility for the singer. The interaction between voice and piano need not always involve beat-by-beat coordination. In general, the accompaniment texture is sparse to allow for focus on the vocal lines.

The Narrator

The role of the Narrator is essential. For it is through the Narrator that much of the Longfellow poem (the story) is presented. It is envisioned that the Narrator will stand to the side of the stage, perhaps with a podium and small lamp for reading. Although the Narrator need not be a skilled musician, it would be helpful if the Narrator could read music, in order to follow along with the score.

Costumes

Simple, Acadian, folk-style attire is envisioned. Perhaps, as the story unfolds and the singers travel far from Acadie, the clothes might become less "Acadian," and more "generic." Father Felician should be dressed as a Village Priest in the eighteenth century throughout the opera.

Performance Venue

Evangeline is a chamber opera created especially for performances in a wide variety of locations. With the small cast and minimal musical forces, this work may be presented in a church or intimate setting. The piano is placed off to the side of the stage, and the singers come and go on stage as specified.

Evangeline

A Chamber Opera in One Act

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882)
Adapted by G. Walker

Gwyneth Walker

Scene 1: Introduction

The stage is empty with the PIANIST located at the side of the stage. A FIDDLER (male or female) walks on stage and plays the following French/Acadian dance tune:

“Tous Les Bourgeois de Chartre”

With energy ♩ = 100
as a dance tune (played in fond remembrance of the past)

The musical score is written for Violin (Fiddle) and Piano. It consists of five systems of staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8. The score begins with a *f* dynamic marking. The first system is for Violin (Fiddle). The second system is for Violin (Vln.) starting at measure 6. The third system is for Violin (Vln.) starting at measure 12, with a *rit.* marking and a *a tempo* marking. The fourth system is for Violin (Vln.) starting at measure 17, with a *p* marking and a *f* marking. The fifth system is for Violin (Vln.) starting at measure 23, with a *rit.* marking and a *a tempo* marking. Below the fifth system, there is a text instruction: "FIDDLER leaves the stage while playing." followed by "rolled pizz." and a *p* dynamic marking. The sixth system is for Violin (Vln.) starting at measure 28, with a *p* marking. The seventh system is for Piano, with a *p* marking. The score ends with a double bar line.

Ad.

slight pause

FATHER FELICIAN comes on stage.

38 **At a stately tempo** ♩ = 60
as a church bell heard in the distance

EVANGELINE, BENEDICTA, and GABRIEL stand together at the side of the stage. They answer FELICIAN from a distance.

Chant "Ave Maris Stella"

Free measure

42

Felician *mf cantabile*
enter ad lib.

Free measure

as waves on the sea

A - ve - Mar - is - Stel - - -

8^{va}

8^{vb}

Ad.

(voices overlap)

Gabriel *mf cantabile*

O beau - ti - ful star of the sea!

la!

(*Ad.*)

Benedicta *mf cantabile*

B
Ho - ly Moth - er of God.

F
De - i Ma - ter Al - ma.

(Ped.)

Evangeline *mf cantabile*

E
E - ter - nal

F
At - que Sem - per Vir - go

(Ped.)

E
Vir - gin, the Source of Life.

F

(Ped.)

E
B
G
F

Bless - ed the gate to Heav - en.
Bless - ed the gate to Heav - en.
Bless - ed the gate to Heav - en.
Fe - lix Coe - li Por - ta.

(Ped.)

F

A - - - - -

(Ped.)

E
B
G
F

Bless - ed the gate to Hea - ven.
Bless - ed the gate to Hea - ven.
Bless - ed the gate to Hea - ven.
men.

(Ped.)

Scene 2: "We Dwell in the Love of God"

N

Narrator:

In the Acadian land, on the shores of the Basin of Minas,
Distant, secluded, still, the little village of Grand Pré
Lay in the fruitful valley. Vast meadows stretched to the eastward,
Giving the village its name, and pasture to flocks without number.

Columns of pale blue smoke, like clouds of incense ascending,
Rose from a hundred hearths, the homes of peace and contentment.
Thus dwelt together in love these simple Acadian farmers, –
Dwelt in the love of God and of man.

FIDDLER comes to center stage and plays this short dance tune excerpt.

Moderate tempo

(a hint of the "Danse Acadienne" to come later)

arco

Vln. 

5

leaves the stage.

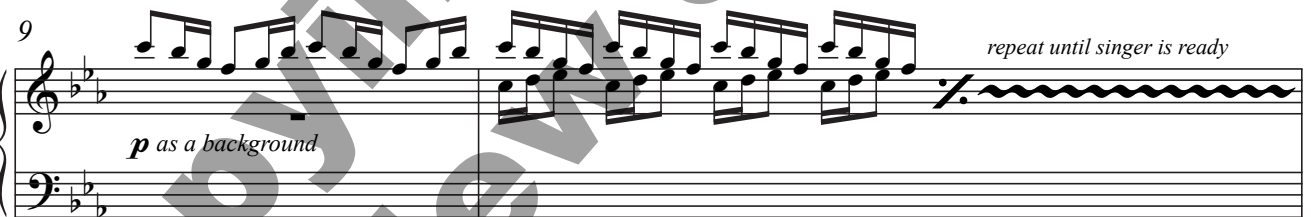
Vln. 

The priest, FATHER FELICIAN, comes to center stage.

A gentle tempo ♩ = 100

suitable for the recitative to follow

9



repeat until singer is ready

with much pedal

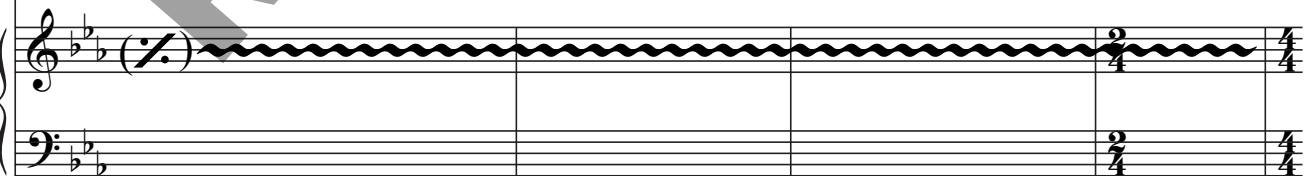
Felician

mf in recitative style

11

F 

I am called Fath - er Fe - li - cian, the priest of _ Grand_ Pré.



15

F

Here I live with my gen - tle flock, — the farm - ers of A - ca -

*smooth, gentle tremolo (not too fast)
"floating" behind the singers*

18

spread arms in a welcoming gesture of a peaceful homeland

F

die. We dwell in the love of God and man-kind, free from fear. Our

22

F

homes are o - pen as day and the hearts of the own - ers. The

25

F

rich are poor, and the poor live in a - bun - dance. Bless - ings of the Star of the

mf *cresc.* *f*

Red. _____

28

holds up hand in a gesture of a blessing of peace

F

Sea. "A - ve Mar - is Stel - la." ___

mf *p*

(Ped.)

BENEDICTA comes to center stage. FATHER FELICIAN moves to the side of the stage.

As before

31

p as a background

repeat until singer is ready

with much pedal

Benedicta

33

mf in recitative style

B

I am called Be - ne - dic - ta Bel - le - fon - taine. Here I live on this good - ly land with my

36

, *p* as an aside, quasi recitative

spread arms in a welcoming gesture of a peaceful homeland

, *mf*

B

fam - ily, (My daughter Evangeline is the fairest of the fair.) We dwell in the love of

(Ped.)

39

B

God and man-kind, free from fear. Our homes are o - pen as

42

B

day and the hearts of the own - ers. We shel - ter the poor, and

45

B

all live to - geth - er in a - bund - dance. Bless - ings of the Star of the

48

B

Sea. "A - ve Mar - is Stel - la." —

FELICIAN answers from the side hand also raised in a peace gesture

F

"A - ve Mar - is Stel - la." —

(*Rec.*)

Scene 3: "Forced Exile"

N

Narrator: *(unaccompanied)*

Merrily, merrily whirled the wheels of the dizzying dances
 Under the orchard-trees and down the path to the meadows;
 Old folk and young together, and children mingled among them.
 Fairest of all the maids was Evangeline, Benedicta's daughter!
 Noblest of all the youths was Gabriel, son of the blacksmith!
(Piano begins)

$\text{♩} = 60$, as a slow march
a drumbeat in the distance

continue repeating through next reading until "altar"

N

(continues with Piano)

So passed the days away. And lo! with a summons sonorous
 Sounded the bell from its tower, and over the meadows a drum beat.
 Then came the guard from the ships, entering the church door.
 Up rose their commander, and spoke from the steps of the altar,
(Piano stops)

"You are convened this day," he said, "by his Majesty's orders.
 Painful the task is I do, which to you I know must be grievous.
 Yet must I bow and obey, and deliver the will of our monarch;
 Namely, that all your lands, and dwellings, and cattle of all kinds
 Forfeited be to the crown; and that you yourselves from this province
 Be transported to other lands. God grant you may dwell there
 Ever as faithful subjects, a happy and peaceable people!"

EVANGELINE, BENEDICTA, and GABRIEL rise from their seats, with fists raised, shouting, "NO!" "NO!" at the Narrator. (Shouting is *ad libitum* and not synchronized.) [FATHER FELICIAN remains seated.]

Piano begins

With energy $\text{♩} = 88$

EVANGELINE, BENEDICTA, and GABRIEL are still standing

7 *f* in anger (at audience), emphatically

E NO! NO! We shall not go! We shall not go! We

B *f* in anger (at audience), emphatically

B NO! NO! We shall not go! We shall not go! We

G *f* in anger (at audience), emphatically

G NO! NO! We shall not go! We shall not go! We

(Ped.)

11

E shall not go! Down with the ty - rants of En - gland!_

B shall not go! We (*f*)

G shall not go!

(Ped.)

15

B
nev - er have sworn them al - le - giance! —

G
Death ——— to these for - eign

mf

(f)

with much pedal

18

G
sol - diers, who seize our homes and our har - vests! ———

22

E
NO! NO! We shall not go! We shall not go! We shall not go! ———

B
NO! NO! We shall not go! We shall not go! We shall not go! ———

G
NO! NO! We shall not go! We shall not go! We shall not go! ———

f

FATHER FELICIAN rises from his seat and rebukes the others.

Recitative tempo ♩ = 66

26

E

B

G

F

f *forcefully*

Felician

What is this that you do, O my chil - dren? —

Recitative tempo ♩ = 66

EVANGELINE, BENEDICTA, and GABRIEL sit.

28

F

What mad - ness has seized _____ you? _____

Scene 4: "Searching"

"Traveler's Lament"

The FIDDLER may roam the stage while playing.

(This "Lament" depicts the exiled Acadians wandering the country in search of loved ones and a new home.)

With gentle motion ♩ = 120

The pizzicato continues a few more times as FIDDLER leaves the stage, fading out as the reading begins.

31
N

Narrator: (begins as violin fades and continues unaccompanied)
 Many a weary year had passed since the burning of Grand-Pré,
 When on the falling tide the freighted vessels departed,
 Bearing a nation, with all its household goods, into exile.
 Exile without an end, and without an example in story.

Piano begins (on next page)

Slowly repeat a few more times while leaving the stage
 (fading out as the reading begins)

♩ = 120, *quickly, lightly*
to depict "scattered, like flakes of snow" (in the reading)

36

continue repeating during following reading

Leo. stays

During the reading, EVANGELINE, BENEDICTA, and FELICIAN return to the stage, wandering, as if searching for Acadian friends.

N

Narrator:

Far asunder, on separate coasts, the Acadians landed;
Scattered were they, like flakes of snow, when the wind from the northeast
Strikes aslant through the fogs that darken the Banks of Newfoundland.
Friendless, homeless, hopeless, they wandered from city to city,
From the cold lakes of the North to sultry Southern savannas, – (*Piano stops*)

(*Continues unaccompanied*)

Friends they sought and homes; and many, despairing, heart-broken,
Asked of the earth but a grave, and no longer a friend nor a fireside.
Written their history stands on tablets of stone in the churchyards.

BENEDICTA steps forward to sing as
EVANGELINE remains in the background.

"Long Among Them..."

Moderate tempo ♩ = 100

Sung to the audience as if telling a story

37 *Slowly, freely*

Benedicta *mf*

Long a - mong them was a mai - den who

with pedal

FELICIAN steps forward to sing.

40

B wait - ed and wan - dered._____

F Felician *mf* Low - ly and meek in spir - it, and

gentle tremolo LH

44

B _____ Some - thing there was in her

F pa - tient - ly suf - fer - ing all things._____

gently pulsing

47

B life in - com - plete, im - per - fect, un - fin - ished;_____

F _____ as if a

50 *f enraptured* *rit.*

B with all its mu - sic and sun - shine, -

F *f enraptured*
morn - ing in June, sud - den - ly paused in the

rit.

54 *Slowly*, *p* *a tempo* (♩ = 100)

B and slow - ly des - cend - ed.

F *p*, *(p)*
sky, Some - times a ru - mor a

Slowly *a tempo* (♩ = 100)

(*Rec.*)

58 *mf*

B Some - times she spoke with

F *poco*
hear - say, a whis - per came to beck - on her for - ward. -

poco *mf*

Scene 5: "Salvation"

FIDDLER walks on stage and plays the following slow tune (which is based on "Danse Acadien" at the end of Scene 2). This song represents a journey, and the passage of time.

"Journey"

At a slow walking tempo ♩ = 60

Three staves of music for Violin (Vln.). The first staff starts with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a 2/2 time signature. The tempo is marked 'At a slow walking tempo ♩ = 60'. The first staff is marked *mf* *sadly*. The second staff begins with a measure rest of 5 measures. The third staff begins with a measure rest of 9 measures, marked *p*, and includes a *rit.* (ritardando) marking. The piece concludes with the instruction 'FIDDLER exits.'

LIGHTS UP on NARRATOR.

EVANGELINE, BENEDICTA, and FATHER FELICIAN remain off stage. They enter when they sing. On stage, in a remote corner (unlit) lies GABRIEL, now an old man. He is near death, alone and unnoticed.

N

Narrator:

Thus did the long sad years glide on, and in seasons and places
Diverse and distant far was seen the wandering maiden;
Like a phantom she came, and passed away unremembered.

Fair was she and young, when in hope began the long journey;
Faded was she and old, when in disappointment it ended.
Each succeeding year stole something away from her beauty,
Leaving behind it, broader and deeper, the gloom and shadow.
Then there appeared and spread faint streaks of gray o'er her forehead,
Dawn of another life, that broke o'er her earthly horizon,
As in the eastern sky, the first faint streaks of morning.

*Piano begins music below at the phrase "faint streaks of gray"
and continues to the end of the reading.*

"Streaks of Gray"

Random tempo

gentle arpeggio

Two staves of music for piano. The first staff is marked *pp* *barely audible*. The music consists of arpeggiated chords. The second staff has a single note held for a long duration.

repeat ad libitum until the reading ends

Begin playing after reading ends

14 Slowly ♩ = 92, as the passage of time

Piano introduction in B-flat major, 4/4 time. The right hand is silent, and the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The dynamic is *pp*. The piece concludes with a *Ped.* marking.

FATHER FELICIAN and BENEDICTA come on stage to tell the story of what has happened to EVANGELINE.

15 Felician *mf*

F Thus for man - y years she wan - dered, un - til her Sav - ior came to

p

with pedal

Musical score for Felician's first line. The vocal line is in the bass clef, and the piano accompaniment is in the bass clef. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment with a *p* dynamic and a *with pedal* instruction.

18 Benedicta *mf*

B There, from the trou - bled sea, had E - van - gel - ine

F guide her.

mf

(p)

Musical score for Benedicta's first line. The vocal line is in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in the bass clef. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment with a *mf* dynamic and a *(p)* dynamic marking.

21

B land - ed, an ex - ile, yet Some - thing now spoke to her

F Some - thing now spoke to her

mf

(p)

mf

Musical score for Benedicta's second line. The vocal line is in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in the bass clef. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment with a *mf* dynamic and a *(p)* dynamic marking.

24 *rit.* *p*

B heart, and made her no lon - ger a - lone.

F heart, and made her no lon - ger a - lone.

rit. *(mf)* *p*

Leo.

Narrator:
 Then the fruitless search, the disappointed endeavor, ended.
 So fell the mists from her mind, and she saw the world far below her,
 Dark no longer, but all illumined with love; and the pathway
 Which she had climbed so far, lying smooth and fair in the distance.
 Gabriel was not forgotten. Within her heart was his image,
 Clothed in the beauty of love and youth, as last she beheld him.

27 *a tempo* (♩ = 92) *p*

F O - ver him the years had no pow - er; he was not

a tempo (♩ = 92) *p*

with pedal

30 *mf*

B He had be - come to her heart as

F changed, but trans - fig - ured.

mf *p*

Leo.

33

B one who is dead, and not ab - sent.

F Pa - ti - ence and de - ni - al of

mf

And... And...

36

B This was the les - son a

F self, and de - vo - tion to oth - ers.

39

B life of sor - row had taught her.

F This was the les - son a