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Completion of Dreaming of Wonderland was made possible in part by New York City Opera, which presented portions of the work during its American Composers Series, 2001.

ORCHESTRATION

2 Flutes (+ Picc.)
1 Oboe (+E.H.)
2 Clarinets (+B.Cl.)
1 Bassoon
2 Horns in F
Trumpet in C
Bass Trombone

1 Percussion
Keyboard (such as Kurzweil)
Strings
Synopsis

ACT I

Introduction. Limbo.
The Knave of Hearts sings of the popularity of “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” before disclosing that the central character of this opera is not Alice, but her older sister Lorina. Lorina, a teenager, has better things to do than fantasize about non-existent lands. Yet, says the Knave, she will learn something important from her younger but much more famous sister.

Scene 1: First Dream. Limbo.
A dream sequence follows, culminating in Alice’s shocked awakening to shouts of “Off with her head.” Excited, Alice seeks her sister.

Scene 2. British country estate, 1890s (perhaps).
Alice finds Lorina reading. Interrupting, to her sister’s protests, Alice tells her about her dream in an extended duet. At first impatient, Lorina finds herself drawn in to Alice’s tale, but ultimately, Lorina reminds her sister of real world concerns: the grass stains on her apron, tea time. Alice heads inside leaving Lorina to her studies.

Lulled by the warm summer afternoon and distracted by Alice’s story, Lorina gives up reading and in an aria, “I’m busy learning the world,” confides her hopes, fears and confusion regarding coming of age, which sets her in opposition to her sister’s—and what was once her own—childhood. Lorina becomes drowsy and succumbs to the ensemble’s singing of “Sleep now.”

Scene 3. Same location as Scene 2.
The Knave enters briefly, ushering us back into the dream world of the opera’s opening. Lorina awakens, now within her own recycled version of her sister’s dream. She has shrunk to Alice’s stature and is now wearing Alice’s clothes. The White Rabbit skitters past, running late after nibbling on some daisies. Out of scientific curiosity, Lorina follows him down his rabbit hole and into Wonderland.

ACT II

Introduction. Limbo.
The Knave of Hearts tells us more about himself, and segues us into more of Lorina’s dream.

Scene 1: The Tea Party. A large table under a tree.
Lorina awakens at a tea party with the Mad Hatter, March Hare and Dormouse. Each of the characters sings a short aria: the Hatter’s “Twinkle, twinkle little bat,” the March Hare’s “If you only kept on good terms with him.” Lorina’s pertinent questions are ignored, and she and the others fall asleep once again as the Dormouse finishes his song, “Once upon a time.”

Interlude. Limbo.
In a spoken monologue, the Knave of Hearts, his hunger excited by the tea party scene, is trying to find something to eat. He smells tarts baking somewhere and wanders offstage, following his nose.

Scene 2: Pig and Pepper. A large house.
Lorina, in a dreamy stupor, finds herself outside the Duchess’ house, where she sees an image of the Cheshire Cat fading in and out of view. She enters the house to find the Duchess, her Baby, a Cook, and a Footman (half man and half frog) singing an ode to the peppery soup the Cook is brewing.
In response to Lorina’s inquiries about the Cheshire Cat and the Baby’s ceaseless crying and sneezing, the Duchess becomes annoyed, then infuriated. She throws the Baby to Lorina, who, horrified at the Duchess’ bad parenting, upbraids her with a didactic rendering of “Speak gently.” This falls on deaf ears; in response, the others respond with Carroll’s pun version of the poem, “Speak roughly,” and treat the Baby ever worse, ultimately chopping off its nose and limbs. This absurdly serves to transform it into a pig, which then runs off stage. The others follow, leaving Lorina to muse over this disturbing scene.

Interlude. Limbo.
In a short recitative and aria, Lorina begins to wonder if she’s lost her mind, and relates that now she’s not certain if she is herself or Alice. She realizes that this dream is a product of both her and her sister’s imaginations. Moreover, bizarre as this dream is, she is beginning to enjoy.

Scene 3: The Caterpillar. A forest of monstrously tall grass.
Now shrunk to only three inches tall, surrounded by a dark forest of grass, Lorina is confronted by an enormous—from her perspective—Caterpillar, whose electronically processed voice is the product of the three male leads singing the part together. The Caterpillar takes a scientific interest in Lorina’s confusion. To check her memory, he demands that she recite after him a poem Lorina learned in school. The Caterpillar begins the quartet “Variations on ‘The old man’s comforts and how he gained them’.” Despite her best efforts, Lorina soon succumbs to an impish impulse and sings a crazed variation on the song (to the punning lines of Carroll’s “You are old Father William”), enjoying herself immensely to the Caterpillar’s exasperation.

Lorina exits, laughing, and the Caterpillar soon follows, revealing in its place the Knave of Hearts and a plate of tarts. On tiptoes, the Knave helps himself to the treats, but trumpets sound as he is caught red-handed by the Queen of Hearts.

Scene 4: The Trial of the Knave of Hearts. A Courtroom.
The Queen and King of Hearts, with the Ten of Clubs, arrest the Knave and take their places in court. The Hatter enters with Lorina, escorting her to the jury box. The White Rabbit, acting as prosecutor, calls the Hatter as a witness. Recognizing him from a concert a month ago, in which he botched his performance, the Queen sentences him to be beheaded. The Hatter is led offstage by the Ten of Clubs, who returns a few moments later with nothing but the Hatter’s hat. Horrified, Lorina begins to speak in defense of the Knave. The Rabbit finds a letter, and reading it, commences the ensemble-finale: “She told me you had been to her.” Lorina becomes more and more frustrated and outspoken regarding the illogic of the proceedings, and is ultimately condemned when the Knave sees a chance to save himself by shifting the Queen’s anger from himself to Lorina. To shouts of “off with her head,” Lorina is surrounded by the others and overcome. She falls to the ground, unconscious.

Scene 5. British country estate (of Act I).
Lorina awakens to the sound of Alice calling her name. In the opera’s final aria, “Now I know,” Lorina thanks Alice for sharing her dream, and for helping her to see that some aspects of childhood: freedom of imagination, and enjoyment of the smallest things in life, should not be forgotten, even as we become adults. The two head in to tea, reconciled.

The Knave enters one last time, enjoying the tarts he managed to pocket during the scuffle earlier. He wishes the audience good night. As the curtain begins to fall the White Rabbit scurries past, daring each member of the audience to follow it into his or own version of Wonderland.
CAST

A cast of seven principals doubles on multiple parts, for a total of sixteen roles

PRINCIPALS with DOUBLINGS

Lyric Soprano #1 (light, youthful voice)
Plays three roles: Alice Liddell, Dormouse, Ten of Clubs

Lyric Soprano #2 (a la Violetta)
Plays two roles: Lorina Liddell, Two of Spades

Dramatic Soprano (a la Tosca)
Plays two roles: Queen of Hearts, Cook

Dramatic Mezzo Soprano (a la Fiordiligi)
Plays two roles: Duchess, Mad Hatter

Dramatic Tenor
Plays three roles: White Rabbit, Baby, Caterpillar (1)

Lyric Baritone
Plays four roles: King of Hearts, Footman, March Hare, Caterpillar (2)

Lyric Bass-Baritone (a la Dr. Bartolo)
Plays two roles: Knave of Hearts, Caterpillar (3)
ROLES

LEAD

**Knave of Hearts** (Knave), narrator; a member of the pack of cards (all of whose costumes must suggest flatness.)
(played by Lyric Bass-Baritone)

**Alice Liddell** (A.), a young girl of indeterminate age, 8 or 10.
(played by Lyric Soprano #1)

**Lorina Liddell** (L.), Alice’s older sister, 15.
(played by Lyric Soprano #2)

SUPPORTING

**Duchess** (D.), a middle-aged single mom.
(played by Dramatic Mezzo Soprano)

**King of Hearts** (King), an older man.
(played by Lyric Baritone)

**Footman** (F.), a bizzarre-looking cross between a man and a frog.
(played by Lyric Baritone)

**Two of Spades** (T.S.), a gardener, a member of the pack of cards.
(played by Lyric Soprano #2)

**Ten of Clubs**, a young soldier, a member of the pack of cards.
(played by Lyric Soprano #1)

**Queen of Hearts** (Q.H.), a member of the pack of cards.
(played by Dramatic Soprano)

**Mad Hatter** (Hatter), a middle-aged man wearing a noticeably large hat.
(played by Dramatic Mezzo Soprano)

**March Hare** (Hare), short-haired, brownish, with long, upright ears.
(played by Lyric Baritone)

**White Rabbit** (W.R.), the Queen’s prosecutor, adorned in white fur, a waistcoat with a watch on a fob, floppy ears, and a nervous temperament.
(played by Dramatic Tenor)

**Dormouse** (Dor.), a small squirrel-like creature with a drowsy predisposition.
(played by Lyric Soprano #1)

**Cook**, an old crone in servant’s garb, equipped with soup spoon and cleaver.
(played by Dramatic Soprano)

**Baby**, an infant, unable to walk unassisted, wearing a huge diaper.
(played by Dramatic Tenor)

**Caterpillar**, an enormous insect with six legs, played by three cast-members speaking and singing in an electronically processed unison.
(played by Dramatic Tenor, Lyric Baritone, and Lyric Bass-Baritone)
SETS REQUIRED

Time: 1890s (perhaps)

ACT I
Introduction. Limbo.
Scene 1: First Dream. Limbo.
Scene 2. A British country estate (with duck pond, and a bench under a large tree.
Scene 3: Second Dream. As Scene 2, above, with the addition of a large rabbit hole.

ACT II
Introduction. Limbo.
Scene 1: A tea party. An oblong table under a tree set with many tea-settings and surrounded by chairs.
Interlude. Limbo.
Scene 2: Pig and Pepper. A large house. Smokey, garishly and peculiarly decorated. A kitchen to one side, with a big black cauldron bubbling over a fire.
Interlude: Limbo
Scene 3: The Caterpillar. A forest of monstrously tall grass.
Scene 4: The Trial of the Knave of Hearts. A courtroom. A raised dais with chairs for King and Queen, a jury box.
Scene 5. The British country estate of Act I, Scene 2.

OTHER STAGING NEEDS

ACT I
Scene 3. Lorina’s outfit magically changes.

ACT II
Scene 2. A projection of a Cheshire Cat, which dims and brightens noticeably.
Scene 3. A projection of a swirling mushroom cloud. A huge moving caterpillar which exits at the end of the scene, revealing the Knave and a plate of tarts on a pedestal. Electronic amplification and real-time processing of the three caterpillar voices, with loud speakers onstage.
Scene 4. Lorina’s outfit magically changes again.