

It Rained on Shakopee

A chamber opera

Performance video: <https://youtu.be/nQVIX7EqVWg>

Libretto by Zhu Yi

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Music by Wang Jie

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CHARACTER

Inmate – Mezzo-soprano

Prison Guard – Lyric Baritone

Children's Chorus

Prison Chorus (tape) - Sopranos and Altos

Sound of rhythmic jingling keys from afar. Inside a prison cell.

A woman prepares herself for an important visit.

CHILDREN'S CHORUS GROUP 1

Look look.

Who's in the corner?

CHILDREN'S CHORUS GROUP 2

Careful careful.

That's the girl without a mother

1

What? What?

Who brought her here?

2

She grew on a tree

and became a daughter

1

Liar! Liar!

My cat has a mother

My dog has a mother

Even my mother has a mother

2

Me and Daddy Mommy travel together

To Lake Superior in the summers

1

Me and Mommy Daddy road trip

We ski till the end of winter

2

2

But her but her
She rides alone to Shakopee
Is there a Disney?

1

Mommy once told me
That's not somewhere you want to be

2

So many reasons to love four seasons

1

Unless your mother locked in prison.

2

Shh!

1

Shh!

2

Shh!

1

Shh!

2

(Whisper) Why is she crying?

Kids run off stage.
Short musical interlude

INMATE

OFTEN I PRETEND NOT TO HEAR
JINGLING JINGLING KEYS
SINGING A COLD SONG ABOUT ME
CAGED HERE
COLD DOORS. COLD CUFFS. COLD KEYS TURNING.

3

THE SAME JINGLE DAY AFTER DAY.
DAY AFTER DAY AFTER DAY.
BUT NOT TODAY.

THE MORNING HAS BEEN WARM. MY HEART BURNS WITH CHARM.
I AM A MOTHER ON MOTHER'S DAY.
JINGLING KEYS, COME TO ME. COME CLOSER.
CALL MY NAME! I'M NOT JUST A NUMBER.
CALL MY NAME! FORGET MY SHAME.
BECAUSE MY LITTLE GIRL IS INCHES AWAY.

Percussion plays jingling keys.

INMATE
(Listens attentively)

YES. IT'S HIM!
THE GUARD WHO WAS KIND.
LAST YEAR HE GAVE US EXTRA TIME.

GUARD
(back of stage)

TIME! TIME! VISITOR HOURS! WHEN YOUR NUMBER IS CALLED, LINE UP FOR A RAINCOAT.

INMATE
(impulsive repeats)
SHE'S HERE. SHE'S HERE. SHE'S HERE. SHE MUST BE HERE!

Sound of rhythmic jingling keys approaching.

GUARD
(on stage, but behind orchestra)

INMATE 382. YOUR EX-HUSBAND BROUGHT YOUR SON.

INMATE

I MADE A HAT.
A PINK HAT
KEEP HER WARM AND DRY
SHE WANTS EVERYTHING IN PINK!

Sound of rhythmic jingling keys stops.

GUARD

INMATE 579. YOUR MOTHER IS HERE.

Sound of rhythmic jingling keys getting closer.

INMATE

I WILL SING HER A SONG. A LULLABY.
WITH A KISS AND GOODNIGHT
SHE LOVES MY VOICE.

Sound of rhythmic jingling keys stops.

INMATE

ANY MINUTE NOW, ANY MINUTE NOW...

Sound of rhythmic jingling keys keeps going.

INMATE

I WANT TO GIVE HER A PONY MADE OF GOLD
TO MATCH HER GOLDEN CURLS

GUARD

INMATE 214. INMATE 214. I WILL NOT REPEAT! YOUR FOSTER MOTHER IS HERE.

INMATE

HOW ABOUT A CASTLE
ON THE MOUNTAIN OF SNOW

GUARD

INMATE 853. ALL YOUR CHILDREN CAME THIS YEAR.

INMATE

OR JUST
A MOVIE NIGHT
WITH MY FAMOUS APPLE PIE
A PICNIC IN THE MEADOW

TAKE A FAMILY PHOTO
JUST LIKE A LONG TIME AGO

Sound of rhythmic jingling keys stops.

GUARD

INMATE...

INMATE

FIVE SIX EIGHT FIVE SIX EIGHT FIVE SIX EIGHT. THAT'S MY NUMBER. CALL MY NUMBER!

INMATE holds her breath and listens.

GUARD

042.

INMATE

NO... NO...

GUARD

YOUR SON BROUGHT THE GRANDSON THIS YEAR.

INMATE

ANY MINUTE NOW. ANY MINUTE NOW.

GUARD

THAT'S ALL THE VISITORS TODAY!

INMATE

NO! GUARD! PLEASE!

Sound of rhythmic jingling keys stops --

INMATE

MY DAUGHTER! MY CHILD!

The guard comes to her.

INMATE

SHE MUST BE WAITING FOR ME.

GUARD

YOU HAVE NO VISITOR TODAY.

INMATE

NO! NO! PLEASE CHECK AGAIN. YOU HAVE SEEN MY DAUGHTER! THE GIRL WITH THE GOLDEN CURL AND A BEAMING SMILE! SHE WAS THIS TALL LAST YEAR. IT'S MOTHER'S DAY! WE ALWAYS... WE PROMISED...

GUARD

(Interrupt)

YOU HEARD ME. I SAID: YOU HAVE NO VISITOR TODAY. I WILL NOT REPEAT.

Silence

INMATE

MUST BE THE RAIN.

IT MUST BE THE RAIN.

GUARD

(to the audience)

I'VE SEEN IT HAPPEN

AGAIN AND AGAIN

THE BEGINNING OF BEING FORGOTTEN

INMATE

MUST BE THE RAIN.

GUARD

DAUGHTERS, SISTERS, LOVERS, AND MOTHERS

THE HOPE IN THEIR EYES

EVEN WHEN THEY CRY

HOW I WISH I COULD LIE

IT'S A BLESSING TO BE REMEMBERED

IT'S A BLESSING TO BE MISSED

IT'S A BLESSING TO BE LISTENED AND FORGIVEN

INMATE

TOMORROW. TOMORROW.

GUARD
(to INMATE)

INMATE...MS JOHNSON. CHECK WITH THE SERGEANT TOMORROW.

INMATE

MAYBE TOMORROW.

GUARD

MAYBE TOMORROW.

PRISON CHORUS
(on tape)

IT RAINED ON SHAKOPEE
ONE APPLE FELL FAR FROM THE TREE
I SAW IT THROUGH MY WINDOW
WONDER WHERE IT'D GO TOMORROW

ONCE I WAS IN DESPAIR
YOU CAME AND SET ME FREE
I WISH MORE TIME TO HOLD YOU
WISH YOU GET TO KNOW ME

MY CHILD
HAVE A SAFE JOURNEY
MY CHILD
BE WHO YOU WANT TO BE

I WAIT HERE IN SHAKOPEE
YOU ARE NOW FAR FROM MY TREE
I IMAGINE THE PLACES YOU'D GO
MY PRIDE MIXED WITH SORROW

MY CHILD
HAVE A SAFE JOURNEY
MY CHILD
WILL YOU THINK OF ME?

CHILDREN'S CHORUS
CAN A FLOWER STAY BLOOMING?
CAN SOUP NEVER GET COLD?
IF I GROW UP, MOMMY, CAN YOU NOT GROW OLD?

WE'LL FLY LIKE BIRDS
GO WHERE WE WANNA GO

[The End]

The work was supported by ACF's McKnight Visiting Composer program and created during librettist Zhu Yi and Composer Wang Jie's residency at the Women's Correctional Facility in Shakopee, MN. The chamber opera premiered at Lake Superior Chamber Orchestra, Duluth MN, in July 2017. Performance video: <https://youtu.be/nQVIX7EqVWg>