

Nonnas

for soprano, mezzo-soprano, violin, and cello

JESSICA MEYER

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5'

PROGRAM NOTE

I love when my music and real life intersect in a genuine way, and this song is probably one of the best examples so far. Born to very old-school Brooklyn parents, I grew up on Long Island and after moving to NYC to go to Juilliard in the 90's I have not moved out of the five boroughs. My boyfriend at the time (now husband) and I would make the long trek on the subway from Lincoln Center to Bay Ridge where Nana Sophie lived. Years later, she finally crossed the Verrazzano Bridge to live with the rest of her sisters on Staten Island.

After my son Ethan was born, we would drive over to Staten Island regularly - rolling down Father Capodanno Blvd. by the beach, passing the sometimes aggressive posse of wild turkeys that still patrol the grounds of Staten Island Hospital on Seaview Ave, and making the yearly trek to Bella Vita restaurant on Hylan Blvd. on Mother's Day so Nana would not have to cook. When we visited, her sisters would stop by (all in their 80's, and they usually lived only a few houses away), and we would all play cards while having cake and coffee.

Nana fell in her kitchen one day, making it no longer possible for her to live alone and she was admitted to Clove Lakes Rehabilitation Center. Her days there were not so great as she deteriorated over time. We would visit when we could, but not enough. We managed to all be there for her birthday in February of 2020 and had a great visit, but when my mom visited just a few weeks later she was unresponsive. Nana passed away on March 3rd and my mother and brother were too sick to even go to her funeral. In the months after, it became clear that many of the residents there died from Covid-19.

Serafina Pattelli was born in 1931 to a large Italian family from Bari and lived a varied life full of relatives and games accompanied by her amazing meatballs and "gravy" (not "sauce").

Everything in the song text is absolutely true...and we miss her.

Many thanks to the Five Boroughs Music Festival and On Site Opera for the opportunity to give her the tribute she deserved.

TEXT

words and music by Jessica Meyer

Nana Sophie never said a bad word about anyone.
“Whatever floats your boat”, she’d say.
Her meatballs and gravy were simply the best.

She was one of 15 children
living on Dean St. in Brooklyn.
The sisters slept 3 to bed,
and they could not *wait* for a certain sister to get married
because of nighttime accidents.

Not everyone survived,
not even her fiancé who died during the war.
She became a seamstress, then somebody’s longtime mistress...
and that somebody was Papa Joe.

One by one they crossed the bridge to Staten Island
and bought houses, sometimes on the same block.
There was always a card game going on.
Wild turkeys still roam the streets around the corner by the hospital,
and ocean breezes waft through every yard.

Sandy tore through and sent the waves over every house except hers.
Somehow, she was spared,
but Covid at Clove Lakes finally took her - and so many others.

After every story, she’d say:
“That’s it, that’s all.”

Her meatballs and gravy...the best.

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Nonnas

*Commissioned by Five Boroughs Music Festival and
On Site Opera for the Five Borough Songbook, Volume III*

Words and music by
JESSICA MEYER

$\text{♩} = 65$ **Easy-going**

Soprano

Mezzo-soprano

Violin

Violoncello

mf *p* *mf* *p*

pizz.

mp

whole step trill

S.

M-S.

Vln.

Vc.

p *mp* *fp*

Non nas

Na-na So - phie ne-ver said a bad word a-bout an-y one

8

S. Non nas.

M-S. "What ev - er floats your boat" she'd say

Vln.

Vc. arco *p* *f*

12

S. *mf* Her meat balls and gra - vy were sim-ply the best

M-S. *mf* Her meat-balls and gra - vy were sim-ply the best

Vln. *mp* *f* *tr*

Vc. *mp* *f*

♩ = 130 **Jazzy** (double-time)

15

S. *mp* She was one of fif-teen chil - dren liv-ing on Dean street in Brook-lyn

M-S.

Vln. *p* *pizz. Swung....* *3* *3^V* *tr* half step trill

Vc. *mf*

20

S. The sis-ters slept three to a bed and they could not wait for a cer-tain sis-ter

M-S. The sis-ters slept three to a bed and they could not wait for a cer-tain sis-ter

Vln. *mf*

Vc.

24

S. *f* to get mar-ried *mp* be-cause of night-time ac - ci dents

M-S. *f* to get mar-ried *mp* be-cause of night-time ac - ci dents

Vln. *pizz.* *f* *arco*

Vc. *f*

$\text{♩} = 65$ **Remembering**

28

S. *p* Non nas

M-S. *mp* not ev-ry one sur-

Vln. *gliss.* *p* *arco*

Vc. *p* *mp*

33

S. Non nas

M-S. vived not ev - en her fi - an - ce

Vln. *pp*

Vc. *pp*

36

S. *mp* who died du - ring

M-S. who died du - ring

Vln.

Vc.

37

S. the war

M-S. the war

Vln.

Vc.

38 *f*

S. she be - came a

M-S.

Vln. *mf*

Vc. *mf*

39

S. seam - stress then some - bo - dy's long - time

M-S.

Vln.

Vc.

40 *rit.....*

S. mis - tress and that some-bo-dy was Pa - pa

M-S. *f*

Vln. *f*

Vc. *f*

a tempo

42

S. Joe

M-S. Joe

Vln.

Vc.

gliss. throughout

gliss.

3

3

3

3

***rit.....* ♩ = 58 Hymn-like**

44

S. *mp*

M-S. *mp*

Vln.

Vc.

p

gliss.

p

One by one they crossed the bridge, one by one they

One by one they crossed the bridge, one by one

48

S. *f*

M-S. *mp*

Vln.

Vc.

whole step trill

mf

p

f

p

crossed the bridge to Sta - ten Is - land

they crossed the bridge to Sta - ten Is - land and bought hou ses

3

3

3

3

52 *mp*

S. some times on the same block go - ing on. Wild

M-S. There was al-ways a card game Wild

Vln.

Vc.

55 *ff*

S. tur-keys still roam the streets a-round the cor-ner by the hos - pit - al and oc - ean bree - zes

M-S. tur-keys still roam the streets a-round the cor-ner by the hos - pit - al and oc-ean bree-zes

Vln. *f*

Vc. *f*

58 *p*

S. Waft through ev - ry yard

M-S. Waft through ev - ry yard

Vln. *p*

Vc. *p* *gliss.*

Urgently

61 **recit-like...push forward and back until m. 68**

S. *f* Some how she was spared

M-S. *mp* San-dy tore through and sent the waves ov-er ev-ry house ex-cept hers *f* Some how she was spared

Vln. *fp* sul pont

Vc. *fp* sul pont

64 **Dejected**

S. *p* and so ma-ny oth thers

M-S. *p* sung tersely but Co vid at Clove Lakes *p* fin-al-ly took her *p* and so ma-ny oth thers

Vln. *fp* *ff*

Vc. *fp* *ff*

68 **Bittersweet**

S. *mp* Af-ter ev-ry sto-ry she'd say *mp* talk with your hands like an italian Her meat-balls-and gra - vy

M-S. *mp* "That's it. That's awwwll" Her meat-balls - and

Vln. *pizz* *p*

Vc. *p*

71

S. Her meat-balls-and gra - vy meat-balls-and gra - vy meat-balls and gra - vy the

M-S. gra - vy meat-balls-and gra - vy meat-balls-and gra - vy gra - vy the

Vln. *mp* *arco*

Vc. *mp* 3 3 3

73

S. best

M-S. best

Vln. *mf* 3 3 3 3 *pp*

Vc. 3 *pp*

strings: slight separation between bows to make rhythms clear