

New America---Short Draft Version

Rachel Cohen, libretto
Jon Forshee, score

A 'Wizard of Oz' story where the Niagara Falls plays the part of the wizard and a sense of knowing where things come from constitutes home - a short working title

Opening chorus

Scene is dawn. light is lifting slowly. The more light there is on stage, more of the set the audience will see. First the light in the back, softly, softly expanding in greens to blues to pinks. They might hear some grasshoppers chirping. They will see the outlines of buildings against the horizon. They will next see heaps of garbage. Perhaps some butterflies will be having an early morning feast. The tracks will be the last, a series of three sets of tracks that will meet in the center of the stage and then fan out again. It is modern day Niagara Falls, New York. Factory workers will enter the stage on their way to work. The force of the Falls, while not seen, are the gravitational center around which everyone revolves, whether or not they realize it. The play starts outside of the Falls' tourist/industrial area, slowly circles toward the center and then out again with the intensity of an oncoming and then passing storm. In the opening scene, the winds should just be beginning to stir.

Workers (workers enter one by one, dressed in flannels, jeans and high top sneakers. They are drinking cans of beers and hitting one another's shoulder's in a joking manner even as the words they utter are ominous in nature.)

S-s-sto-storm's coming-coming/storm-storm-storm's coming-coming-coming in-in-in-in/ Storm's coming-coming/ Storm's coming-coming/ Storm's coming-coming in-in-in-in

Join in drug dealer (standing back, like at the side of a building counting his inventory, waiting for 'customers,' counting his money)

Bones. Notes. Stones. Cashed out. Cold. Stones. Broke. Bones. Notes. Cashed out. Cold. Broke. Bones. Cashed out. Stones. Broke. Bones. Cold. Cashed Out. Bones. Broke. Cold. (building rhythm)

Whores (the point is that they are unaware of the affect nature is having on them. That not only affects them, it may even affect them more. So, they need to give voice to the growing winds of the storm without themselves being aware of it.)

S-s-sto-storm's coming-coming/storm-storm-storm's coming-coming-coming in-in-in-in/ Storm's coming-coming/ Storm's coming-coming/ Storm's coming-coming in-in-in-in

Whore 1: (speaking parts)

Whore 2:

Whore 3:

Workers: (will follow the rhythm set up before, using words from whores' dialogue)

- Enter 'Dom' and 'Sueno' - Dom's the smart one, Sueno, slightly smaller and more jumpy.

Kids are painting dollar signs on the sides of cars -

Kids' song

D&S :

Tra-tra-tra-train's coming-coming/ train-train-train-train's coming-coming-coming in-in-in-in/ trains coming-coming/trains coming-coming/train's coming-coming in-in-in-in.

(have to build some more ideas in here. Idea being impermanence/in the moment. Rhythm won't change, the words will morph)

Hobo's song

- Enter Hobo -
(he's supposed to come out of a "train car" all crazy and leering, bottle in hand)

H: Been here
when they built 'em
when they killed 'em.

When they're covered in grass
No history, but past,
Like a living thing, (nostalgic)
The fields all flowing behind.
Been runnin since.
You runnin too?

D & S: If we're runnin, we run toward 'Future.'

A star called 'Wormwood'

H: (Nods in agreement, points to the center which is three sets of tracks that merge for change-overs and then split apart again, like a 'star'. Start segue into **We Build Them Like Temples**)

- All worn down
and covered in rust -
We built 'em
like relics
Where they burst into flame
Under a star called 'Wormwood'
We give our grace...

We build them like temples

(Stage opens up. Workers entering. Lights are yellow, makes it look like its hot, working in the summer. Workers motioning to the tracks as if to decide which one to work on first. This is a song of praise to the amazing things man first realized he could make)

Worker 1: We

Worker 2: (with tools in hand) Build Them

Worker 3: Like Temples (with anvils hitting against metal)

(rhythm repeated. Boys are left standing watching in the corner as history takes place in front of their eyes)

Hobo: With famine all around-
When people were small
And the things we built to Him great
And Time moved on
- and us, too -
And the things we made seemed small
And He became we
and we became it
and it became Nothing...
- and then Nothing moved on, too -

(takes another drink, sputters, then leans over to puke. Looks at the boys with eyes wild with anger. He screams now, spoken)

Who are you?!

What do you want from me?!

(at the audience)

(Hobo runs off stage while screaming, maybe some foreshadowing of the Flying Monkeys/Businessmen)

Field of poppies (you know, I've just added this in, so we don't have a corresponding theme. Any suggestions?)

(lighting change again, I want it to be evocative of the poppy fields from Wizard of Oz. The workers have left the stage, but I want there to be a lingering ghost of their rhythm, almost as if what is now on stage is the dream and that the rhythm might actually be reality - like in those dreams where it feels so real that you wake up holding your sheets in the exact same way you were holding someone's shirt in the dream)

The boys begin walking, clearly a little spooked and not sure where they are going. Maybe with the video projections behind them moving as if they are walking. We really ought to find a photographer who would understand us and who could take some video footage for us. Like a photo montage of going from fields to tracks, then tracks to buildings, then buildings to cities and so on...)

Enter women:

The trains they take

Any direction on.

We built them
like temples

We sped on.

- Enter The Good Witch Glinda -

(begins to gravitate toward the boys in a soothing but oddly menacing way)

Glinda: Forget,

Forget

you soon

will return home.

Where you begin

Is where you'll go

Follow the train tracks home.

Eye of the storm

(alone on the stage, the boys are disoriented. This section is important to me. The boys change identity, or better yet, become one identity. This is where the boys begin to realize the *relationship* of their highways, birds, bodies, etc.... maybe this is where our call and response part goes. The feeling that something is 're-emerging' that has always been there. Remember my story about birds 'talking back to' -and even retaining - repetitive music!)

-They walk into a clearing. It is Niagara Falls circa 1815 or so. (this shouldn't be hard to project, there are many paintings of the pre-developed falls). The thing is, it looks just like a common wooded area to them because they're used to seeing it developed.

D: This place I know

S: At ten years old

D: (spoken) Ten years old. My mother was out. I woke up. I wasn't sure where I was.

S: Summer, 1983. We were playing outside when we all looked up. There was nothing. Then a plane passed.

D: I looked out the window. It was like looking into another universe.

S: And then the birds called back

D: And we were at the bottom of a sea, but the sea was air

S: And it didn't matter if they were talking to a bird or a dolphin, they were so in the moment, talking to a plane or a * sea anemone. I saw the cars all slick. It didn't matter if they were talking to a plane or a sea anemone all wrap around the universe.

*D: like we were sea anemones, and I saw the cars with their sides all slick, they were so in the moment, and it didn't matter, and we were like sea anemones, the cars all wrap around their sides like dolphins and, it didn't matter, they were so in the moment, and

*(same time)

Flying Monkeys/Businessmen

(Kind of upbeat pace like in the opening to the movie 'Brazil'.)

-The men walk in quickly and take the boys in tow with them, leading them in an endless fast-paced circle that ends in a view of the Niagara Falls circa 1920

FMB 1: C'mon, I'll take you out for a drink when this is all over with

FMB 2: A drink? I thought we'd be getting more than a drink

FMB 3: Okay then, how about a steak with a drink afterward?

FMB 1: Now that's more like it!

2: Take over here for instance. We've got a model of the projected plan.

3: A triumph of Man over Nature!

1: Power over Beauty

2: Science over Religion

3: Productivity and Tourism in one

1: We'll make a killing, let me tell you.

2: We've come to an age where man decides his own destiny.

The tracks laid down are facing straight ahead.

The future, my man, is Here:

The Maid of the Mist (corresponding to "We build them...")

(There has been an underlying sound since the 'Eye of the Storm' that has been growing louder and more sinister. It finally comes out as the basis for the scene. It is the sound of the roaring of the Niagara Falls. It is a funeral dirge of the rest of the cast dressed as animals in black cloaks. Actually, I want the 'animals' to be indistinct, just the basic impression of animals being in human form, like in the 'fox wedding' of the Akira Kurasawa film, 'Dreams' - almost of religious importance and gravity. Or maybe I should ask my friend for recordings of Mohawk funeral ceremonies. Do you want me to look that information up? Would it help you?)

(The 'animals' walk around the stage, their heads down, in a group as if they are on a ship together, the lighting is gathering in intensity to indicate flames. Just as the ship is tipping over the edge and leaving the stage, the 'woman' in the back lifts her head and there are dark tear marks down her face)

No future no past
We head down the path
Where nature leads us
Heedless to direction
We head straight ahead

(as they are heading over the Falls, lighting down to signify 'fire')

FMB 1: We'll build them toward temples
FMB 2: From seashore to the seashore
FMB 3: Through mountians
FMB 1: Coast to coast, we'll lay them down
FMB 2: Connecting cities to villages, villages to towns and on and on
FMB 3: The future, my man, is Ours.

(and faster)

Jet -Pack Girl, i.e. La Defence

(sound dissipates into a cloying rhythm of electronic and 'technological' sounds, evocative of a natural forest scene)

Need something to get the feeling through that everything is new. This is a future that has never existed.

This is the imagined future that they wanted to build, they wanted to make.

Where everything's made to be replaced tomorrow we're directionless. All of us. If we had a direction, we'd all feel better.

Kids triumph

D&S: we are here, we are in the moment, here, we are in the moment, here, can you take this for me, hear, can you hear this moment, here, can you feel this moment, here, here, hear, here

Closing Chorus

Voice 1: There's a storm brewing beneath this surface. If you put our hands to it, you can almost feel it. We are the buildings. We are the parts. When dawn breaks, traffic talks back.

Voice 2 (spoken): The weirdest time I ever had was New Year's eve 1981. This was back when the future seemed wide open. Sitting out on the beach January first, I had the feeling we were coming to conquer ourselves. I was more scared than I've ever been in my life.