

THE LAST WIDE OPEN

A Love Song in Three Movements

Book, Lyrics - Audrey Cefaly

Music - Matthew M. Nielson

Commissioned by
Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park
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Cast of Characters

ROBERTO: a poet; an Italian* immigrant, agreeable; warm; generous; highly intuitive; also:
Movement 1: long-time dishwasher at Frankie's
Movement 2: a new bus boy at Frankie's
Movement 3: a teacher

LINA: a dreamer; emotional; giving; seemingly always in a sort of disillusionment; an Alabama girl; also:
Movement 1: long-time waitress at Frankie's
Movement 2: a part-time waitress at Frankie's
Movement 3: a nurse

STAGEHAND: There exists in this world a magical elf (part butler, part sommelier, part nursemaid) with impeccable timing and exquisite taste, always and most honorably in the service of the players. Dressed as a restaurant house manager, he/she somehow manages to float in and out of the space with the grace of a gazelle and yet fully disappear *into* it as one would if fitted with matching wallpaper. Always there. Never there. We get the point.

NOTE: The part of Roberto may be modified to fit whatever language / country of origin the actor is best suited for.

Place

Frankie's (a Trattoria). Birmingham, AL

Time

May 5th. Midnight. Present Day.

ABOUT THE MUSIC: if the actors do not play instruments, a separate live musician or pre-recorded accompaniment is fine.

NOTE: all three variations occur on the same day at the same time, in the same restaurant, at midnight on May 5th, present day.

SETTING: Visible to us is a large, colorful space representing the dining room of an old Italian trattoria. Just outside the restaurant is a back patio (this may or may not contain a modest amount of additional seating). The outside area is covered with an overhang. In my perfect world, the rain, at times, falls onto the patio through cracks in the gutter. And perhaps there are lights from the windows of nearby shops or homes that warm neighborhood.

INTRODUCTION

The STAGEHAND rolls on a clothing rack filled with props, instruments and costumes. The STAGEHAND positions the rack, then adorns it with a sign: "FAKE PROPS". ROBERTO enters, handing the STAGEHAND his jacket and tie. The STAGEHAND remains on stage, hanging up the jacket and readying props for the next scene. ROBERTO speaks directly to the audience.

ROBERTO

(to the audience)

Buonasera! My name is Roberto Moretti.

(beat)

I am an *immigrant* in America.

(horrified)

What the *hell* is going on in America?! *Madonna!*

(pause)

On tonight, we have a break from all of this crazy and we sit down in the city of Cincinnati, Ohio, to watch... a *play. Together.* However implausible this may seem, there is no reason to be *alarmed*, people have been gathering to watch live stories for some time, so, if you feel any discomfort... I will ask you, please... do it quietly.

(beat)

But this is not politics, this is not a lecture, this is a *love story* and what is not to love about a love story?

ROBERTO assists the STAGEHAND to place a mop and a bucket center stage, along with a fallen chair.

ROBERTO (CONT'D)

(holding up his program)

OK, so, *The Last Wide Open*. It is actually three *variations*, if you will, on the same story. It is the kind of love story that every lonely heart has told a thousand times in secret daydreams. It is the story of Lina and Roberto. *Boh*, I do not wish to spoil it, you seem like intelligent people-- Welcome to Frankie's! Everybody knows Frankie's!

LINA enters. The STAGEHAND hands her a ukulele.

LINA

I bet they don't. I bet they don't know Frankie's.

ROBERTO

(To LINA.)

Ah, Lina!

(To the audience.)

Everybody, this is Lina!

LINA

(To ROBERTO.)

You are so exuberant.

ROBERTO

(To the audience.)

I am exuberant!

LINA

(To ROBERTO.)

Did you tell them about me?

ROBERTO

(To LINA. Defensively.)

I just got here.

LINA

(To ROBERTO.)

OK, fine. Just take the thing.

ROBERTO turns to see the STAGEHAND ready with his backpack.

ROBERTO

(To LINA.)

You were not here before.

LINA

(Slightly annoyed. To ROBERTO.)

We can do this later.

(Brightly. To the audience.)

Hello. My name is Lina. And I'm from around here.

(To ROBERTO.)

Could you go? I need to do the song.

(To the audience.)

Music in a love story is very important.

ROBERTO

(Half to LINA, half to the audience.)

Si. Si. Very important.

LINA

(Strumming her ukulele - to ROBERTO)

Go!

ROBERTO

(To the audience.)

OK. Everybody. *Divertitevi!* Please enjoy. Oh, and eh, cell phones. / Tsk Tsk Tsk.

LINA

(To ROBERTO.)

They know!

ROBERTO exits with his backpack.
The STAGEHAND sits in a nearby chair, waiting patiently.

LINA (CONT'D)

(To the STAGEHAND.)

Have you heard this one?

The STAGEHAND smiles.

LINA (CONT'D)

(To the audience.)

She's heard this one.

LINA (CONT'D)

(Strumming/tuning her guitar. To the STAGEHAND.)

Have I ever told you, you're the nurse to my Juliet?

The STAGEHAND shakes her head in response.

LINA (CONT'D)

(To the STAGEHAND.)

Yes you are.

The STAGEHAND smiles.

LINA (CONT'D)
(To the STAGEHAND.)

You are.

(Mouthing the words to the audience.)

She is.

(Strumming/tuning guitar. To the audience.)

This song is called "THE SONG BEFORE THE LOVE SONG." It's very sad.

(To the STAGEHAND.)

Is it very sad?

The STAGEHAND nods.

LINA (CONT'D)
(To the audience.)

Told you.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE - "THE SONG BEFORE THE LOVE SONGS"
(CONTINUOUS)

LINA
(Strumming.)

THEY SAY THAT THERE'S A SONG IN YOUR HEART
THAT'S A FUNNY THING THAT THEY SAY
THEY SAY YOU SHOULD BE TRUE TO YOURSELF
AND THAT LOVE FINDS A WAY

SO THEY SAY.

THEY SAY THAT THERE ARE SONGS LEFT TO SING
THAT'S ANOTHER *NEAT THING* THAT THEY SAY
THEY SAY IT'S JUST A MATTER OF TIME
UNTIL LOVE COMES TO STAY
THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY

LINA (CONT'D)

Not a cynic.

LINA (CONT'D)

WHO IS THIS "THEY" I WONDER?
HAVE THEY EVER LOOKED AT THE SKY
WHEN IT'S ENDLESS AND GREY?
WHO IS THIS "THEY" I WONDER?
LIKE EVERY SINGLE HEARTACHE'S THE SAME
AND THEY'RE NOT, NO THEY'RE NOT
AND IT'S COM-PLI-CA-TED. COMPLICATED.

WHO IS THIS "THEY" I WONDER?
HAVE THEY EVER SLEPT IN A BED
WITH TWO DOGS AND THREE CATS
AND A TUB-OF-ICE-CREAM?

(Beat.)
Doubtful...

TRANSITION (CONTINUOUS)

The STAGEHAND collects the ukulele and then ties a dirty apron around LINA. LINA touches the stains on her dirty apron. The STAGEHAND then hands LINA a mop and turns to exit.

LINA
 (To the STAGEHAND.)

Wait!

LINA reflexively hugs the STAGEHAND who then exits.

LINA (CONT'D)
 (Flatly. To the audience.)
 OK. *Movement One.*

LINA, now deflated and sad, sings softly to herself as she lies down on the cold floor, cradling her mop.

LINA (CONT'D)
 (a capella)
 THEY SAY THAT THERE ARE SONGS LEFT TO SING.
 THAT'S A FUNNY THING THEY SAY.
 (Faltering.)
 THEY SAY IT'S JUST A MATTER OF TIME
 UNTIL LOVE COMES TO STAY...
 (Almost a whisper.)
 So they say...

MOVEMENT ONE (CONTINUOUS)

The SOUND OF AN APPROACHING THUNDERSTORM. LINA softly weeps. Silence. A PHONE rings. ROBERTO, a dishwasher, enters the dining room with his backpack and keys. HE crosses to the bar to answer the phone.

ROBERTO
 Frankie's, we're closed.
 (Beat.)
 Yes, on Cinco de Mayo.
 (Beat.)
 Trattoria.
 (MORE)

ROBERTO (CONT'D)

(Beat.)

Trattoria.

(Beat.)

Hello?

ROBERTO hangs up the phone.

LINA

(Softly. Almost childlike.)

Tell me the truth, Roberto.

ROBERTO

(Confused. Calling in the near-dark.)

Lina?

ROBERTO notices LINA for the first time.

ROBERTO (CONT'D)

(Rushing over to LINA.)

LINA! Lina, what's happen?!

LINA

(Weakly.)

What's happen...

ROBERTO

You fell?!

LINA

I'm doing my Pilates.

ROBERTO

Pilates?

LINA

It's an *advanced* maneuver. It works your inner core and your *ass fat* area.

ROBERTO

Scusa [excuse me]?

LINA

Yes, Roberto, I fell.

ROBERTO

(Seriously alarmed.)

I call the *nine one one!*

LINA

No.

ROBERTO

Can you get up?

LINA

No.

ROBERTO

What can I do?

LINA

I just want to lay here.

ROBERTO

Lay here?

LINA

Yes...

ROBERTO

(Unsure.)

Okay...

ROBERTO starts to leave.

LINA

(A yelp.)

STAY!!!

ROBERTO

(Paniced.)

Okay!!

ROBERTO settles in. In a show of solidarity, HE lies next to LINA on the floor and they stare up at the ceiling. A moment passes...

LINA

I woke up this morning, Roberto...I got outta bed. I looked in my mirror...and I realized...I am so old.

ROBERTO

No, bella. You are not -

LINA

Yes I am. And please don't argue with me, it works better that way!

ROBERTO (CONT'D)

.... Lina...no...

LINA

I was standing there and I heard sirens, and I knew exacty what it was. Mr. McElway in apartment 2A died this morning. He died all alone, Roberto. And little Zigzag and Fritz were freaking out, his poor dogs, it was so awful. He was the sweetest man.

(MORE)

LINA (CONT'D)

(Beat.)

It was a horrible... *horrible* morning. So, then I get here, 2 hours late, and that crazy lady came in for lunch, the one with the hyena voice, like if death was a sound, it would be her voice, ya know, like exactly *her voice* -- and weirdly she was like laughing at her own jokes, you know how someone will do that...

(Nearly in tears now.)

And they were bad ones. They were so bad...

(Beat.)

So I brought her the fettucine alfredo, and then, just outta nowhere, she picks up her plate and throws it across the table at her husband, Roberto, at his face! From across the table! What is *wrong* with people?! And what is wrong with water? Just a glass of water in the face, right there in the face, two, three ounces, tops. It's simple, it's classic...good for the environment.

(Beat.)

Ya know what you never hear Roberto? In kindergarten, when Mrs. Tipton looks around at those cute little innocent faces and she says...kids, what do you want to be when you grow up? Oh, oh, I know, I know! I wanna be... a *waitress*! I want to *grow up* and *clean up* after other people's problems *all day long*, and oh, *please*, (raising hand in the air) I want that hyena lady, because I just love scraping pasta off the ceiling!

(Beat.)

You never hear that Roberto. You never do.

ROBERTO

(Tenderly.)

I'm sorry you have this bad day, Lina.

The SOUND OF SLOW ROLLING THUNDER.
ROBERTO lays down by LINA's side.

A moment passes. THEY enjoy the silence.

ROBERTO then notices the underside of the table, which is caked in layers of old blobs of chewing gum. More enthralled than grossed out:

ROBERTO (CONT'D)

Oof!

(MORE)

ROBERTO (CONT'D)

(Taking in the vastness.)

Disgustoso...

LINA

(Lifeless.)

Fifty years of Dentyne. Juicy Fruit. Hubba Bubba...

ROBERTO

Hubba? Ah, ooba booba? Ah, *Si-! Remarkable!*

Silence.

THEY explore with their eyes, looking at each and every blob, as if at an actual art exhibit. This goes on for a few moments.

LINA

The yellow one has flavor crystals.

ROBERTO

Flavor crystals?

LINA

It sparkles.

ROBERTO

(As if decoding an ancient text.)

Flavor crystals...

LINA

(Pointing out another blob.)

And that one.

Ad lib. THEY look at all of the chewing gum. Another quiet moment passes.

LINA (CONT'D)

(Suddenly wistful.)

You know what I wish, Roberto? Just once, I want my life to be like it is in the movies, ya know...like-like a fifty dollar tip or somebody wins the lottery. You ever notice how the waitress in the movie always ends up with the good guy in the end? I could be in the movies. Just tell me what to sign, I'll sign it.

Pause.

LINA (CONT'D)

You don't have to stay. I'm fine now.

ROBERTO
(Skeptical.)

Hmm...

THEY do not move.

LINA
(A realization.)
This is the most we've spoken. Ever.

ROBERTO
Oh?

LINA
Why is that?

ROBERTO
(Shaking his head.)
Boh [I don't know].

LINA
How long have you worked here?

ROBERTO
5 years and three weeks. We start on the very
same day.

LINA
We did?

ROBERTO smiles in response.

LINA (CONT'D)
We've been doing this for five years, Roberto?
(Sickened by the thought of it.)
That's *amazing*.

Pause.

ROBERTO
(Sweetly.)
You did a good job with the mopping.

LINA
...

ROBERTO
Looks good.

LINA
(Heartfelt.)
Thank you for noticing.

ROBERTO
I should not notice?

LINA
Well, I don't know but... it's nice to be noticed.

ROBERTO
I notice.

LINA
(Touched.)
You do?

ROBERTO
Si.

Pause.

LINA
Can I tell you something weird?

ROBERTO
...

LINA
I like to mop...

ROBERTO
No...

LINA
I do. I enjoy it.

ROBERTO
Enjoy? This is crazy.

LINA
I told you.

ROBERTO
?

LINA
It's *mine*. No matter what kind of day I've had, it's the one thing that's *mine*. And I do a damn good job too. I put the chairs up-no one else does that. Late at night... everybody's gone home. It's the last thing I do after silverware and wipe-downs. I start at the counter, and I wind my way around A3 and A4 and then I backtrack behind the bar, and then back through B and then C, and then I mop myself into a little corner and out the door.

(MORE)

LINA (CONT'D)

I turn the key, and when I look back in the window, I can see everything-my whole day-shiny and... new.

(Beat.)

I could have been a nurse.

ROBERTO

Could you not still be a nurse?

LINA shrugs.

LINA

I guess. It just seems far away now. Ya know? Plus, it's a lotta money to spend on... higher quality abuse.

(Beat.)

You're a writer, huh?

ROBERTO blushes.

LINA (CONT'D)

I see you writing. In your book.

ROBERTO

Si.

LINA

What's it like where you come from?

ROBERTO

Puglia?

LINA

Is that it? *Puglia*?

ROBERTO

Si.

LINA

That's where Frankie's from, right?

ROBERTO nods.

LINA (CONT'D)

What's it like?

ROBERTO shrugs.

LINA (CONT'D)

Beautiful?

ROBERTO

Si.

LINA
Cows and pastures and shit.

ROBERTO
Si.

LINA
How do you say shit in Italian?

ROBERTO
Merda.

LINA
Merda. Pastures and merda.
(Beat.)
How come you left?

ROBERTO
(Deflecting.)
Ah. You do not want to hear this.

LINA
No?

ROBERTO
It is a *ninna-nanna* [lullabye/bedtime story].
You will fall to sleep.

LINA
I won't.
(Beat.)
Promise.
(Beat.)
Please?

ROBERTO
Puglia, *si*. Ah, well...my father was
contadino...eh...farming? But, eh, we did not
see eyes to eye.

LINA
No?

ROBERTO
Difficult. He cannot, read...write...*mah*, the
one thing he knows is *terra*, this farm...this
was all he ever knows. I love him but I cannot
live this life. To stay in one place, never to
see the world, no. *Non per me* [not for me]. And
one night, I tell him this, I say these things
to him...

(Beat.)
He have this *look* in his eye - this is the very
bad part.

(MORE)

ROBERTO (CONT'D)

(Beat.)

He will not forgive me. I cannot stay.

LINA

So you left...

(Beat.)

Don't you miss him?

ROBERTO

He is very sick. He dies three months ago.

LINA

Oh...

ROBERTO

I say to him to *come to America, good care in America.*

LINA notices the far off look in ROBERTO's eyes.

LINA

I'm so sorry, Roberto. I didn't know you were going through all this.

ROBERTO shrugs.

The lights flicker. SOUND OF APPROACHING THUNDER.

ROBERTO stands to light a few candles on the various tables in anticipation of the power situation.

LINA (CONT'D)

You know, Roberto, I saw you last week.

ROBERTO

Oh?

LINA

At the farmer's market.

ROBERTO

...

LINA

You didn't see me?

ROBERTO

No...

LINA

What-you looked right at me.

(Beat.)

I had on an orange dress...

ROBERTO

No.

LINA

(Somewhat suspicious.)

Strange. You were buying tomatoes? Heirloom tomatoes?

ROBERTO

(Deflecting.)

Ah, *pomodori* [tomatoes]? You did not say hello.

LINA

I didn't want to disturb you. I just wanted... to observe you... in your natural... habitat.

ROBERTO

(Amused.)

Habitat? Like in the zoo? If you want to see me in a zoo, you would not have to go this far!

LINA

No, I just mean... well, it was nice to see you out in the open. Away from here, ya know?

ROBERTO

...

(Beat.)

Maybe...

LINA

...

ROBERTO

Maybe you see me, is okay you say hello.

LINA

Oh?

ROBERTO

I cut you a tomato, we take a walk.

LINA

A walk?

ROBERTO

Si. Along the river...