

BRIAN FELSEN'S  
"CONDUCTING ELIF"

*Strangers' Gallery 3*  
based on Daniel C. Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*

*'Doug, boast, you're not the best phenomenologist after all!'*  
*(immediate shame)*  
The author would like to apologize for the above boast.

*For members of the ASSC*

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Elif Savas, a soprano  
Conductor / Cop  
Opera Director / Guard  
Child / Procurement Deputy / News Announcer / Scholar / Nietzsche  
The child's mother / another soprano / Door-Man / Aladdin the Genie  
Librarian / Number-Girl 1 / Scheduling Deputy  
Librarian's assistant / Number-Girl 2 / Personnel Deputy

*Five musicians (and occasional folkloric dancers):*  
First Violin (Concertmeister) / Health Inspector / De Sade  
Violin 2 / Ice Cream Man / Programming Director  
Violist (aspiring cello player)  
Oboe player / TV Producer  
Clarinetist / Reporter

## PRE-PERFORMANCE

### At the BOX OFFICE:

Tickets say "Latecomers admitted."

There are two clocks behind the counter: one labeled "OUTSIDE" and the other, with no hands, labeled "INSIDE THE THEATER"

A guy keeps cutting in line asking where something is that doesn't exist anymore on an obsolete map. He or the counterperson asks a skill on line, "Can you argue without your blood pressure going up? If you want to verbally fight, a 30-second argument is included in the ticket price. C'mon, let's go, you have an ugly voice."

Staff wear buck teeth but talk grandiloquently. Everyone gets a tattered 2-page program and a penny (or a coin of cheap/obsolete foreign currency), with which they're told they need to give to the doorman to get in.

### In the BATHROOMS:

In one of the stalls, Musician 1 plays scales while outside the stall, Musician 2 keeps trying to open the door, give flowers, give things for her to sign, ask stupid questions; the musician inside keeps trying to hold the door shut.

A few seconds after an audience member enters a stall, Musician 2 triggers a speaker inside of it making a flatulent noise; after people flush, Musician 2 triggers the sound of more peeing and offers brown-stained cloth to the users when they're done.

Musician 2 in the bathroom is holding up a mirror for Musician 1, who is tuning up while shaving (or applying tons of makeup), fixing his/her hair and telling himself to stand up straight. Musician 1 says, "I'm nervous. Do you think she will pass the audition? Wow, I look great today." Musician 2 says, "OK, you can look away from the mirror now."

### In the LOBBY:

People have to wait in the lobby before entering the theater.

SIGNS in the lobby: "Welcome to the Charmed Circle," "We are confident that you will behave suitably," "Practice the Cadenza," "Drink the tea before it gets cold," "Pee first, because who knows how long it'll be until intermission?", "Check the makeup: How do I look?" and "All seats partial-view."

A LOUDSPEAKER near the floor says, "Can you find the penny on the floor? Pick it up, now. Finders keepers. Don't waste it - it's not a shared resource, it's yours! Quick, or the other guy'll get there first." Loudspeakers on the wall announce admonitions not to bump into various objects in the lobby, or else you'll hurt various body parts.

The CONCESSION STAND has a sign behind it: "What's the most direct way to pleasure you can find?" The Food Seller (Ice Cream Man) is wearing a Hawaiian shirt, straw hat, a pillow under his shirt, and smoking an unlit cigar. Candy bars are priced "New" and "Antique"; the latter ones are open and bitten into. Every five minutes, the Health Inspector comes and tells them they can't sell used food. The Food Seller tells him, "I know my rights. No one is expected to buy this stuff, nor will they be allowed to buy it. It will not infect the other goods. I'll have your job. I am in charge, not you. Go away."

The Opera Director puts up posters reading "THIS SEASON'S SCHEDULE - SOLOIST ARRIVES AT ...," and keeps switching them from wall to wall. A child follows the Opera Director, with large sticky post-it notes with different times on them (8:00:17 PM, 8:02:43 PM,

8:03:26PM) to cover over the original time on it, and tears the post-it notes off the old poster, sometimes writing in the new time with magic marker.

Conductor: "I'd like to make an announcement. The program order has changed for today. Those sitting on the left have the best sound quality to hear the strings; please see me for the correct program. Those sitting on the right have a better view but not such good sound; please see her for the correct program." (points to Elif) There are two different PROGRAMS, and each has a slightly different wording/casting.

SCENE 1  
AUDITION

Five musicians start to tune up onstage. One plays an A on an oboe, which clashes with a G# played on the speakers or by the players.

STOP! a musician shouts. Pause, then they all shout NOW! In turn, they go around the circle a few times, each saying, "In tune," "Not in tune," "In tune," "Not in tune," "to what?"\

The conductor enters, and the musicians stand up and applaud him. Another musician walks onstage as well (or a stagehand removes a seat).

Over the speakers: "Elif Savas?"

Elif enters and faces the audience. "Yes. (Pause) I'd like to sing the hard cadenza now – it's pretty challenging but I hope the opera does it this year and if so, I think I'd be right for the role."

Over the speakers: "Do we have your resume and photo?"

Elif: I sent in one with my application, but I brought an extra copy...here.

She's waiting to start, but the musicians are still standing. The conductor lifts his arms and suddenly starts a fast Black Sea gypsy song, which he's surprised to be conducting. The musicians play musical chairs. The song stops, and two violinists fight for the last chair in slow motion.

The loser, speaking as if underwater: "He took the seat - he cheated!"

The winner at normal speed: "Go stand in the back, or wait in the wings. Maybe you'll get your chance to play later." They get into a fistfight; the winner knocks the loser onto the floor, takes his jacket, and announces: "I'm the concertmeister today." Exit Violin 2.

Elif: Hey, you're not my conductor!

Conductor stammers: I – I think what happened is – I'm not – sure of the order, but – the first violinist told me to substitute since your – conductor hasn't shown up yet. (Pause) What piece would you like us to do?

Over the speakers: Are you ready to start? We have over a hundred other sopranos waiting. If it takes any longer this photo of yours will be even more out of date than it is now. On your application – let's see – Elif – it says you're doing an aria antika from the Leave a Document opera.

Elif: I'm just doing the coloratura part leading into the cadenza.

Elif cracks her knuckles. She turns to face the musicians. Conductor taps his baton. Elif turns back around to face the audience. He starts the piece; she sings a recitative, but when he waves his arms to bring in the players for the aria part, the musicians move their bows but no sound comes out. Elif sings a couple of notes, looks shocked, and turns around to the musicians, who grin. Conductor stops the players.

Conductor: I know this piece can get a little tricky, but at the very least you should come in on time. Come on, help her out! You - excuse me – hello – aren't you a violist?

Cello: Yes.

Conductor: Then why are you playing the cello?

Cello: Well, we're out of viola parts, and you just said that we needed more bottom.

Conductor: I didn't say that... well, it's not such a bad idea... but it should come from a contrabass, maybe – not from you. You should do your own job. Can you transpose up the part?

Cello (grumpily): Yeah, I suppose so. (Picks up a viola.)  
Some performers change clothes and jackets with each other.  
Conductor: Let's try it again.  
They play, looking like idiots, the strings plucking with grins, and they keep slowing down. Elif taps the conductor and the conductor stops them.  
Conductor turns around to face audience. "Can you just give us five minutes? Just five minutes. Thanks." He turns back around. "Something's not right."  
Violin: What's not right, oh great infallible maestro?  
Conductor stands there, scratching his head.  
Elif: It's the phrasing...  
The rest of the musicians: "ssshhh!"  
Conductor: Yes. Staccato. Strings, one at a time. A tempo." They play the parts individually, perfectly, staccato. "Yes, that's what I want, staccato. Okay, measure 9."  
They play it together, with E singing, but some of them play legato, smirking and giggling.  
Conductor (stuttering): You just did it fine individually!  
Cello: Well then, stop trying so hard to notice everything. You're staring at us, and it's making me self-conscious.  
Another soprano walks onstage with a water bottle.  
From speakers: Time's up. Thank you for coming. Next!  
Elif: I only got to sing for a few measures...  
From speakers (another voice): Let's take a five-minute break.  
On the speakers, the sound of the judges leaving. (zipping briefcases, footsteps, door shutting.)  
The upcoming soprano leaves the stage.  
Concertmeister: Now – I don't think you're needed here anymore, not for today.  
Violin stands up and knocks baton out of conductor's hand.  
Conductor: No - - no - -  
Oboe: I don't recall him ever being needed. He's just creating a distraction.  
Musicians whisper: "Let's Down SIZE-IM! down-SIZE'IM!" getting louder and louder.  
They tear up a couple of part-scores, toss the scores up in the air, stand up and bounce the conductor around. They form a cunga-line and toss his conductor's score from one to the other, playing keep-away from him while playing along or moving to the rhythm of Black Sea music. Elif also runs parallel to the line trying to get his papers back.

Music fades, as an ice cream cart is being wheeled onstage by Violin 2 (the loser of the Musical Chairs), and the tinkling sound of the Ice Cream Man music crescendos.

Lightmen loudly fight over whether to light the ice cream man or the musicians. The players onstage also begin fighting for position in the spotlight; one of the lightmen loses the fight and leaves his station.

The ice cream man has a cigar in his mouth and is wearing a Hawaiian shirt. He opens the fridge.

Ice cream man: "No ice cream today, just dry, healthy pretzels and..."

Everybody freezes. Music begins, as the Ice cream man sings: "You can find (orchestra, clapping and dancing: Cut the bullshit!), You can find (cut the bullshit), What's the most direct way to pleasure you can find?" Speaks: Let's see – what have we here for Elif...a nice big jar of peanut butter!"

Elif jumps on a chair, flaps arms ecstatically, and two musicians carry her on the chair to the pushcart and lower her. She looks up, looks down, looks all around.

The musicians sing (to “Hallelujah”): “Eat the pretzels, Eat the pretzels, Get the pretzels, healthy pretzels, the fat-free pretzels!”

Ice cream man holds out the bag of pretzels, and Elif bends down like a dunking-bird toy and tries twice to take a bite from his hand, but doesn’t reach his hand. Finally the cigar man smacks her. He says, smiling: “Just – take it. And then why don’t you dip it in my nice, creamy peanut butter. I won’t tell mom.”

Elif takes a pretzel out and eats one stick. A musician comes to the front of the stage and flashes a placard labeled “1” to the audience. Elif closes the pretzel bag, gives it back, and starts back to the conductor’s stand. She freezes. Music of “You can find/you can find” and then rhythm of “what’s the most direct way to pleasure you can find?” plays at half-speed as she moonwalks back to the cart and takes the bag again.

Music stops. The musician with the placard flips the card to “2” as the ding of a bell is heard. E takes out another pretzel, then considers. Suddenly, “What did you promise yourself, really; it would repeat!” plays as the musicians go-go dance. Elif closes the bag and a musician flips the placard to “3”.

Ethereal music plays. The ice cream man is calling up to the ceiling with his hands, and a huge jar of peanut butter is lowered from the ceiling. E dips the pretzel into the peanut butter jar. She eats it in super-slow motion, while the sound of her aria in piano reduction fades in on the speaker. The tinkling of the ice cream truck also fades in as the ice cream man leaves and the peanut butter jar gets pulled back up.

SCENE 2  
LIBRARY

Lights dim as the stage is being set up like a library. Meanwhile, a dolly is very slowly being pulled onstage. Elif is lying on the dolly in a fetal position, with a pillow and blanket. The lights come on dimly. A quote on dream-consciousness, set to music, plays.

The musicians enter wearing full-body stockings, and dance, crossing and uncrossing their legs. Elif remains lying on the dolly, crossing and uncrossing her legs too.

A stagehand places a toilet in the musicians' way, and they pick it up, dance with it, sit in it, and roll around it. The loudspeakers command the dancers to "Straighten your arm," "Turn your neck," "Uncomfortable, Move it, do it"; they run and dance like that, with their arms straight out, while Elif, asleep in a fetal position, does the same movements on the dolly. Finally, the loudspeakers command "Go back to work," at which point musical instruments are heard falling, rattling, and vibrating, and a phone rings very loud.

Elif sits up, holding her head and then her hand to her ear as if talking on a phone. The dancers exit, crouching down by the sides of the stage as if to pee. Loudspeakers play the sound of peeing and flushing, mixed with Elif's voice saying "Pee first? Answer phone first? Phone."

On the right speaker, the phone-compressed voice of the conductor: "Let's Xerox the scores of the hard aria from the Leave a Document opera." I'd like you to come with me this time – I think the librarian's getting sick of my last-minute demands."

Elif: Suppose the orchestra can't play that one? We're not allowed a rehearsal before the audition.

Conductor: Of course they can play it.

Elif: But what if the library's lent out the scores, because the opera decided not to do that opera this year?

Conductor: They'll probably do it – but even if they already decided not to include it in this year's program, the librarian'll be the last to know – the last, that is, except for you. But right now, for her, it's still a possibility, so the piece'll still be on the shelves.

E slowly rises as the dolly reaches the "Door Man." She reaches up, turns his handle, and he falls down. The conductor appears onstage and they walk past the door man, who is lying on the floor.

The stage is then brightly lit up, revealing, in the middle of everything, a gold-painted bookcase made of oversize cardboard, with holes for a few real books.

On the other side of the stage, a few people are waiting in line in front of a desk. Elif stands behind a child dressed like the devil. Whenever she speaks to the child, the lights flicker. The devil-child is peeling bananas, tossing the peels on the floor and handing bananas to his mom, as his mother speaks.

The child's mother starts bragging about her kid: "Who's the genius? MY son is a new arrival to the opera and already has a command of 18 languages. He just translated a song-cycle of Ottoman court music into the vernacular. Pause. Yeah? Pause. He's smarter than you. What's YOUR IQ anyway? He's the only one I know who truly understands the B section of Shostakovich's 27th concerto." (The word "pause" is spoken.)

Conductor: There is no 27<sup>th</sup> concerto.

The mother: "Of course there is, the one with the E minor arpeggios. The one that's based on a theme by Kurt Godel – with the structure a-g-c-t-a-t-t-g-c..." She'll go on and on, as

her talk will get faded into the right speaker, and she'll be just mouthing the words at some point, as the child will speak and get louder and be on the left speaker.

Child: Are you a genius?

Elif: I want to be one at singing and performing, that is, I want to think like one, that is, I'd like to...

Child: What do geniuses do?

Everything freezes.

Elif: What?

Child: What – do – geniuses – do? Geniuses – leave – works.

Everyone dances frantically for a few seconds and then stops.

Conductor: Well what about the Queen of Live Performance?

Child: There he goes again, dragging out the Queen of Live Performance. Well let me tell you something about the Queen of Live Performance. The reason Leyla Gencer is the Queen of Live Performance is because somebody – someone stronger and smarter and more popular than her – saw to it that she couldn't get recorded. Flat-out had her blackballed. And a hundred years from now, whose recordings will people find on that golden bookcase (points) and take down to listen to? Maria Callas's, that's who. And therefore – she's the genius.

Elif: Well, how do you get on the golden bookcase?

Child: You mean, how can YOU get onto the golden bookcase? Pffff. You're nowhere NEAR there yet. First thing you need to worry about is passing your audition. The piece of yours you were thinking of doing last night? Well maybe you should do something else that better fits into this season's program, rather than seeing yourself as some jewel for the orchestra to set. And lose the wimpy conductor!

Conductor: I am NOT a wimp.

Elif: What piece should I do then – Clean Up My Room?

Boy - You like that one? (laughs scornfully) You can't possibly like that one.

Mother: The Maid is such a stupid role.

The mother gives her Elif a filthy look and takes the child away, pulling him by his ear.

Elif reaches the front desk.

Elif - Can I get a library card?

Librarian - Who are you? Let me guess: you're a singer. A master of languages. Well guess what, you're a late arrival. We're fresh out of cards.

Elif - Can I still take something out, even if just for a couple of days?

Librarian - That's easy. We can give you a latecomer temporary badge. Let's see... here's some old ones of those who've died... mm, hmm... What's your name? Why don't you just write it here, your handwriting's better than mine. (Elif writes on a sticker, and the librarian sticks the new name over the old card.)

Elif: We need the part scores for the cadenzas in Leave a Document. (looks at the child, by the bookcase) And for Do Your Vocal Exercises too.

Librarian: You'll need to go to the individual part shelves – the winds, the brass shelves, the percussion, the strings bookcase...on each part shelf, you'll have to look under U for "Unisoni," or under L for "Leave."

Elif: But I need all the parts!

Librarian: All the parts? That probably can't happen. Most of the scores are probably out. People have to rehearse sometimes, and when they do, we have to give them as long as it takes.

Assistant: Don't worry – though no branch has ALL the parts themselves, we've got a particularly good interlibrary loan system.

Conductor: That's nonsense – this is the only library around here!

Assistant: Of course.

Elif: Then we'll never get the scores on time!

Assistant: People usually seem to get what they want. But you've made such an unusual request...all at once! I mean, there's a million copies of The Mating Routine, or Put On Makeup, or Drink Tea, but only a few of Leave a Document. Let me give you some advice: Interrupt...

Librarian (overlapping): Interrupt what you're doing, come with me, and let's see what we can get. You stay here – (points to conductor) – they may not want to help with another one of your last-minute requests. Why don't you wait in line at the copy machine, otherwise you'll never get them made in time – it's a real bottleneck over there. We're closing in BLEUH (sticking out tongue) minutes. Come – there should be some of what you need.

Elif and the librarian go over to the bookshelf.

Shelves have big labels “IMPORTANT,” “INTERESTING,” “FAMILIAR,” which the librarian reads out loud, as if finding her bearings.

Elif walks around to the back; there's the cellist from the rehearsal.

First Violin: You!

Cellist: Leave a Document? Here you go, sweetie! (gives her the score)

She walks E back around, there's the violist.

Elif: I need the brass parts.

Violist: Now that's a problem. The trumpet's having tea. The violist – that's me! – is studying transposition. And you don't want to know what the trombones are doing...

Elif: I HAVE to get all the parts.

Violist: All the parts?

Elif: All.

Violist: At once?

Elif: At once. Don't you have any extra copies? It's such a common piece!

Librarian: We don't have the funds. The hours here are very limited...

Violist: ...and even those we waste!

The Librarian and Violist high-five each other. The Assistant comes over with a messy pile.

Assistant: These just came in from the other branches.

Elif: That was quick!

The librarian brusquely takes the scores from her, juggles them, and walks her quickly to the Xerox machine, where the conductor is waiting. The librarian starts Xeroxing the parts. They come out of machine, shooting out all over the stage, while the librarian drops more and more cigarette ash – a glassful of it – all over the copier.

Conductor – Can't we do it ourselves?

Elif – They won't let us touch their precious machines. Anyway, it's their job.

Conductor - Hey, that page came out too dark. Do you want to try it again?

Elif - Don't worry, I remember the original one was a little funky.

Conductor (to librarian) - Can you do that page again?

The librarian shrugs, and tries again.

Conductor - Now it's too faded.

Elif: Screw it.

Conductor: Hey, this one's completely faded. It looks blank. And this one doesn't look like what we just put on the glass, it's not even from the same composer!

The assistant hears the commotion and comes over.

Assistant: Can I make the copies - it'll go quicker that way. Pause. It's what you hired me for.

The Assistant shoves the librarian away; when she gets past a chalked-off distance from the machine, she freezes. Assistant starts gossiping while she Xeroxes.

Librarian: I found some of what you're looking for. It isn't ALL of the parts but you can fill in the blanks or change them to your liking, who'll notice, a couple of scholars? These on the top of the pile are the wind parts, but I warn you, some of them are from the Rimsky-Korsakov reorchestrations, which were done well after the original composer died. These pages look like they're from the newer version, so if you want the originals you'll have to convert them. The percussion parts are there but they're not from the final draft; this is from a corrected version that was withdrawn, it looks like the urtext...

Elif: I think the order's completely mixed up.

Assistant: True – some of the sheets here have page numbers, but not all.

Conductor: Well, for the ones that don't, I can take them back to the practice rooms and try and reconstruct how it was written.

Elif: I know how it's supposed to go.

The spotlight turns off on the Xerox machine. The librarian springs to life to plug the Xerox machine back in, the librarian yells "Hey!" at him; she freezes again.

Conductor & Elif switch places. The librarian hugs the assistant and freezes too.

Elif: I think the order's completely mixed up.

Conductor: They all have page numbers, but only some of the sheets are full orchestrations; the rest are just piano reductions. I'll take them back to the practice rooms to try and reconstruct how it was written.

Elif: I'm not sure how every part is supposed to go.

Assistant comes to life. "...and these, on the bottom, I cut out of a study score, and taped them together; there's also probably a lot of stuff you don't want in there and can't use, don't bother thanking me, sorry, but they're not transposed, so someone's going to have to do it once you get there. Here you go, Elif, here's the vocal exercises, here's the coloratura section – wow that's a hard part - Conductor, here's the cadenza to look over even though it's not for you, now please leave. We're closing. And you're late," pointing to the conductor.

SCENE 3  
ELECTION

Two stagehands carry in the “Door-Man,” who unrolls a door-cape from his chest labeled “Opera Director.”

Elif: Can I see the Opera Director? (pause) I need an audition. Can I get scheduled for one? Can I see him?

Elif tries to knock on the door, but he veronicas her like a bull. She opens him like a door, sees a large mirror that somebody’s holding, and closes him. The Door Man is carried (or slid) back from her. Elif goes around to the other side, knocks on him again, opens him, sees the audience, looks around, and closes it. She goes back to the first side. She clears her throat and knocks again, and the Director’s booming voice comes from the other side: “Is your voice healthy?” E stammers: “Yes, I’m healthy enough to sing.” The Door-Man doesn’t budge, so Elif grabs the Door-Man’s arm.

Elif: Let me in.

Door-Man: He’s in a meeting; he absolutely cannot be seen right now. In the conference room. Private. It’s too late anyway, the baton’s already raised. Let go of my arm. I’ll tell you something that can help you if you let – go – of my arm. That’s better. There’s an election going on right now in the ballroom. They’re voting on this year’s repertoire. You can get in there. If you learn what they’ll be performing this season, you can sing it for him, if he gives you an audition.

He lets her in.

The other side gets lit up, revealing the musicians, voting for the Programming Director.

Two number-girls take pictures of Elif, whisking her from place to place.

Number-Girl 1: “So many reporters are here for your talk!” The number-girl (who holds up a number like a Boxing Ring round-counter girl, or wears the number like an American Bandstand contest dancer or like a large birthday-candle number) takes a Polaroid picture of Elif by a keyboard onstage. After she takes the picture, the light goes out over the keyboard. She may scrawl a caption on the picture, and she then tosses the picture into her basket, which she may give to Elif.

Number-Girl 2 takes a picture of Elif holding a jar of cold cream and does the same thing.

A labeled President’s-seal podium gets wheeled onstage and stagehands hand everyone (including audience members) placards. Everyone holds up the placards like delegates, each with a different font style: “Clean Up” or “Get the Tea Later” or “Makeup in 5 minutes.” (They need to be spotlight or a little light turned on the audience.)

A banner gets lowered from the ceiling, saying “VOTE FOR GETTING THE TEA NOW”. People keep sticking words on the end of the banner: “...In 5 minutes” or “...in 20 minutes” or “...after you warm up” or “..after you get dressed.”

The Clarinetist gives a speech at the podium: Blah, blah, blah, b’bluh bluh blah, blah blah... You guys are all looking tired – could somebody bring me some tea? I’d really appreciate that.

E gets handed the sign “PRACTICE THE HARD COLORATURA SECTION.”

The Oboe Player asks, “Permission to interrupt?” and the first speaker, the Clarinetist, gets pulled offstage with a giant hook. The new speaker starts stroking his beard, and everyone

on stage starts doing that. The Oboe Player says: “I just noticed that, and I was wondering if I could have permission to interrupt this procedure of deciding the order of execution of the subroutine, of thinking about, and posing yourself, the question: do I have permission to interrupt this procedure? Because it’s hard to find my train of thought with all this visual distraction – can we take five minutes to clean up the confetti?”

The First Violinist pounds a gavel to no avail as different factions shout.

During all of the speeches, actors in the audience and other delegates onstage loudly stammer things like “Point of order!” “This place is a pigsty!” “Get dressed first!” “Warm up first!”

Violin 2 (the musician who lost earlier in musical chairs) carries a boombox and steps up to the podium. Everyone stops. He says, “Rather than make empty promises, I’d like to show you my platform. I think with a careful allocation of resources, we can multitask. Let me show you. Clear some space.”

He and Elif stand in the center of the stage and pick up and drop placards; they bump each other and fall down. Four people (Two Number-Girls, Door-Man, Child) make a circle around the two and dance the horah, doing the following movements: picking their noses, scratching an itch, and biting nails. Five dancers (Conductor; Violin 1, Viola, Oboe, Clarinet players) surround them, dancing in the opposite direction, miming writing on notepads, dunking and drinking tea, practicing singing, and putting on makeup; violinists among them may bow a real chord. The inner circle messes with / itches the outer.

The dance ends.

Violin 2: Call to vote?

Delegates: Aye!

Violin 2: Vote for me?

Delegates: Aye!

The crowd drops their placards and applauds. (An applause sign is held up.)

The new Programming Director is carried to the podium, and two actors carry onstage an LED ticker-tape reading: “News flash: ‘DO ALL THE ROUTINES’ wins by a landslide...what worked...”

The winner stands beaming before the applauding crowd. Elif stands next to him, smiling, and he flashes the Richard Nixon Victory sign. His campaign victory speech: “I’d like to thank my opponents for putting up a good fight...I know they’ll be back...I’d like to thank my supporters, and especially thank everyone for permission to interrupt and to represent us...I promise to work diligently to uphold the primary item on my campaign platform, which is to immediately get the tea, and, once it has been duly procured and obtained beyond the shadow of a doubt, I will move on from this supreme accomplishment and will clean my room, and then put on makeup, and finally, I may warm up, with renewed energy and without distraction.”

More applause, and he is handed the giant tea cup.

Elif: The new Programming Director lied! That’s not what he promised at all! All he’s now talking about is procuring and manicuring and other piddling middling tasks! We need to work on the hard coloraturas or I’ll never make it! I need to see the Opera Director – to find out if he knows about this, and if that’s really this year’s schedule. I need an audition!

Clarinet: Come on then! Follow me!

Elif: Where are you all going?

Oboe: To the Opera Director!

Elif: To the Opera Director – they’ll never let us in. He’s in a meeting.

Clarinet: You’re absolutely right, he’s just found out about the election results and is now

meeting to ratify them!

Elif: So how will we get in?

Clarinet: Well, every leader needs some entertainment, right? Then, let's entertain him; maybe then he'll entertain us. Here, put this on. (Hands her folk-dancing garb.)

All the losing candidates (Conductor; Violin 1, Viola, Oboe, Clarinet players) walk offstage in a line, wearing folkdancing clothing.

SCENE 4  
OPERA DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

A cabinet meeting. All delegates, including Elif's conductor, have popcorns and cokes, and sit in chairs in a semicircle around a conference table. They ignore Elif and the other waiting folk-dancers. The Opera Director, who looks like Stalin, sits at the head of the table.

Opera Director - Let me see the 5-second plan. Deputy in charge of choosing the conductors?

Programming Director (winner of the election) unrolls his plan, which reads 5-DAY PLAN.

Opera Director: Conscious. (Stamps the plan in triplicate.) Elif. Roll tape of what just happened.

They turn their chairs around and face the audience, eating popcorn, looking up to the balcony. Silence.

Elif turns around and faces the audience, and someone runs out and holds up a mirror to block her view of the audience. Someone hands the dancers knives.

Opera Director: "I don't like this edit at all. I want the Same Boring Pieces. Get that conductor out." He turns to Elif's conductor and shoots him in the head. Elif gasps as the conductor falls back in the chair. The dead conductor then puts on a bloody head bandage and sits back up.

Opera Director (to Programming Director): You are now officially the Permanent Conductor. Don't let me down. (Points a gun at him.) When will all the roles be decided? Conscious! (He rubber-stamps the table in triplicate.)

Personnel Deputy: Most positions are now filled and most of the operas are scheduled, but who gets the roles depends on what pieces get performed, and what pieces get performed depends on who gets the roles. Fortunately, we don't have to decide until right before we announce. Or, we announce and then we decide.

Programming Director: Actually, we have to know by the time we print the program.

Scheduling Deputy: Daddy, he spoke out of turn!

Programming Director whacks the Scheduling Deputy on the head with a 2x4.

Programming Director: Sir, it's been a hard day. Would you like to jerk off for a little while?

Opera Director: Sure. Let's rest for five minutes.

Opera Director leans back on chair and puts the five-day plan over his face.

The light comes on the line of folkloric dancers (Violin 1, Viola, Oboe, Clarinet). The Door-Man stops them.

Elif: We're folkloric dancers here to perform for the Opera Director.

The Door-Man steps aside. Meanwhile, her conductor leaves the stage.

The light switches back to the cabinet meeting, where the Personnel Director and the Programming and Scheduling Deputies are standing behind the sleeping Opera Director, conspiring, and take the plan off his face gently. They alter the plan with magic markers and fight over the plan, tugging at it – and it tears as the Scheduling Deputy falls down on the floor backwards.

Personnel Deputy: Better fix it before he wakes!  
The Programming Director unrolls a length of tape but peels off a length that's too big.  
The rest of the deputies, in turn:  
Personnel Director: "Save it!"  
Scheduling Deputy: "Waste!"  
Procurement Deputy: "Misallocation of resources!"  
Personnel Director: "I need it, gimme the tape!"  
Scheduling Deputy: "Shame!"  
Procurement Deputy: "Simon says, peel off the tape!"  
Personnel Director: "No, you used too much - don't rip it, turn the roll back..."  
Scheduling Deputy: "Uh oh, you tore it off though you knew not to! Why'd you have to complete the action!"

Red light shines around. House music plays, and the words SHAME! SHAME! boom over the speakers. As the music plays, Elif's voice comes over the speakers: "I need this piece; I didn't use enough on the tear – on the score." Another voice: "Don't interrupt / finish the routine!" "Complete! Deactivate!" The Programming Director sticks the extra piece on a nylon bag in the trash; a voice on the speakers says, "Save it - you'll need it later - WASTE, WASTE!"

Personnel Director: This is embarrassing. Should we wake him up?  
Programming Deputy: Certainly not. Wait – there's a line of people outside waiting.  
Personnel Deputy: He can't possibly audition anyone today.  
Programming Director: It's just the common folk. He should make an appearance so they'll continue to believe in him. Let him entertain them.  
Scheduling Deputy: Better yet, let them entertain him – they look like performers.  
Procurement Deputy: Perfect – quaint little folk dancers! Let them in!  
Personnel Director: Open the door!  
The Door-Man steps aside again, and the dancers enter, Elif among them.  
The Opera Director wakes up, rubbing his eyes. He smiles at them and goes back to watching the balcony.

They do a Turkish folkloric dance. Every time they slap their knees, the Deputies and Opera Director shout "conscious!" They're juggling knives. Elif juggles too, but she dances clumsily, and when she tosses a knife, it hits the Opera Director, who keels over, dead.

Everything stops except the Opera Director's word "Conscious!" which still comes on the speakers. The Programming Director screams and cowers in the corner. Elif's trapped and everyone points guns on her.

A cop with a helmet enters and says: "Put your guns down! Alright, let me take a statement. Who killed this man?"

Scheduling Deputy: It was the Programming Director!  
Elif: No it wasn't. I admit - I did it, but it was an accident.  
Other deputy: Officer, this person isn't an assassin, she's a dancer. Look at the Programming Director over there, cowering in the corner. He was ambitious. He's new, and now he's scared because he knows he's guilty.

Elif: I'm not really a dancer! I'm a singer; I just dressed up like a dancer to try to get an audience with the Opera Director so he would give me an audition!

Cop: Is that what you really are, or is that just the way it seems to you now? Maybe, you revised the story in your mind so you could have a better image of yourself?

A dancer (Viola) and the Procurement Director: I believe her! She's a strong one!

Cop: Then it's settled. 'Cause in my precinct, only the strong survive. Elif, congratulations. Mister Programming Director, you're under arrest. (Handcuffs him.) Is everyone here ready to do their jobs?

All: Yes!

Cop: Then, let's do it. Let's make a statement. (He shines a flashlight in Elif's eyes, and reaches for his club but takes out a baton instead. He takes off his uniform and hat, and someone tosses him a conductor's suit.

Elif: It's my conductor!

Cop/conductor: You're not going to wear that, are you?

SCENE 5  
PERFORMANCE

Elif changes her clothes onstage as the stage is being set up, with four musicians (Violin 1, Viola, Oboe, Clarinet) and conductor, set up as in the first scene.

The lightman keeps moving light toward her and she keeps running away from it as she changes. (Or, she gets dressed while the conductor tries to talk her into moving under the light.)

The lightperson calls out: "Esse est percipi!"

Elif: What?

Lightperson: Esse est percipi. To be is to be perceived.

Elif: You mean, to last is to be exploited!

The conductor is standing on a dolly, which is sliding left away from his stand, and he has to step off it to get back in front of the stand, and steps onto another dolly which also slides away.

Elif walks downstage.

Conductor to the orchestra: "Let's do the piece with the hard coloraturas, 'cause they're applauding the showy stuff today." The orchestra looks confused and searches for scores. The lights on the audience turn on, and someone in the audience shouts out, "I've got it!" and runs up and hands them to the conductor.

He announces the pieces to the audience: "Today we'll be performing arias from the opera Leave A Document. Elif will sing "Put On Makeup," "The Vocal Mask," "Get Dressed," "Drink Water," and "The Mating Routine."

Violin 1: We're missing some parts.

Conductor: We all know it by heart. Just wing it - you'll be great.

Conductor conducts, but the orchestra's sound comes out slightly later than the conductor's hands. Sound cuts in and out. As he conducts, he rotates around the orchestra on a dolly. Musicians come and go as they please. Even the conductor walks offstage and comes back. Sometimes Elif conducts as she sings; sometimes she lays down as if asleep; sometimes she puts on makeup.

The Programming Director (Violin 2) in handcuffs tries to climb up a ramp on the left to get onstage, but he keeps sliding down it as if it's greasy; people in the audience stop him.

Commotion can be heard from lobby or backstage, with phrases from other scenes and sounds of her practicing coming in from the outside and from backstage. (CE 434)

Signs or LED screens in the theater read (or loudspeakers interrupt and say): Buy index cards! Buy score paper! Pay attention!

While she's singing, a fan blows off a couple of score-papers off the conductor's stand, and she starts singing "Blah blah" until she reaches the next page. (The paper can come be pulled by a thread from offstage).

Over the speakers come sounds of the crescendoing repeated phrase: "Notice / ignore," until a car alarm sounds, and it stops.

While she's singing, actors (Librarian, assistant, child, mother) stand around and touch her face, open her mouth, lift her neck, and hold her diaphragm.

Towards the end of the aria, deliverymen keep coming in to drop off objects for the next library scene.

The musicians applaud her wildly tossing her roses.

At the end, she might try to leave the stage and collapse like a rag doll, at which point two men carry her lifeless body back onstage, where she springs back to life.

SCENE 6  
“BACKSTAGE”

Elif: How was it?

Conductor: You were amazing.

Elif: I felt dry and kind of unhappy.

Conductor: How you felt has nothing to do with how you sounded - you can't know. You didn't hear it from the audience – you were amazing tonight.

The dead Opera Director enters in with a knife in his head. “Everyone loved it.”

Conductor: It was good for you; how was it for me?

Opera Director - What do you mean?

Elif: Was there anyone there that can help us?

Conductor – I'm glad that the musicians enjoyed playing it, and it's good that we all worked together, but for Elif it would be nice to have something actually come out of it – what she wants is a life in which she gives more concerts. Were there any TV reporters present?

Opera Director - I think at least one reporter came. There's also some visitors from the elementary school, who want to meet you and have you sign their programs.

Conductor – Alright, but can we just have a moment to savor it a little for ourselves, before you let them in?

Elif: No, let them in. THEY are what's important, they're the next generation. We have a chance to have a real effect on their lives.

Conductor: OK, but just tell the reporter to wait a couple more minutes.

Reporter's trying to get in, as children crowd around her and ask her questions.

Child: How can I become a singer?

Elif tells the child about a career in singing.

Child: What does it feel like to sing like that?

Elif: I use my own private language to describe how I place my voice in the mask, which is hard to explain, and even then I'm making up what I think happened.

Reporter finally interjects: What's the name of the opera you were singing from – I missed the first part.

Elif: I sung “Practice the Hard Coloraturas” from the opera “Leave a Document.”

Conductor: Y'know, I announced those titles at the beginning of the piece – weren't you there?

Reporter: I – I wasn't at the WHOLE performance. It's very hard for me to sit through the whole thing – so much going on at once – and I don't have to – we have the footage on tape. It's in the can for the news tonight.

Elif: That's OK...

Reporter: Can you come down to the studio to watch the tape with us and comment on it?

Conductor: I'm not sure a tape can capture the live experience...

Conductor: It's for broadcast! Of course I'd love to go down.

She pulls away from the children and walks off.

SCENE 7  
TELEVISION STUDIO

Over the speakers: “Roll the tape.”

They all walk backwards; a tape is heard being rewound on a speaker.

A blue light comes on Elif and she sings the aria quietly over the music. While the music plays, the speakers also play the following: “Please record. Please record, please work. All conductors have their rehearsals filmed. We are now (insert today’s date), and I am trying to ground myself to this camcorder. I am paranoid, paranoid, paranoid. The batteries aren’t going to work, it’s not going to record. I hope I’m recording this I hope I’m recording this I don’t know why I don’t know why I don’t know why. Shit. The write-protect tab is on, the write-protect tab is on because you’re talking so much. You’re wasting tape space. I am wearing on the tape head, using it up for my own convenience. Mom says sometimes, ‘Take the luxury, you can afford it once in awhile to take the Metroliner instead of having to wait 3 hours for another train.’ This is the special occasion. What just happened. You’re using up the tape. Jesus I’m afraid of stumbling, I’m afraid of stumbling, I’m afraid of stumbling, I’ll shut off, the tape recorder.”

Then video snow is heard. They freeze.

Producer: Can somebody tell me what happened to the tape?

Reporter: It must have gotten wiped coming through security x-ray.

Producer: That’s just great. Schedule reenactment for – fifteen seconds. Clear the studio!  
Cue lights. Elif, can you stand over there, in front of the blue screen ... OK, when music begins, you lip-synch.

Elif: But...

Producer: Camera three, ready. Five seconds. Four. Three. Two. One.

Producer points at Elif.

The music starts, and Elif starts to lip-synch to the music, coming in a little bit late on each syllable.

After singing for about twenty seconds, there’s an earthquake.

A loud telephone rings, the wall shakes, and everyone starts to fall down; the folkdancing troupe staggers onto the stage from the wings and stumbles back out.

Everyone: It’s an earthquake!

Elif: Aah, damnit.

Conductor: We’ll still make the news, don’t worry. Are you OK?

Elif: No, I’m not OK. For them, there’s no such thing as a small earthquake. Even if the camera didn’t break, that’s tomorrow’s top news story, NOT me – and not what I’m singing.

Conductor: We’ll call the station tonight after the dust settles, to keep in their minds. Maybe the footage they got of you was even more interesting.

Elif walks across the stage, plops down on a bed, takes a remote controller, and “turns on” the TV. The conductor comes over to the bed.

A clicking sound comes over the speaker (or out of the TV) and actors dance around her. One of them runs behind the cutout of the TV, which becomes a desk, and becomes a news announcer. He reads: “Thank you for watching our premiere broadcast of yesterday’s news, where we report and describe What Just Happened. Tonight’s guest-anchor: Elif.” The spotlight shines on the bed, where Elif’s been picking her eyebrows. She’s caught like a deer in the

headlights, and runs over to the desk, and they follow her with their cameras. The cameramen are saying, “You can’t get them all in focus - just choose ONE spot.”

Elif reads the news, but her voice changes every five seconds; she continues to lip-synch the rest of her speech. Elif: “Tonight there’s been an earthquake measuring 97.2 on the Richter scale. Although there are no reported injuries, the foundations of the central theater, where she just gave a triumphant performance tonight, are irrevocably altered. Wait – this just in – there are some confirmed fatalities, in the collapse of the executive offices. The Opera Director and several members of the local traditional folk ensemble are reported to be among the dead. We have recovered a videotape from the scene, which we will now show you as a live exclusive.”

Video snow is heard over the loudspeakers. Producers are fighting: “Did you put it in a lead bag? It must have gotten wiped going through security. Cut to a roundtable discussion!”

Lights switch off the desk and come on a table, where First Violinist says (in a funny voice): “While an earthquake is always kate-a-kleyes-mic, today’s tragic events indeed have a silver lining.”

Viola player (in a monotone): It brought our community together for a new and special performance.

First Violinist: And it couldn’t have happened without Elif’s commanding interpretation. I really believe that as of tonight, a new star is born.

Elif, back on the bed, “switches off” the TV.

Elif (excited): This is great!

Conductor: Well, it’s not REALLY what happened...

Elif: So what... (laughing) I’m really gonna make it!

Conductor: Whether you “make it” or not, you should be thinking about the live performance and focus on the moment. You were amazing; it was a very rich experience, no matter what comes of it later, no matter what the effect.

Elif: Yeah yeah yeah... I WAS BROADCAST! Which means I’m gonna make it – and there’ll be effects that’ll provide me with what really matters - a life full of these rich experiences.

Conductor: But now we’re too full. We’re all – weighed – down.

Elif (annoyed): What are you talking about?

Conductor: Our scores. All these scores and papers – we have to return them to the library. If we don’t put some of them back on the shelves, we’ll never remember any of this.

Elif: That’s a great idea. I’d love to march into the library right now and show that mother who’s the real Queen here.

SCENE 8  
LIBRARY

Elif and Conductor at front desk. A guard is standing by the desk.

Elif: Here are the scores.

Librarian: Is it all of them?

Elif: Of course it's not all of them. You didn't GIVE us all of them to take out!

Librarian: You know you can't display it incomplete. (Bodyguard whacks Elif in the kneecaps.) Now let me ask you again. You're returning all the scores, right?

Conductor: Yes, it's all the parts... if anything's missing, I can finish them for you and fill in the notes...

The conductor, carrying his police uniform, sits down with the scores at the desk.

Suddenly, a fanfare plays.

The Mother, dressed like Aladdin the Genie, appears at the bookcase and is heard breathing on the speakers heavily like a dragon, low and quiet. The Programming Director walks over toward Aladdin and hits an invisible wall, which he pantomimes feeling.

Aladdin takes a book off a shelf and throws it into the garbage. Two children carry the garbage can to the side of the stage and dump the books onto the floor. A scholar walks on with a robe, picks up a book, and crawls on all fours to sneak the book back onto a lower shelf.

Aladdin sees him and growls, kicks him in the face; he rolls offstage. Aladdin throws the book back into the trash. This repeats.

Spotlight shines back at the front desk. The reporter is at the desk with the librarian and the bodyguard.

Librarian: Yeah, I know, you'd like to contribute a report.

Reporter: No, I'd like to return one.

Librarian: With all the pages written-on. And what have you brought us today? (Brusquely takes his notebook out of his backpack and looks at it.) Oh, yes, a steno pad. Let's see: Phenomenology. Subtitled, The Story of the Concert and What Just Happened. (Looks up at him.) Sounds fascinating.

Reporter: It's not just an autobiography...

Librarian: It never is. (presses a button)

Assistant: Fiction?

Librarian: Fiction.

Reporter: But it really happened!

Librarian: See that man over there? (Points to the conductor at the desk.) That person taking down what you're telling me now takes it very seriously, that you really believe that what really happened, happened.

Reporter: But it really did!

Librarian: Let's go.

The bodyguard comes to carry him away. The reporter gets out of his arm-hold.

Reporter: I have every right to be here! I'm a member of the press!

Librarian: Let me see your badge: ah, yes, it says expired. (Stamps EXPIRED on it) Ha-ha!

Reporter: I'll have your head – I'll have your job for this.

Bodyguard: Sir, we do not doubt your sincerity. But you wouldn't want us to test it, would you? It would be VERY expensive, time-consuming, and should we say a painful process. Why don't you leave quietly. (Escorts the reporter out.)

Elif's music is heard, and the spotlight comes on the conductor at the desk.

Aladdin suddenly bellows: You know what you have to do to get on here.

The oboe and viola players take the conductor's handcuffs.

Conductor: Will I ever get to stand up for a few moments? To experience life, look at deep greens and purples, go to the bathroom, all the things I enjoy?

Aladdin: That's up to you. Nietzsche would want you handcuffed. (Pause; a bearded philosopher gets shined under a spotlight, and nods.) De Sade certainly would have you handcuffed. On the side, a musician in a wig gets shined under a spotlight, and nods.

Conductor: Well, handcuff me to the desk then.

They handcuff his leg to the chair.

The conductor takes his baton out of his right pocket and starts writing with it. Over the speakers comes the sound of his speeding/slowing scribbling, voices reading and correcting his paper (about what each phrase of Elif's aria is like), his heartbeat, and her music played in slow-motion.

Suddenly, he knocks over his baton and says the words "What just happened?," which get interleaved over and over (echoing repeatedly on the speakers or with other actors offstage saying them in canon.) The sound of the baton dropping also comes and echoes over and over, decrescendoing.

He looks back and bends down to pick up the baton, putting it back on the desk. Then he repeats the motion, over and over and slower, even though the object's already safely back on the desk. All actors offstage say the following in turn:

Opera Director: "Baton."

Programming Director: "I dropped the baton."

Reporter: "Look away, seal it."

Child: "What just happened?"

First Violin: "Clean up!"

Opera Director: "Pick baton up."

The conductor goes back to writing, caught in the loop of occasionally bending halfway down to pick up the baton and of describing a particular phrase of hers for the rest of the scene. At some point in the aria, her singing skips like CD player and the sounds and light fade on him.

A new CD gets lowered from the ceiling onto the librarian at the desk.

Librarian takes the CD out of the shrinkwrap with a folk-dancing knife.

Bodyguard: Hey, you're Elif! (looks at the CD) I saw on the news that the audience loved the performance!

Elif: Thanks...

Bodyguard: I've got an offer you can't refuse – more concerts, a recording...

Elif (looking at the CD): A document! Is that really me? Hey, can you get it on the golden bookshelf?

Bodyguard (laughs): You got it.

Bodyguard walks her to the bookshelf, hands Aladdin a coin, and Aladdin puts it on the shelf.

Bodyguard: Let's go for a ride. (Walks her offstage)

The Programming Director enters and walks quickly over to the bookshelf.

He climbs the ladder by the bookshelf. His foot breaks through a rung. Aladdin growls and shakes the case, and books fall off. The ladder is shaking violently, and he is not going to make it up to the top. The librarian comes over, as Aladdin growls softly.

Librarian: TIME'S UP.

Programming Director: Well, I'm not SURE it's finished. Could I please sit and work on it for awhile?

Librarian: You know you can't work on it anymore. You might contaminate it. Soon those people won't be able to work on it anymore either.

Programming Director: I know that, but if I could only have ten more minutes. Just ten minutes.

Librarian: Can't you see all those people? You had no influence; nobody wanted it. I'd help you if I could, but I can't... so I shan't. (Laughs.) But there may be some pages that could help. Could you please? We can use this page...and this page... that'll keep the rats out for awhile...

Programming Director: I'm sorry for lying to you before...I don't need any more tea...LOOK, DON'T USE MY WORK JUST TO KEEP THE RATS OUT! DON'T LET IT BE TO KEEP THE RATS OUT!

(Librarian takes a few pages, throws the rest away, and crumples the pages into balls, to stuff into holes in the wall.)

Librarian: Don't you want to be a good boy and help? So many people say they want to contribute, yet what they really want is not to die, for them and their family to be remembered, to be loved...couldn't you please help us, and give us the help we really need?

They look around, and people appear from the sides of the stage wearing yellow fuzzy rat suits.

Programming Director: OK...you can use it if it helps. Where should I go now? I'm feeling tired and old.

Librarian. You can rest over there. (Pause.) NEXT!

The Musicians carry him into a hole in the floor of the stage. They hand down books and cover him with them.

The librarian drops the Programming Director's remaining papers onto the desk.

Oboe player: Can I have those?

Librarian (shrugs): Sure.

The oboe player gathers up the papers, shuffles them in order, staples them, and puts them into a book.

Clarinetist: Put his beginning and ending dates on the title page.

The oboe player writes them on the title page.

Stage lights start to dim. The oboe player carries the book over to the bookshelf; Aladdin welcomes her to put it on a bottom shelf, which she does, and the Musicians walk off, as the Ice Cream Man tune plays. Aladdin takes the Programming Director's work off the bottom shelf and holds it out, dangling it over the wastebasket.

*Istanbul, Turkey  
September 2002*

*(Alternate title: regarding/exploring consciousness)*