



The Best Solution to Plastic Pollution—
Micro-Opera for Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, and Piano (2022)

Duration: ca. 7 mins.

Chen-Kang Kao

Program Note

Micro-opera, an opera within ten minutes, tells a story by condensed instrumentation. Each voice is sung by only one singer and is accompanied by the piano, so it sounds like a solo or ensemble piece.

The libretto of *The Best Solution to Plastic Pollution* is written by me. On a talk show, three guests discuss their opinions about plastic pollution. Empress (soprano), an eloquent politician, cares about the environment. Effy (mezzo-soprano), a professional host of a talk show, is calm. Joe (tenor), a drink deliveryman, lacks his own opinion. Walt (baritone), an arrogant boss of a grocery store, is dominant. The libretto not only discusses the environmental issue on the surface but also explores human nature. Everyone can be Empress, Effy, Joe, or Walt.

In terms of the music, I integrate many elements: diegetic music, tonality, bitonality, atonality, octatonic scales, recitatives, and ensembles for two to four singers to name but a few. I hope that through these elements, the music can convey the main idea in the libretto clearly.

Notation

Singers and Pianist:

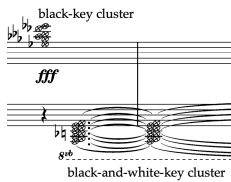
If there is only one chord per measure or no notes in the piano part, then singers can sing more freely according to the mood of the plot. Sometimes, *colla voce* is marked in the piano part.

Singers:

,

Take a breath only when there is a comma or rest, but it is not necessary to take a breath on every comma or rest.

Pianist:



The crosses in the noteheads indicate a cluster that should be played with a palm. If it is a black-and-white-key cluster, play all the black and white keys roughly within the register; if it is a black-key cluster, play all the black keys roughly within the register.

Registers of the Singers

Soprano: E4-C6

Mezzo-Soprano: B3-G5

Tenor: D3-B4

Baritone: G2-G4

Props in Scene II

Empress: A coffee cup and teaspoon.

Effy: A bowl and spoon.

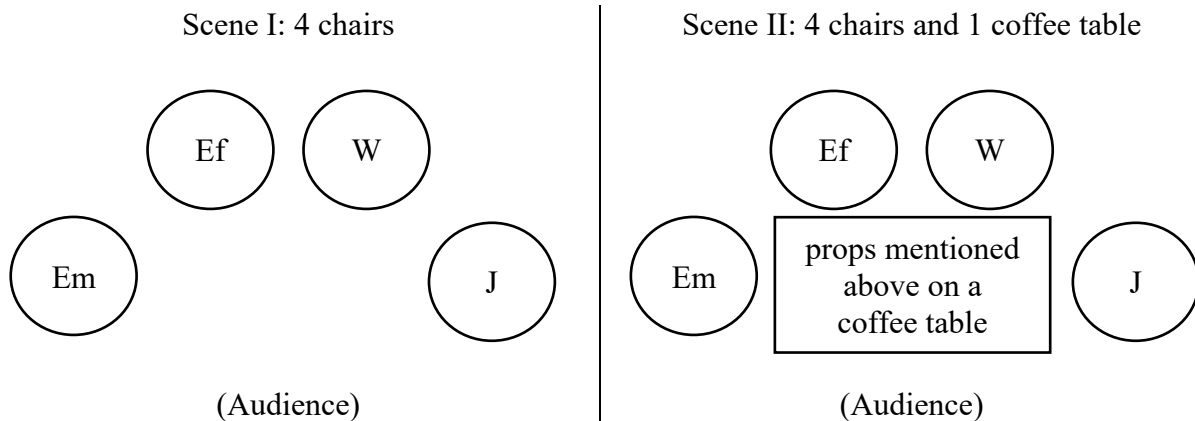
Joe: A cake box.

Walt: A burger box.

* All the props should be not disposable, but eco-friendly.

* Singers use score folders when singing. It would be great if they could memorize the ensemble part (from m. 148 to the end).

Settings



Characters

Empress (Soprano): a Riverside Democratic politician

Effy (Mezzo-Soprano): a host of *Hot Issue of the Week*

Joe (Tenor): an Uber Drinks driver

Walt (Baritone): the boss of Walmart

Pianist: a character who appears before the end of Scene I, without any words

Libretto

Scene I

(In a broadcasting room. Everyone is seated in a semicircle peacefully, from left to right: Effy, Empress, Walt, and Joe)

Effy: Good evening, everyone. Welcome to *Hot Issue of the Week*. I'm Effy. People rely on plastic products more and more, but scientists said the food we eat, the water we drink, and even the air we breathe all contain microplastic particles. To be more specific, we ingest approximately a credit card's weight in plastic every week. Today, we are very honored to invite three representatives from different walks of life and see what their opinions are on the issue. Let's welcome Empress, a Riverside Democratic politician.

Empress: Good evening.

Effy: Walt, the boss of Walmart.

Walt: Hi, everyone.

Effy: Joe, an Uber Drinks driver.

Joe: Hello, Effy. Hi, everybody.

Effy: Empress, please tell us what you do to prevent microplastics from entering our bodies.

Empress: I hope my proposal that no plastic bags, straws, or containers be given to the customers in 2025 will be passed in Congress this year. If we don't take immediate actions, our health will surely be damaged seriously.

Effy: It'll be a big change, won't it? Walt, will you support Empress's proposal?

Walt: With all due respect, there's no evidence that plastic will harm our health, and plastic products are just unavoidable. They are especially needed to fill drinks or pack food. Plastic-free choices are more expensive, so I think my customers won't want to pay extra money for these choices.

Effy: What about Joe? Do you agree with Walt?

Joe: I couldn't agree more. Plastic products are convenient. I can't imagine people having to reuse containers to hold food or drinks. We also have to clean them after each use. I don't think we have time for that. More importantly, I'm not having any health issues right now.

Effy: Well, it seems Empress's proposal was rejected by Walt and Joe.

Walt: As long as people recycle plastic products well, everything will be fine.

(Red light from the ceiling)

Empress: Bullshit!

Walt: Excuse me?

Empress: Only 9 percent of...

Walt: What did you just say?

Empress: Only 9 percent of our plastic products are...

Walt: You owe me an apology.

Empress: Only 9 percent of our plastic products are really recycled...

Joe: *(To Empress)* Your face needs plastic surgery.

Empress: The landfill is the main way these products are handled. Excuse me? I do this for the sake of all mankind, you two idiots!

Walt & Joe: Whoa, whoa...

(All guests stand up, fighting)

Effy: STO~~~~P!!!

(Keep fighting)

Effy: The situation is getting a bit out of control. Let's take a short break, and we'll be right back. *(Cues Pianist)*

Pianist: *(Plays the intermezzo anxiously)*

(Lights off)

Scene II

*(Lights on. Normal light from the ceiling. Ten minutes later.
Everyone is seated peacefully again, eating delicious food)*

Empress: *(Drinks a cup of coffee or stirs the coffee with a teaspoon)*

Effy: *(Holds a bowl and spoon, puts them down on the coffee table, and talks to the audience)*
This soup is so delicious! I can't even tell it's plant-based. *(Looks at the camera)* Oh, welcome back again. Finally, our guests reached an agreement and have decided to gradually reduce plastic products yearly! Walt, tell us what changed your mind?

Walt: Empress treated us to a five-star meal. And after that, we all admitted that we were just too overwhelmed by hunger to behave well, and we made up. *(To the audience)* The veggie burger is quite juicy! *(Holds a burger box)*

Joe: Empress's face looks fine. *(To Empress)* I apologize for what I said. I think reusing and reducing plastic items are actually great ideas. *(To the audience, points at a cake box)* The cake is pretty soft!

(Everybody stands up, puts away the food, and talks to the audience)

Ensemble: A five-star meal can help us make an impartial judgment.
The soup, veggie burger, cake, and coffee are so fantastic
That we decided to reduce plastic.
We always know how to protect the environment.
A five-star meal can help us make an impartial judgment.
(Effy: This soup is so delicious!)
(Walt: The veggie burger is quite juicy!)
(Joe: The cake is pretty soft!)
It's the best solution to plastic pollution.

The End

The Best Solution to Plastic Pollution

Scene I

(In a broadcasting room. Everyone is seated in a semicircle peacefully, from left to right: Effy, Empress, Walt, and Joe)

(Lights on before the music starts)

Chen-Kang Kao
Jan. 18-Feb. 15, 2022

♩ = 92 energetic

Empress (Soprano)

Effy (Mezzo-Soprano)

Joe (Tenor)

Walt (Baritone)

Piano

p *mf*

5

Empress

Effy

Joe

Walt

Pno.

p *mp* *mf* *f* *mp*

rit.