IF, ACCORDING TO THE CRITIC CATHERINE CLÉMENT, THE HISTORY OF OPERA chronicles "the undoing of women"—with their disastrous ends in murder, suicide, disease, and madness—then *Marnie* begins its tale with a woman who is already thoroughly undone. It tells the story of Marnie, who moves through life in a series of assumed identities, misleading her employers and stealing from them before escaping to a new town and starting her destructive cycle again. Compelled to this life of deceit by forces she doesn't understand, Marnie is a stranger to herself, at once perpetrator and victim. The shadowy psychological trauma in her past sets her on a cycle of lies, manipulation, and theft, eventually resulting in her entrapment in a marriage with another flawed soul: Mark Rutland, the widower who both desires and torments her. Nico Muhly's new opera, now seen at the Metropolitan Opera in its American premiere, gives gripping operatic voice to Marnie's shattered sense of self and the forces that perturb her.

Marnie is the third opera by American composer Nico Muhly (b. 1981) and a product of the Met's New Opera Commissioning Program. As with Muhly's earlier works *Two Boys* and *Dark Sisters*, *Marnie* takes as its starting point a story of "emotionally intense ambiguity," in the composer's words. And like *Two Boys*, which inhabits the universe of Internet avatars, *Marnie* explores both the fluidity of identity and overlapping spheres of reality. In portraying the murky psyche of *Marnie*'s title character, Muhly deploys not only her own voice but also a quartet of "Shadow Marnies" who function in part as her subconscious, as well as silent male figures whose stance is more antagonistic. Muhly calls the complex interplay between these layers "a nebulous series of mirrors" and relishes creating a character with so many different registers. "There's what she's saying, there's what she's thinking, there's the immediate source behind what she's thinking and saying, and then a deeper source that we only hint at," he says.

This guide presents *Marnie* as an operatic psychological thriller that draws on both the unique narrative voice of its title character as well as the vast expressive resources of grand opera. It will prepare students to engage confidently and meaningfully with Muhly's opera and give them tools to interpret much of contemporary opera written in the past 50 years. This guide will also align with key strands of the Common Core Standards.

LEONARD   KELLY   GRAVES   DAVIES   MALTMAN

This guide includes five sections.

- **THE SOURCE, THE STORY, WHO'S WHO IN *MARNIE*, AND A TIMELINE**

- **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:** Two activities designed to align with and support various Common Core Standard strands used in ELA, History/Social Studies, and Music curricula

- **PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES:** Two activities to be used during *The Met: Live in HD* transmission, highlighting specific aspects of this production

- **POST-SHOW DISCUSSION:** A wrap-up activity that integrates the *Live in HD* experience into the students' understanding of the performing arts and the humanities

- **STUDENT RESOURCE PAGES:** Classroom-ready worksheets supporting the activities in the guide

The activities in this guide will focus on several aspects of *Marnie*:

- The operatic representation of the novel's unique narrative voice
- Muhly's compositional style
- The work of bringing a new contemporary opera to the stage of the Met
- Creative choices made by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera for this production
- The opera as a unified work of art, involving the efforts of composer, librettist, and Met artists

This guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *Marnie*, whether or not they have any prior acquaintance with opera. It includes activities for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds, and seeks to encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts as a whole—as a medium of both entertainment and creative expression.

SUMMARY Marnie, a young woman going by the name of Mary Holland, works as a secretary at an accounting firm. One day after closing, she breaks into the office safe and steals the company's funds. She escapes and makes plans to change her appearance and identity in a new town, but first visits her disapproving invalid mother and gives her money. At Marnie's new job at Halcyon Printing, she recognizes Mark Rutland, the firm's owner, from her past, but he doesn't seem to know her. One day, Marnie delivers some work to Mark at his home. When Marnie is terrified by a thunderstorm, Mark comforts her and tries to kiss her. Marnie flees and returns to the office. She breaks into the safe, but Mark catches her in the act. He convinces Marnie to marry him to avoid his going to the police. On their honeymoon, Mark reveals that he knew she was a thief when she applied for her job. He wants her to love him, but Marnie can't stand his touch. He tries to force her to give herself to him, but she escapes into the bathroom and slits her wrists.

Marnie recovers from her injuries, but both she and Mark suffer from their disastrous marriage. Mark persuades Marnie to see an analyst; in return, he will have her beloved horse Forio stabled at their house. In her therapy, Marnie has flashbacks of a thunderstorm, a soldier, her mother, and her dead baby brother. Later, Mark and Marnie take part in a fox hunt. Amid the chaos of the hunt, Marnie panics and Forio bolts. Mark, trying to help, is hurt, and Forio is injured so badly that he must be shot.

Marnie in the opera's pivotal fox hunt scene
RICHARD HUBERT SMITH / ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA

Marnie visits Mark in the hospital. She is beginning to yield to his feelings but takes his keys when he falls asleep. At the office, Marnie unlocks the safe but cannot steal from it. She flees to her mother's house, only to learn of her death. Mark and his brother, along with the police, track Marnie down. Mark says he will wait for Marnie, but she isn't able to promise the same. The police put her in handcuffs as she says, "I'm free."

THE SOURCE: *MARNIE* BY WINSTON GRAHAM Although best known today for his historical *Poldark* novels set in early 19th-century Cornwall (currently the subject of a BBC television series), the English author Winston Graham spent most of his career writing contemporary suspense. Working during the second half of the 20th century, Graham often focused on ordinary people caught in morally fraught situations and the gradual discovery of hidden past events. Both of these features arise in *Marnie*. Shortly after its publication in 1961, the legendary director Alfred Hitchcock began adapting it into a film, and his *Marnie* premiered in 1963, starring Tippi Hedren and Sean Connery. It is easy to see why Graham's novel was a compelling source for Hitchcock: Its themes of romantic obsession, female culpability, psychological trauma, and frustrated sexual desire are the defining tropes of Hitchcock's career. But while the film sets the action in America and shifts toward a more optimistic ending for Mark and Marnie, the libretto that Nicholas Wright has developed in conjunction with Nico Muhly for his opera returns to the greyer worldview of Graham's novel. It preserves the setting in London and Buckinghamshire as well as the inherent class tensions of late 1950s/early '60s Britain, and includes the lecherous character of Terry, whose tantalizing countertenor lines disquiet Marnie. It also removes the tidy ending of Hitchcock's film, instead embracing the more equivocal closing of the novel. Above all, the opera restores the distinctive interior voice of Marnie herself, using the dramatic forces of the art form to represent her fractured identity and most deeply buried self.

SYNOPSIS

ACT I: *England, 1959*. At the accounting firm of Crombie & Strutt where she works as a clerk, Marnie meets Mark Rutland, a handsome client of Mr. Strutt's. Mark is immediately attracted to her. After the office closes, Marnie steals money from the office safe, and as she escapes, she plans how she will change her identity and appearance when she moves on to the next town, as she has done before. Marnie visits her invalid mother and gives her the money for a new house. Meanwhile, Marnie's theft is discovered at Crombie & Strutt, and Mr. Strutt vows to bring Marnie to justice. Marnie applies for a job at Halcyon Printing and is shocked when the man who interviews her is Mark Rutland, whom she met at Mr. Strutt's office. To Marnie's relief, he seems not to recognize her and offers her the job. She also meets Mark's brother Terry, Mark's "wayward deputy" at the firm.

Weeks later, Terry, a notorious womanizer, invites Marnie to a poker evening at his flat. When she joins her co-workers at a pub, they urge her to accept Terry's invitation. A stranger appears, claiming to have known Marnie under a different name, but she dismisses him. Marnie joins Terry and his friends Malcolm and Laura Fleet for the poker game at his apartment. After the game, Terry makes a pass at Marnie. She rebuffs him and escapes.

At Mark's house, his mother, Mrs. Rutland, pressures him to improve his performance as managing director. Marnie arrives, having been invited by Mark on the pretext of work. Marnie mentions her beloved horse, Forio, and Mark speaks of his loneliness since his wife died. A thunderstorm erupts, terrifying Marnie. Mark comforts her, then declares his romantic fascination with her and tries to kiss her. Marnie quits her job on the spot and flees. She plans to escape the two brothers by changing identity once again. She breaks into the Halcyon safe, but Mark catches her in the act. He threatens to turn her in unless she agrees to marry him. Marnie has no choice but to comply. Marnie's mother receives a letter from Marnie, saying she'll be out of touch for a while. She discusses her mistrust of Marnie with Lucy, her neighbor. Marnie's mother believes that when Marnie was a girl, she killed her baby brother. On their honeymoon cruise, Mark reveals to Marnie that he recognized her when she applied for the job and has known all along that she is a thief. She refuses sex with him and he tries to rape her. She locks herself in the bathroom and slits her wrists.

ACT II: Weeks later, Marnie removes the bandages from her wrists. The scars are fading, but she feels her wounds will never heal and vows to remain strong and resist Mark. Marnie and Mark dress for a business dinner. Marnie gives him information that leads him to conclude that Terry is scheming to take over the family firm. Frustrated by their sexless marriage, Mark presses Marnie to consult an analyst. In return, he promises to bring her horse, Forio, to be stabled on his property. Marnie sees the analyst for several weeks and eventually recalls a memory of a thunderstorm, a soldier, her mother, and her dead baby brother.

Marnie and Mark arrive at the country club for his mother's party. Terry threatens to expose Marnie as a fraud. Mr. Strutt appears and recognizes Marnie, despite her denials. Mark agrees to meet with him later to resolve the situation. Terry excoriates Mark for his entrapment of Marnie, and the two men fight. Mrs. Rutland shocks Mark when she reveals that it is she who has been planning a takeover of the family firm, and it will now be run by Malcolm Fleet.

Marnie and Mark take part in a fox hunt, with Marnie riding Forio. When the horse panics and bolts, Marnie is thrown, and Mark, trying to help her, is injured. Forio is so badly hurt that he must be shot. Mark's mother visits him in the hospital and expresses bewilderment at his marriage. Marnie arrives, and the conflict between her and Mark eases, but as she leaves, she steals his keys. Deciding she must leave the country to avoid her growing feelings for Mark, Marnie breaks into the office safe, but she finds herself unable to take the money. She goes to see her mother but arrives to find that her mother has died. At the cemetery, the mourners assemble. Lucy tells her that it was her mother, not Marnie, who killed Marnie's baby brother. Marnie rejects her feelings of guilt and her need to transgress. Mark appears, accompanied by Terry and the police. Mark hopes that Marnie and he might reconcile, but Marnie can't promise anything. She only knows she must face the truth. She gives herself up to the police with the words, "I'm free."

CHARACTER		VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Marnie	An enigmatic young woman	mezzo-soprano	Marnie moves from job to job, stealing from each employer and then changing her identity, though she does not understand what drives her to do this.
Mark Rutland	A widower, owner of a printing firm	baritone	Lonely after the death of his wife, Mark is drawn to Marnie from the start and doesn't hesitate to entrap her when an opportunity arises.
Terry Rutland	Mark's brother and colleague in business	countertenor	A known womanizer, Terry pursues Marnie despite his suspicions that she isn't exactly what she seems.
Mrs. Rutland	Mother of Mark and Terry	soprano	Mrs. Rutland has her own ideas about how both her sons and the family business should operate.
Marnie's mother	Marnie's invalid mother	mezzo-soprano	The figure of Marnie's mother pervades much of the story, shaping Marnie's behavior and disorders.
Lucy	A neighbor who helped raise Marnie	alto	Lucy is now a caretaker for Marnie's mother but remembers the traumatic events of Marnie's childhood.
Shadow Marnies	Four body doubles for Marnie	sopranos and mezzo-sopranos	The Shadow Marnies reflect and distort Marnie's interior life, representing her anxieties and emotional defenses.

The first UK edition of Winston Graham's novel

Grace Church, Providence
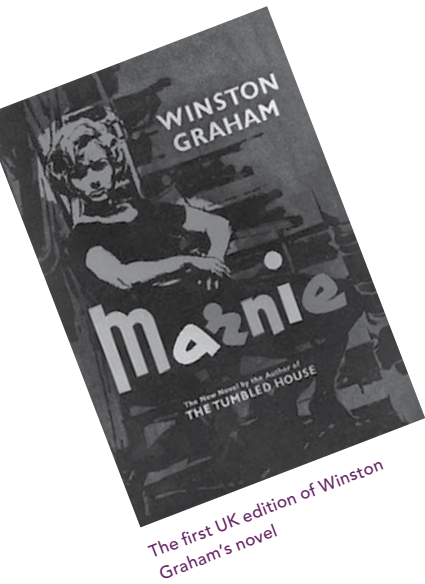
1961   The English author Winston Graham writes his novel *Marnie*.

1963   The film *Marnie* by Alfred Hitchcock premieres, featuring Tippi Hedren and Sean Connery.

1981   Nico Muhly is born in Randolph, Vermont, on August 26, to an artistic family. His mother is a painter and his father is a filmmaker. Throughout Nico's childhood, the Muhlys divide their time between Vermont and Providence, Rhode Island.

1990   Muhly begins piano lessons, and within a year, joins the boys choir at Grace Church (pictured at left) in downtown Providence, where he is first introduced to the works of the Anglican choral tradition. His abiding love for Weelkes, Gibbons, Tallis, and Tye dates from this time. Also at this time, Muhly begins composing. His first composition lessons are with Kevin Sullivan and Ron Nelson, composers active in Providence.

1995   Muhly attends the Boston University Tanglewood Institute summer program and decides to become a composer. Today, Muhly teaches composition students at Tanglewood.

1999   Muhly begins a joint degree program at Columbia University and the Juilliard School. His composition professors include John Corigliano and Christopher Rouse. While there, he hones his technical skills in composition. In his English program at Columbia, he focuses on postcolonial literature and the novels of Charles Dickens. He graduates in 2003 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and in 2004 with a Master of Music degree in composition. During his freshman year, Muhly becomes an intern for Philip Glass, one of the preeminent composers of American minimalism. Muhly continues to work with Glass until 2008 as an editor and conductor, often focusing on arranging parts for his film scores.

2006   Muhly joins the artist-run record label Bedroom Community, headed by Icelandic musician Valgeir Sigurðsson and produces his first recording, *Speaks Volumes*.

2008   Muhly composes the score to the Academy Award–winning film *The Reader*, featuring Kate Winslet and Ralph Fiennes.
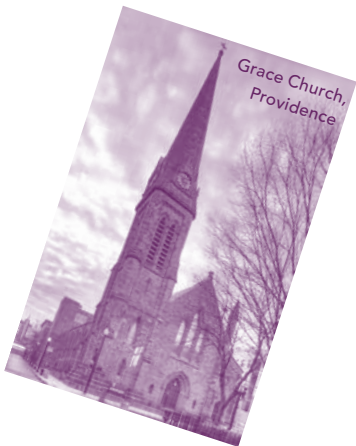
2011 Muhly works for the first time with director Michael Mayer on the Tony Kushner play *The Illusion* at the Signature Theater Company in New York. Drawing on the success of this collaboration, they remain friendly both personally and professionally

Muhly's first opera, *Two Boys*, premieres at the English National Opera in June. A co-production between the English National Opera and Metropolitan Opera, it tells the story of a grisly stabbing of one teenage boy by another and their roles in a complex web of imagined personas on the Internet.

Muhly's second opera, *Dark Sisters*, a commission from the Gotham Chamber Opera, Music Theatre Group, and the Opera Company of Philadelphia, premieres in New York on November 9. It explores a crisis among a family of women, all wives to a single, prophet-like husband in a renegade sect of Mormonism.

With Philip Glass
NEILSON BARNARD /
GETTY IMAGES NORTH AMERICA

2013 *Two Boys* premieres at the Met on October 21.

Mayer proposes the story of *Marnie* as the topic for an opera to Muhly. Together, they pitch the idea to Metropolitan Opera General Manager Peter Gelb. With Gelb's approval, they work with Paul Cremo, Director of the Met's Opera Commissioning Program, to begin developing an opera based on Winston Graham's novel. Cremo introduces Muhly to Nicholas Wright as a potential librettist.

2017 *Marnie* receives its first performance on November 15 by English National Opera at the London Coliseum.

2018 Muhly revises the opera to tighten the narrative and allow for smoother scene changes. *Marnie* premieres at the Metropolitan Opera on October 19.

"Am I / I am / And which are / you?": Voicing Marnie's Inner Life

English / Language Arts

IN PREPARATION
For this activity, students will need the reproducible resources available at the back of this guide entitled *Voicing Marnie's Inner Life*, as well as the audio selections from *Marnie* available online or on the accompanying CD.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS
English/Language Arts, Creative Writing, Drama, Humanities

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
• To identify the modes of speech used in different artistic media

• To practice close reading and listening in order to analyze literary and musical techniques

• To explore the expressive resources of grand opera

• To think critically and creatively about the opera's central themes

In *Marnie*, Nico Muhly and his librettist Nicholas Wright began with a compelling but thorny inspiration: a protagonist who eschews emotional connection, whose chameleon personas mask the strange blankness of her real self, and yet whose unreliable first-person narrative forms the entirety of her story's landscape. In developing their operatic adaptation, Muhly and Wright sought to remain true to Marnie's inner voice, while also exploiting the operatic art form's unique ability to communicate emotions and desires, both conscious and not. The opera's liminal spaces—which blur the line between identity and self-construction—form the backdrop to a story that moves seamlessly between reality and the fuguing psyche of the title character. This exercise will provide students with a nuanced understanding of Marnie's character, gained from readings in Winston Graham's source novel and the libretto, as well as from an examination of musical excerpts from the opera. Students will:

• become familiar with the character of Marnie
• examine quotations by the novel's author regarding Marnie's narrative voice
• engage in textual analysis, closely reading excerpts from the novel and the libretto
• learn how elements of the opera reflect Marnie's inner turmoil

Marnie with the four Shadow Marnies
RICHARD HUBERT SMITH / ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA

STEPS

In this activity, students will learn about the narrative style of the source novel and read several brief excerpts to analyze Marnie's distinctive voice. They will then turn to a study of the opera's libretto, reading it for its transformation of the first-person narrative of the novel. Through their investigation of the opera's musical treatment of Marnie's inner psyche, they will discover some of the musical resources of grand opera and gain a concrete experience of the story's themes of compulsion and self-knowledge.

STEP 1: Begin by familiarizing your students with the characters of the opera. Distribute the chart of *Who's Who in* Marnie found in this guide and give your students a minute or two to read it silently. Next, move on to the specifics of the plot by having students read the synopsis or the summary. You may prefer to have them take turns reading it aloud. Either way, the most important takeaway is that the opera tells the story of a troubled young woman who lies, cheats, and steals from her employers before changing her identity and moving to a new job—all without understanding the trauma in her past that compels her to repeat this destructive cycle over and over.

STEP 2: Let students know that Nico Muhly's opera *Marnie* is based on the 1961 novel *Marnie* by the English author Winston Graham. In the novel, the story is told from the point of view of Marnie herself, entirely in the first person. Prompt students to make observations on some of the features of first-person narratives.

- How can you recognize a first-person narrator? (the use of "I" or "we")
- What can be known about the events of a story told in the first-person? (only what is observed by the narrator)
- Does the story present insight into the thoughts and perspectives of other characters? (no, only as they are revealed to and understood by the narrator)

In his memoirs, Winston Graham wrote about the challenges he faced in writing in the first person in *Marnie*. Pass out the reproducible handouts at the back of this guide entitled *Voicing Marnie's Inner Life*, and guide students' attention to the first section. Have them read the two quotes by Graham (or assign students to read them aloud), and then open a brief discussion on the creative implications of writing through a flawed first-person narrator. Can the reader believe what the narrator says? How can the reader deduce what is real and what is not? How might the narrator's perspective distort her portrayal of the events of the story? There is also space available at the bottom of the handout for students to record their observations.

STEP 3: Divide the class into several groups, and have students turn to the next section of the reproducible handouts, which includes several excerpts from Winston

Graham's novel. Assign each group one of the excerpts and have them discuss how Marnie portrays her situation and what, if anything, can be deduced about who she really is. Does she seem to be telling the truth? Is it possible to catch a glimpse of her mind at work? How does she present herself and depict her own desires? Is there anything unusual about the narrative voice she uses when she refers to herself?

STEP 4: Now ask students to consider the types of changes that would necessarily occur in adapting a novel—particularly a first-person novel as in the case of *Marnie*—into a work of drama. Whereas the novel could be understood as a series of monologues all written in the voice of Marnie herself, a dramatic work would need to include the voices of other characters. Ask students: How might it be possible to retain the individual, skewed perspective of the title character of Graham's novel in a setting in which other characters have dialogue and express their perspectives?

Drama students may be familiar with the term soliloquy, which refers to an extended speech in which a character expresses his or her thoughts aloud, usually directly to the audience. In drama, soliloquys give characters the opportunity to reflect on their hidden thoughts and desires and to reveal them to the audience—often while keeping them concealed from other characters. They give the audience a window to see into a character's mind.

In opera, composers have a similar tool at their disposal: the aria. A piece for solo voice with instrumental accompaniment, an aria gives the composer a platform to display a character's inner life using not only the poetry of words but with music as well. In *Marnie*, the librettist Nicholas Wright has fashioned sections of text that he calls "Links," which appear between scenes and provide a medium for Marnie to voice her thoughts.

Have students turn to the next section of the reproducible handouts, which includes the text to the first Link in *Marnie*. Explain that this scene occurs close to the opening of the opera, just after the end of the workday at Crombie & Strutt. Marnie, in the persona of Mary Holland, has just rebuffed a pass from her employer, Mr. Strutt, and emerges after her co-workers have left to break into the office safe.

Give students a moment to read Marnie's aria in the Link, or alternatively, call on a student to read it aloud. Then lead them in a discussion, covering the following questions:

- What do we learn about Marnie in this excerpt?
- How do we learn it? How would you describe Marnie's style of communication or vocabulary?
- What are the emotions that compel Marnie to behave the way she does?

Next, remind students that in opera, the meaning of the text is amplified and expanded by the musical setting. Play **Track 1**, asking students to follow the text as they listen

The company at work at Crombie & Strutt
RICHARD HUBERT SMITH/ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA

to the music. Note: The music begins at the text "Goodbye, Mary Holland." Invite students to comment on their initial impressions of the musical atmosphere, asking:

- How does this music make you feel? Peaceful? On edge? Worried?
- How would you describe the singer's voice? High? Low? Tender? Disdainful?
- What does the sound convey about the character? What kind of person would you expect this character to be, based on the sound of her voice alone?

STEP 5: In addition to expressing Marnie's inner monologues through Links, the opera presents a yet more original solution to the challenge of how to represent Marnie's flawed first-person perspective. Nico Muhly and Nicholas Wright have created a quartet of Shadow Marnies, mysterious women who appear and recede throughout the opera. They dress alike (in similar costumes to Marnie but in contrasting, bright colors), surrounding Marnie at moments of psychological turbulence. They can represent Marnie's subconscious, her past identities, the emotional protections she has erected for herself, her anxieties, and her suppressed memories. For the Shadow

The character of
Marnie's mother is associated
in the score with a distinctive
orchestration: Her scenes
include cadenzas for solo
viola. While a number of
operas feature solos for
violin—such as Gounod's
Faust, Massenet's *Thaïs*,
Janáček's *Jenùfa*, Strauss's
Der Rosenkavalier, and Berg's
Lulu, principal viola solos are
exceedingly rare. One other
notable example is Weber's
Der Freischütz, which includes
"Einst Träumte," a soprano
aria accompanied by solo
viola. It tells the story of a
disturbing dream.

Marnies, Muhly employs a musical texture that remains distinct from the surrounding voices. They sing without vibrato, in long, drawn-out syllables that obscure the text, and often in drones or with close dissonances. In the words of Muhly, "you lose track of the text, but it doesn't matter because it's cumulative emotional information."

To provide further context, you may choose to present the following quote by Nico Muhly to students, in which he describes his use of the Shadow Marnies:

"They can be soothing, or they can be antagonistic, or they can be complicit, or a combination. They can take Marnie out of herself, so she can leave one of them to steal or do something else. It was really important for me that they be a completely distinct sonic environment within the chorus. In a landscape of trees, there's one artificial one. There's something just a click off."

After introducing the concept of the Shadow Marnies to students, have them turn to the next section of the reproducible handouts, which presents an excerpt from the Act I scene at the pub. Marnie has just been recognized by a man who knew her in one of her previous identities. Shortly after she puts him off, the Shadow Marnies appear. Have students follow the text as you play **Track 2**. Note: The audio example does not set the entire text provided in the handout. As in the previous step, ask students to reflect on what they have learned about Marnie in this excerpt.

- Who is Marnie? How do we learn this?
- Does Marnie understand herself?
- Does this interaction between Marnie and the Shadow Marnies take place in the world of the pub, or somewhere else?
- How do the Shadow Marnies amplify Marnie's emotions?

STEP 6: Return the discussion to the question of the tools that opera composers (or writers of drama) may use to portray the inner thoughts of a character. If students have studied Greek tragedy, they may be familiar with the use of the chorus as a reflective force to comment on the story. In *Marnie*, Muhly sometimes deploys the chorus in a similar way. Have students turn to the next section of the reproducible handouts, which provides the text for "All night long." In this number, the chorus does not act as a group of individual characters, but rather as a collective assembly that speaks in the voice of Marnie's psyche. Have students follow the text as you play **Track 3**. The number begins with a small group of Shadow Marnies intoning "all night long," and gradually grows through the addition of more voices and instruments into an ensemble of great dramatic force. Ask students to comment on what this number adds to their understanding of Marnie. Does she possess deep feelings, or is she callous? What

drives her? Is she content to remain as she is? Or is she even sufficiently self-aware to know what she wants?

STEP 7: Wrap up the activity by asking students to consider the three musical elements in *Marnie* they have studied—Muhly's use of Link episodes, the Shadow Marnies, and the chorus—and reflect on which of these tools gave them the most insight into Marnie's inner life. Which came closest to replicating the distinctive first-person narrative style of the novel? Did one element feel more distinctively 'operatic'?

FOLLOW UP: Regarding his choice to have the Shadow Marnies sing in an early-music style, Muhly has remarked on his love of that music and its importance in his own musical development. Have students reflect on the music that would form their own personal soundtracks. If their psyche had a voice, how would it sing?

A CONVERSATION WITH NICO MUHLY

American composer Nico Muhly has emerged as one of the most prolific composers of the 21st century, one whose diverse inspirations and collaborators range from Philip Glass, Björk, and the Faroese musician Teitur, to the Anglican cathedral repertory of Renaissance composers such as Weelkes, Tallis, and Tye. Now, for the second time in five years, the Met presents the American premiere of a new Muhly opera. Looking ahead to *Marnie*'s arrival, Muhly spoke to the Met's Angela Marroy Boerger about his work's "very operatic" story and the influences behind his music.

You've mentioned that when director Michael Mayer proposed *Marnie* as the subject for a new opera, you were immediately on board. What is it about this story that convinced you that it belonged on the operatic stage?
I've long maintained that one of the great things about theater—but also about opera—is that most of it relies on a fundamental lie, on a fundamental misconception or an untruth. *Così fan tutte* is the best example of this. You dress up as someone else to show what you actually think. Or when someone else is in costume, you believe something that you ordinarily wouldn't have. This happens on stage as an element of the plot, but it also happens between the characters and the audience. We are all asked to believe in this deception. In *Marnie*, that con is at the heart of the story.

And it's at the heart of Marnie's own identity.
You're absolutely right. What drew me to *Marnie* was that if you re-invent yourself constantly, as I dealt with in *Two Boys*, what you *actually* are is an opera composer. In this way, Marnie has written a piece for five or six different women, and she stars in it—she's Cindy Sherman [the late–20th-century self-portraitist and photographer]. But eventually you get caught, not by the police or by a man, but caught up in your own creation.

You are very open about the influence of your time singing in the boys choir at Grace Church in Providence, and the sonorities of early music often echo throughout your own work. What is it about this idiom that you find inspiring?

For me, one of the appeals of the Anglican choral tradition is teamwork—the idea that this music is not all about one single person; it's not a showy, Romantic way of making music. I like that it resists a Romantic sense of how a musical climax works and a Romantic sense of how time passes in music. That's been a fundamental concern of what I write both instrumentally and vocally: how to make concert music compelling and communicative, which still hews to my roots.

It's fascinating how you've adapted this style for the Shadow Marnies, who reflect and distort Marnie's inner life. Why did you choose to have them speak in the early-music language of drones, descants, and careful dissonances?

I was seeking a representation of what, if I were in Marnie's environment, would be the music that would cling to me. The

answer would be Taverner; it would be Tallis, Brown, Tye. Those very long high lines that you hear—that's that sound that you get addicted to, that you hear the Tallis Scholars and Stile Antico singing. Now that I've written for those groups, I feel a certain deepening or thickening of my relationship with that sound.

It's also a fundamentally choral style. How does this reflect your understanding of contemporary grand opera?

If you're going to write a grand opera, you should *write* one. What you have is a couple hundred years of power behind the form. In the same way that if you're commissioned to do something for a cathedral that's been around since 1260, you should harness the power of that space. There is so much nested history there. But to harness it doesn't necessarily mean to deploy it; it means to be aware of it. To be true to it and to not say, "I'm trying to set this on fire." There are other people who are more than happy to set it on fire, and I will throw them the match. But for me, I want to use the chorus. I want to have movement. I want to have a bunch of principals. I want there to be a reason for it to be big and a reason for there to

be movement on stage. I'm interested in creating a document, which is to say, the score, which suggests to the designers, to the director, to the video team, the actors, the choreographers, to everyone, to harness their sense of the power of this thing and deploy it all together.

One of the most powerful moments in *Marnie* is the choral number "All night long." Could you tell us about that?

What you begin with is the Shadow Marnies, inside the ensemble in this little ripieno solo group, as in a concerto grosso configuration [in which a small group is set against a larger one]. It starts with that fundamental core, and then the larger chorus comes in, and then it transforms into this gigantic, whirling, properly Romantic thing. For me, the scale of that chorus is really satisfying because it starts with two voices, and then one descant, and it gets bigger and bigger. It's one of the louder moments in the piece. Proportionally, it was about starting with that kernel and exploding into full anxiety. But it also traces the history of vocal production. You begin from an early music style, and it explodes outwards. It's one of my favorite parts.

17

Minimalism, Aleatory Music, and Drones, Oh My!

Music

IN PREPARATION
For this activity, students will need the reproducible resources available at the back of this guide entitled *Minimalism, Aleatory Music, and Drones, Oh My!*, as well as the audio selections from *Marnie* available online or on the accompanying CD. You will also need a musical staff on your chalk or whiteboard, staff paper, and assorted orchestral, band, or Orff instruments.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS
Chorus, Band, Orchestra, Music Theory, Humanities, Art

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
• To gain a basic understanding of various compositional trends in contemporary classical music

• To become familiar with Nico Muhly's musical style in advance of the HD broadcast

• To practice composition and transcribe brief musical examples

• To replicate and improvise upon simple musical material

The notion of analyzing a contemporary opera can be intimidating. The listener may have no knowledge of the composer's style or even a frame of reference of other recent works. In Nico Muhly's opera *Marnie*, newcomers to contemporary classical music can find several readily-discernible auditory elements to help them along: minimalistic textures, aleatory music performance, and drones. Muhly's eclectic drawing from these disparate elements also serves the function of representing musically the conflicting psychological forces at work in Marnie's world. His music simultaneously depicts not only the conversations around his title character but also her deeper anxieties and troubled psyche. This exercise invites students to engage with these musical techniques as represented in Muhly's opera and then to respond to them creatively by composing their own versions.

Students will:
• develop new musical vocabulary
• listen critically to musical examples and identify their distinct components
• develop and perform both composed and improvised musical elements

STEPS
In this activity, students will listen to brief excerpts from *Marnie* and read those sections of the score, analyzing them for their use of minimalistic elements, drones, and aleatory processes—all important aspects of Nico Muhly's compositional style. Based on their understanding of these concepts, students will compose brief musical excerpts and perform them using a combination of instruments and voices. The creative result of this combined work will be the composition of an original brindisi (a drinking-song style often used in opera), as well as a deeper understanding of some of the compositional aspects of classical music written in the past 50 years.

STEP 1: It will be helpful for students to gain a basic sense of some of the elements in Muhly's musical style by reviewing the *Ten Essential Musical Terms*. An understanding of the concepts of aleatory music and minimalism, as well as the vocal style of early music will aid them in the course of the activity. Discuss the terms at the start of class, using your voice and/or instruments to demonstrate where possible. Explain that Muhly draws on not only the compositional style of minimalism in his opera, but also aleatory processes, drones, and the vocal style of early music.

STEP 2: Explore the concept of minimalism further. First, play **Track 4**, taken from the very first scene of the opera. Ask students for their impressions of this brief excerpt. What kinds of adjectives would they use to describe its shape? Is it complex or simple? Does it seem static? Does it have a narrative direction or seem to represent anything? Drawing on the definition students studied in the *Ten Essential Musical Terms*, ask them to describe how this excerpt can be understood as exemplifying minimalism.

Distribute the reproducible handouts entitled *Minimalism, Aleatory Music, and Drones, Oh My!* and point students' attention to the transcription of this excerpt. Play Track 4 again, now asking students to follow along to the music. Using the score, can they describe what is going on harmonically in this example? (The music is built on a D-minor triad; in the second and third measures, an E is added to the triad, and in the fourth and fifth measures, a B♭ is added. The basic sonority for the entire example is D minor.) Have students describe what is going on rhythmically in the example. (There is both constantly pulsating eighth-note motion as well as a series of shifting on- and off-beat eighth notes.) Guide students toward an agreement that the example includes very simple melodic material, a static harmonic background, combined with an active but directionless rhythmic impulse. The music is repetitious and static.

Track 5 provides a second example of a minimalistic texture from the opera. Play this excerpt for students, again asking them to describe its melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic shape. How can it be understood as an example of minimalism? (In the first two measures, Muhly oscillates between two chords or note clusters; in the next four measures, he reduces the texture further, flipping between a fourth (D–G) and the C below. The rhythm is uniform—a constant stream of eighth notes.) Students may also notice that in the final two measures of the excerpt, Muhly introduces a long, dissonant note in the double basses. In addition to displaying a minimalistic texture, this example also demonstrates that Muhly does not adhere to a minimalistic practice exclusively, but rather uses it as only one technique in an eclectic array of compositional practices.

STEP 3: In the following exercise, students will collectively compose their own minimalistic musical excerpt. Ask the class to "pick a chord, any chord." C major, D major, A minor—anything is permissible. Students can call out their preferences; the teacher should choose one option out of their answers (when picking one of the chords that students nominate, you may decide to choose one whose pitches are played comfortably on the instruments in your class). Notate the tonic triad of this key on the chalkboard. For example, let's hypothesize that the class chooses D minor:

Next, ask the class to identify two of the notes in this triad (for example, either the D, F, or A) that will move by stepwise motion to form a new interval. For instance, they could choose to move the D to an E, and the F to a G. Write the resulting interval (in this example, the minor third from E–G) next to the original triad.
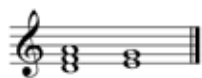
Now, have students recall both the ostinato-like repetition and the rhythmic motion in the two musical examples from *Marnie*. How can you re-create this texture using the two musical components the class has developed—in our example a D minor triad and the minor third from E–G? The goal is to compose a single measure of music; you should assume you are composing in $\frac{4}{4}$. The music should display constant motion, but the rhythm may be completely static or slightly more complex through the use of rests. The only requirement is that the music must be built exclusively from the two components developed above, oscillating between the two sonorities or repeating them in a different way. Let students guide this process.

You may end up with something like this:

Or this:

Make sure that you notate the completed measure on the board. For more advanced classes, you may also have the class determine what the articulation should be. Complete the notation by including a repeat sign at the end of the measure. Demonstrate by performing the measure of music on the piano, repeating it several times.

Now, have students help orchestrate and notate the music. Divide these notes among the instruments or voices you have available in your class. You could assign

the top notes to woodwinds or sopranos (singing on a neutral syllable such as "la"), the middle notes to recorders, the lowest notes to trombone, or any combination of available instruments at your disposal. While you notate the three lines for your three instruments or instrument groups, students should do the same on their own staff papers, according to the instruments they have. Be sure that students notate in the clef appropriate for their instrument.

Using the example developed above, you might produce something like this:

<div style="float:right;">

</div>

Finally, have students perform the minimalistic music that they have composed and orchestrated, repeating it ad infinitum, until cut off by the teacher.

STEP 4: Return to the idea of drones from the *Ten Essential Musical Terms*. Play the excerpt from *Marnie* on **Track 6**. Let students know that the score for a portion of the example is provided in the reproducible handouts.

FUN FACT: Muhly compares his aleatory music—for instance in his brindisi—to the structure of a beehive. He notes, "I want it to feel aleatory in the way that a beehive is aleatory, where each bee has its own little internal pattern. There's an element of chance and yet the routine is always the same."

Using their ears as well as their eyes as they read the score, ask the class to identify where the drone is located in this excerpt. (Answer: It is a vocal drone and is sung by the four Shadow Marnies, who share the pitches the G-D-G—an open fifth with the bottom note repeated at the octave. They enter just before Marnie sings, "How many hundred quid, I wonder?")

Now have the class compose a vocal drone, following the same process of group decision-making as in the previous step. The drone may include one of the notes from the minimalism activity, or it may be built from an unrelated pitch. Note: The more distant the relationship between the drone notes and the minimalist example, the more difficult they will be to perform together in the activity to come.

For instance, the vocal drone that your class develops may look like this:

Establish the pitches with your instrument or the piano, and then have the whole class perform the vocal drone on a neutral syllable, divided according to students' vocal ranges. Ask that students sing without vibrato, using straight tone. This is the vocal style that Muhly assigns to the Shadow Marnies.

Nico Muhly on Drones

Much of Muhly's music includes droning—by instruments, voice, or machine. Whether for solo instrument and piano (*Drones & Viola*; *Drones & Violin*), small ensemble (*Drones, Variations, Ornaments*; *Looking Forward*), or within a large-scale work such as opera, Muhly's compositions employ this musical texture in distinctive ways. Here, he discusses what drones signify for him and how he uses them in *Marnie*.

"Every space has an ambient sound, for instance the sound of the air conditioner in the room I'm sitting in. That has a pitch, and it's unceasing. For me, the times that I'm the most alone in my thoughts are when I'm in an ostensibly quiet but also "droney" environment. For instance, on airplanes, but also in the shower, or when using the vacuum, or on the train. All these situations have a specific set of notes that you hear. I've found these places to be conducive to thinking, either positive or negative. The dark place is visible at those times, as is a future brightness.

For me, agitation can happen in still environments just as easily as in stressful ones. And in *Marnie*, I wanted to show musically that her fearful way of existing can happen over tremendously complicated music just as easily as it can over just two notes, over a drone."
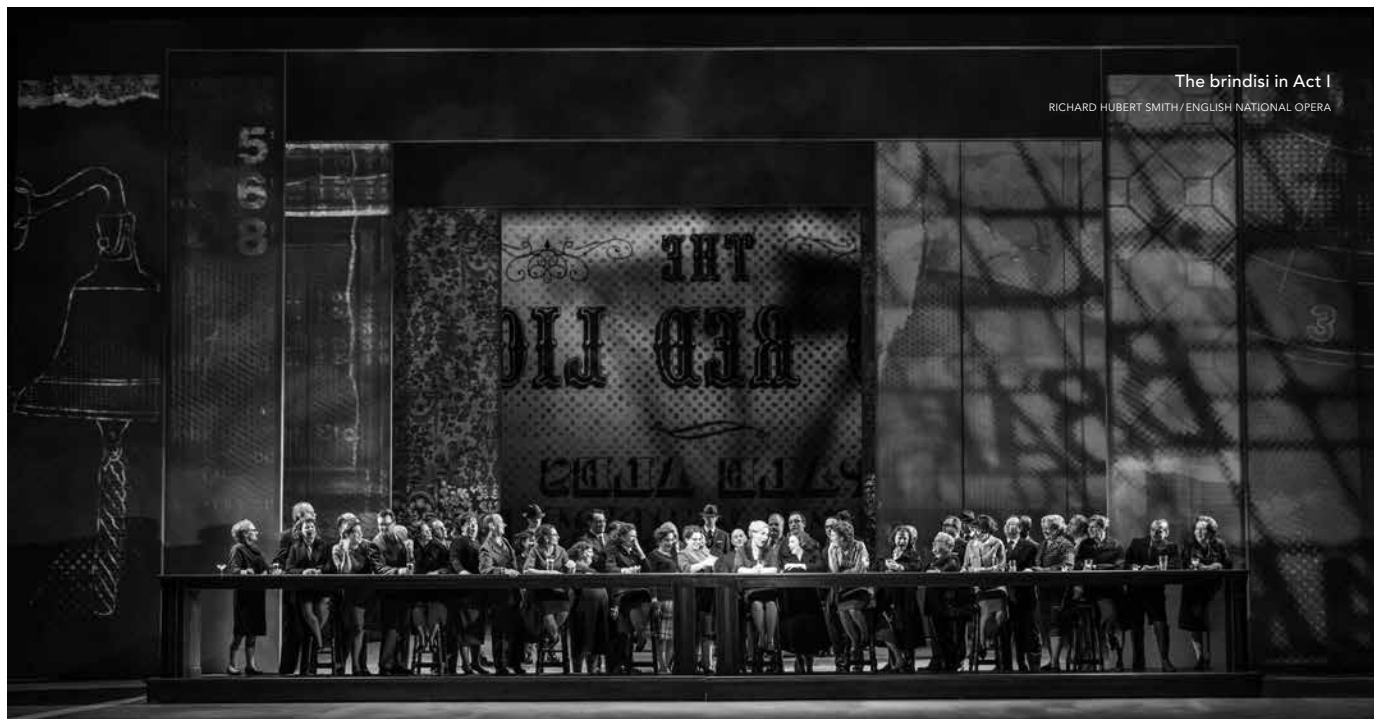
Next, divide the class in half. One half should continue singing the vocal drone, while the other returns to their instruments, performing the notated minimalistic music from Step 3. Repeat until everyone is comfortable and able to stay on pitch.

STEP 5: Now, we will shift gears and consider aleatory music, another of the compositional processes that Muhly uses in *Marnie*. Simply put, in aleatory music, the composer relinquishes absolute control over the composition and performance of his or her music, allowing chance or decisions on the part of the performer to determine its shape. Consider the following performance instruction from *Marnie* (also provided for students in the reproducible handouts):

In various places, the chorus has passages in which they are asked to vacillate on a given set of pitches with a given set of lyrics. Freely sing any string of the text on any of the given pitches, incorporate rests between statements, and do not coordinate with any other singers.

In this example, singers are free to sing the names of contemporaneous drinks.

[names of drinks]

A VE-RY strong mar-ti-ni.   A side-car, please.   TWO___ side-cars.

Play **Track 7** for students; they may follow along to the text in the reproducible handout, which also includes a portion of the score, at the passage coinciding with "(names of drinks)." Explain that this musical number is Muhly's interpretation of a brindisi, a form familiar from operatic history, which is meant to be a drinking song. Muhly uses the aleatory process described in the performance note on the previous page to create a musical sound meant to represent the cacophonous din heard in a pub as customers place their drink orders.

STEP 6: In a brief musical exercise, students will practice the same sort of aleatory composition and performance that Muhly employs in his brindisi. First, prompt students to develop a 3-note tone cluster. For ease of performance, the tone cluster should draw on the pitches used in Steps 4 and 5. For instance:

Make sure you notate the tone cluster on the board; students should notate it on their staff paper.

Let students know that their brindisi will be set in the school cafeteria. Like Muhly's piece, singers will call out the drink of their choice as they wait in line. Prompt students to supply examples: chocolate milk, apple juice, Diet Coke, lemonade, bottled water, etc. Remind students of Muhly's performance instruction: "Each chorus member should sing, on any of the given pitches (or a combination thereof), a short list of things they might drink. Incorporate rests, have this feel like the natural thought process of deciding between [Mountain Dew or Red Bull]." Give students a moment or two to decide which drink they'll "order" in the brindisi. The choice of their drink is up to them, within the limitations of something that could be found in a school cafeteria. Similarly, exactly which notes students will sing is up to them, as long as they are drawn from the tone cluster. Students should determine their own rhythm.

Demonstrate the pitches in the chosen tone cluster on your instrument or on the piano; play them consecutively and in different orders so that they are firmly established in students' ears. Feel free to demonstrate an example or two of a "drink order" yourself, and then call on students to practice and demonstrate their own examples.

Now, perform your aleatory music as a group. Lead the group by conducting—and set the pace by using the same tempo and meter from the previous activities. Conduct one empty bar, and then students may begin to enter with their drink orders. Remind them that they don't need to coordinate their music with that of anyone else; they don't need to enter on a down-beat or even in the first measure. They may repeat

their order as many times as they like; they may also change their order. You can let this aleatory performance go on for several measures.

STEP 7: As a final step, combine the three elements of this lesson into an eclectic whole, using the minimalist excerpt, the vocal drones, and the aleatory choral music developed in the preceding activities. As necessary, review students' memories of the music by guiding them towards the transcriptions both on the board and those they notated on their staff paper.

Divide the class into three groups: instruments (or voices) performing the minimalist excerpt; voices performing the drone; and the chorus performing the aleatory drink orders. As preparation, have each group play or sing its portion alone as you conduct. Set pitches from the piano as necessary. Next, let everyone know that once they begin playing or singing, they should continue repeating until you cut everyone off together.

Then, begin with the minimalist instruments. Conduct one empty bar, and then have them play three to four measures of their music alone before you cue the entrance of the vocal drones. Let the two groups perform together for another three to four bars. (Note: Singers in the second group may take breaths as necessary, in a manner uncoordinated with other singers.) Finally, cue the entrance of the chorus, who can enter at any time following your signal with their aleatory drink orders. Let the performance of this combined whole go on for another eight bars, or until you are satisfied that the disparate parts have coalesced into a coordinated but eclectic whole.

OPTIONAL: For advanced music students, you may add additional components to the students' brindisi. For example, you may have a fourth group of students play ostinati with drums, claves, or triangles—either all performing the same rhythm, or each with a different rhythm that students compose.

A fifth group might take as inspiration the Shadow Marnies, who represent and comment on Marnie's inner life. Have students supply a phrase that could be part of the interior monologue of someone in the cafeteria. ("I'm so hungry / Who will sit with me / I hate bologna," etc.) Guide students to develop a melody using step-wise motion, in long durations, matching the Shadow Marnies' vocal style. Provide a second line at the parallel third, or using a pleasing combination of consonance and dissonance. For example:

I hate bo - lo - gna

FUN FACT: The score for *Marnie* calls for a large contingent of percussion instruments: bell plates, chimes, claves, crotales (small pitched cymbals), bass drum, brake drum, kick drum, glockenspiel, guiro, ratchet, small and large tam tams, triangle, vibraphone, woodblocks, and xylophone, in addition to a piano, celesta, and a series of offstage drums.

Ten Essential Musical Terms

The following list of terms provides basic vocabulary to help your students engage more deeply with the music of *Marnie*.

Aleatory Music A style that includes elements left undetermined by the composer. The term derives from the Latin word *alea* (dice), referencing the practice's reliance on chance. Aleatory music can develop from several procedures. It may include music in which the composer relies on chance procedures—such as coin tossing—to determine musical elements which are then written down in fixed notation. It may also include compositions in which the system of notation itself eschews the precise indication of pitch and duration (the notation may instead be abstract or graphical), or compositions in which the performer must choose between several clearly indicated options. In *Marnie*, Muhly's aleatory music is of this third type and includes choral passages in which the singers are asked to vacillate on a given set of pitches and an improvised lyric, without coordinating with other singers.

Bisbigliando A performance direction used by Nico Muhly in *Marnie*, in which the performer should play the indicated pitches as a "free murmuring in any order." The word is Italian for "whispering." Sometimes used as a performance direction for harp, the term in Muhly's usage refers to the murmuring arpeggiation of a single chord in an order chosen by the performer.

Brindisi A drinking song. Common in 19th-century opera, the brindisi often functions as an invitation to a group of people to raise a glass and toast something or someone. Notable examples include "Libiamo ne' lieti calici" from Verdi's *La Traviata* and "Viva il vino spumeggiante" from Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana.*

Drone The sounding of a fixed pitch or set of pitches that is maintained throughout a musical piece or section. Drones are common in both early music and folk music from around the globe, for instance in music played on the bagpipe, Tibetian trumpet, and Provençal tabor. Drones are built most typically on the home pitch of a melody and sometimes an interval—commonly the fifth or fourth—above it. In *Marnie*, the Shadow Marnies occasionally sing vocal drones.

Early Music The vast body of music written from ancient times through the Renaissance and early Baroque era (ending roughly 1700). In the most general terms, much early music, especially that of the Renaissance, follows strict rules on the treatment of dissonance, and uses and resolves it strategically. Since the mid-1970s, interest has grown in preserving and performing early music, including attempts to replicate "authentic" performance practice, which includes singing with straight tone, improvising historically informed ornamentation, and performing on period instruments such as natural horns and string instruments with gut strings and shorter fingerboards.

Eclecticism A feature of some contemporary classical music after the mid–20th century, eclecticism signifies the use of elements from multiple pre-existing sources and models. It entails drawing from or quoting distinct musical styles and works, rather than employing a single musical style. Nico Muhly's works are eclectic in that they employ elements of American minimalism, aleatory techniques, and Renaissance-style vocal delivery, among several other styles and compositional processes.

Minimalism A style of composition marked by a purposefully simplified melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic language. It often features lengthy repetitions and ostinatos of simple musical gestures against a static harmonic—typically diatonic—background. Arising first in the 1960s, musical minimalism was a reaction against the deeply complex atonal and fragmented music of the mid-century. One of the foremost musical minimalists is Philip Glass.

Orchestration An aspect of composition, orchestration is the art of choosing which instruments should play each musical idea in a musical work. Successful orchestration requires that the instrument chosen is appropriate to the melody—that the musical line is within the instrument's playable range and expressive capabilities. The art of orchestration also allows a composer to draw on and combine the disparate timbres of instruments to amplify melodic expression and create a wide range of musical color.

Percussion A family of instruments that produce sound through shaking or striking a resonating surface, which may be made out of metal, wood, or other materials. Percussion instruments may be pitched or unpitched, and examples include timpani and drums of all types, triangles, marimbas, gongs, and even the piano, which produces sound through the striking of hammers upon metal strings.

Straight Tone A style of singing with very little or no vibrato. It is commonly used in the performance of early music.

Supporting the Student Experience during
The Met: Live in HD Transmission

Watching and listening to a performance is a unique experience that takes students beyond the printed page to an immersion in images, sound, interpretation, technology, drama, skill, and craft. Performance activities help students analyze different aspects of the experience and engage critically with the performance. They will consider the creative choices that have been made for the particular production they are watching and examine different aspects of the performance.

Each Performance Activity incorporates a reproducible sheet. Students should bring this activity sheet to the *Live in HD* transmission and fill it out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. The activities direct attention to details of the production that might otherwise go unnoticed.

For *Marnie*, the first activity sheet, *Who Are You Wearing?*, asks students to pay particular attention to the designs that costume designer Arianne Phillips has created for Marnie. With her series of new personas and the images that she presents to the world, Marnie is a shape shifter. She creates different identities through her hair color, makeup, and manner of dress, and even within a single persona, she chooses clothes to match the dictates of her situation. Students will make notes on several of Marnie's costume designs and the information they impart about the image Marnie is trying to project.

The second, basic activity sheet is called *My Highs & Lows*. It is meant to be collected, opera by opera, over the course of the season. This sheet serves to guide students toward a consistent set of objective observations, as well as to help them articulate their own opinions. It is designed to enrich the students' understanding of the art form as a whole. The ratings system encourages students to express their critique: Use these ratings to spark discussions that require careful, critical thinking.

The Performance Activity reproducible handouts can be found in the back of this guide. On the next page, you'll find an activity created specifically for follow-up after the *Live in HD* transmission.

IN PREPARATION

For this activity, students will need the Performance Activity reproducible handouts found in the back of this guide.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND *MARNIE*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6
Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4
Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

Escaping the Prison of Her Mind: Marnie After *Marnie*

Start the class with an open discussion of the Met performance. What did students like? What didn't they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently? The discussion offers an opportunity to apply the notes on students' *My Highs & Lows* sheet, as well as their thoughts about the visual design of the Met production—in short, to see themselves as *Marnie* experts.

As becomes increasingly clear over the course of *Marnie*, no one in the story is a fully empathetic character, just as hardly anyone ever tells the truth. The opera's inhabitants are propelled by conflicting desires and efforts at self-preservation, both overt and subconscious. Consider the following quote by Nico Muhly:

"Do we ever know, can we ever settle on, who is a hero and who is a villain? As is the case in real life, there's a bit of both in all of us. Mark and Marnie … are tasked with navigating the impossible bond between these two twisted characters, and, in doing so, communicating the ways in which we are all negotiating our best and worst instincts, including those over which we enjoy some amount of control, and, of course, those we don't."

Marnie embraces her version of freedom
RICHARD HUBERT SMITH/ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA
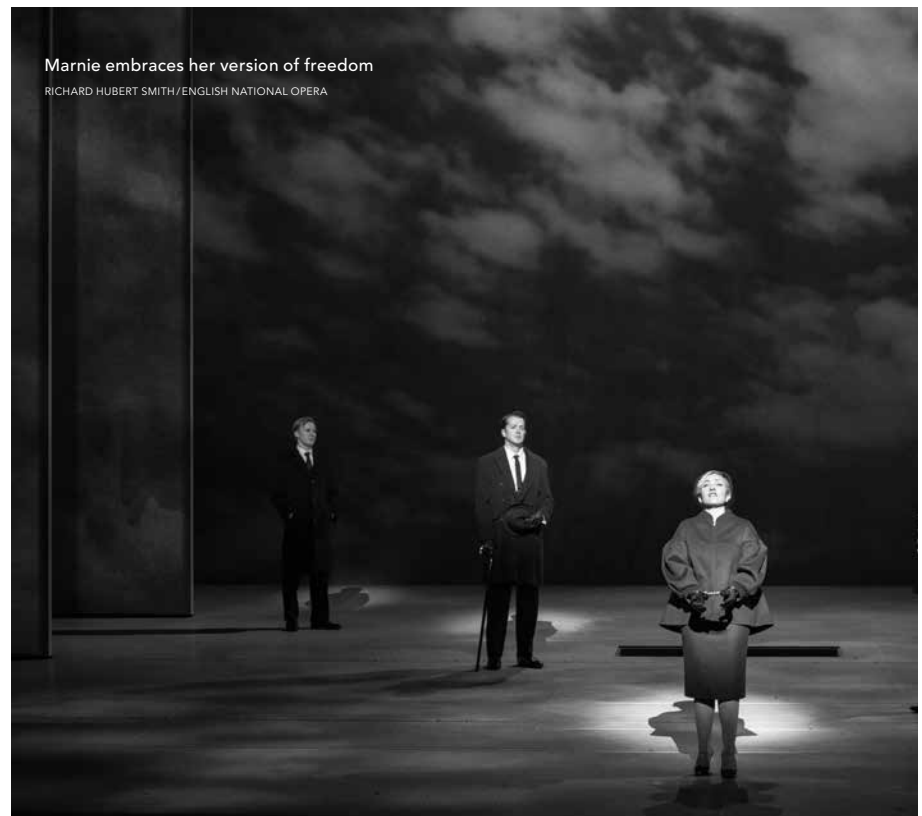
Spend some time unpacking this quotation with students. How is Marnie both hero and villain? How is Mark? What are their best and worst instincts? Next, invite students to discuss their impressions of the opera's characters and actions. You may prompt them with the following questions:

- What do you think Marnie wants? Do you think she changes over the course of the opera? What are some of the musical or dramatic indicators that she feels a certain way? How do you react to her as a protagonist?
- What are your impressions of Marnie's mother? Was there anything about her music or the staging that hinted at her true nature? (Hint: You may refer to the Fun Fact in this guide regarding Muhly's use of the viola)
- What are Terry's primary concerns? What drives him to behave the way he does?
- What of Mark? There is of course no excuse for the act of sexual violence he inflicts upon Marnie. Was he wrong to love Marnie and try to help her? What are some of the ways he tries to do the right thing? On the other hand, what are some ways in which his love for Marnie is unhealthy or unrealistic?

The ending of the opera is notably ambiguous about what the future may hold for Marnie and Mark. It is clear that after learning the truth about her mother and the death of her baby brother, Marnie feels liberated from her lifetime of repression and deceit. As she calmly accepts the handcuffs the police place on her, it seems that she will not contest the punishment she will have to face for her crimes. It isn't clear, however, how she feels about Mark—who nevertheless promises to wait for her.

As a final activity, invite students to assume the voice of Marnie and postulate what she might have to say to Mark after the events of the opera. Ask them to imagine that Marnie has been sent to prison, where she continues to react to the revelations at the end of the opera. Encourage students to think carefully about what Marnie would want to say to Mark, either explaining her past behavior, excusing or blaming herself or Mark, or writing about her hopes or limitations for any future interaction with her husband. Students will then write a letter to Mark in the voice of Marnie. Students may be creative in deciding whether Marnie is on a pathway towards recovery, or whether she continues in a more psychologically confused state, speaking through multiple personas as in the opera.

FUN FACT: In *Marnie*, each of the major characters is associated with a specific solo instrument. Marnie is accompanied by the oboe, while for her mother, it is solo viola. Mark's paired instrument is the trombone, while his brother Terry's is the trumpet. Muhly uses these twinned instruments to reflect his characters' inner thoughts and desires. He remarks, "The twin instruments can help reinforce the chamber music–like tugging between various deceits and agendas. For instance, when Marnie senses trouble, she can sing the business-casual phrases required of her, chipper and practical, whereas in the pit, the solo oboe shows us that she is already trying to find a way out of that room as quickly as possible."

Excerpts taken from the ENO dress rehearsal of November 16, 2017

MARNIE
Sasha Cooke

MARK RUTLAND
Daniel Okulitch

TERRY RUTLAND
James Laing

MRS. RUTLAND
Lesley Garrett

MARNIE'S MOTHER
Kathleen Wilkinson

Conducted by
Martyn Brabbins

English National Opera Orchestra
and Chorus

1   Link 1: "Goodbye, Mary Holland!"

2   "Maybe we don't know you either"

3   "All night long"

4   Minimalism example #1

5   Minimalism example #2

6   Drone example: "Ssh! What's that noise?"

7   Brindisi: "Cinzano and lemon"

Courtesy of English National Opera and used by permission

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY
Voicing Marnie's Inner Life

The personally told story has a number of drawbacks, and one which is frequently overlooked is that the narrative character usually remains something of a negative personality—a sort of multiple mirror reflecting other people's images but never his own.

—Winston Graham, *Memoirs of a Private Man*, 2003

The fault with the average narrator is that he is too normal. His very normality is the plain mirror reflecting the oddities of others. But let the narrator be a psychological case, like Marnie, a compulsive thief … Her mirror is not plain, it is flawed and distorts what it reflects. All the other characters therefore are at first slightly out of true because of it—that is until the reader adjusts himself. Then you have the intriguing situation of the narrator betraying her character, her slightly twisted reasoning, unselfconsciously, so that the reader gradually perceives what she is, while she does not know she is so revealing herself.

—Winston Graham, *Memoirs of a Private Man*, 2003

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Voicing Marnie's Inner Life (CONTINUED)

She put her arms around my shoulders. 'Now don't be cross. But honest, you've been with Rutland's more than six months, yet I don't feel I know you. I don't feel I can get at you. I like you, of course, but I don't know what you're thinking at this very moment. You're like somebody behind a glass wall. There, now you can be as mad as you like!'

I laughed. 'Look out; one of these days somebody might throw a stone!'

—Winston Graham, *Marnie* (p. 66)

I was in the completest hole ever. I had always thought, if I'm caught as Mary Taylor or Millie Jeffrey, that's not me. Even if I go to prison for it, that's not me. With luck I could keep them from ever knowing who I really was. I might have been able to write a note to Mother saying I was going abroad or something, keep up a sham until I came out. But there was no sham here. By some foul swivel-eyed piece of bad luck Mark Rutland had found me out as Marnie Elmer.

—Winston Graham, *Marnie* (p. 91)

After a time he said: 'And Mr. Taylor? Where does he come in?'

'Mr. Taylor?'

'Is he a little more of your imagination or does he exist?'

'Oh, no. There … was nobody. She had never—I've never been married.'

—Winston Graham, *Marnie* (p. 95)

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY
Voicing Marnie's Inner Life (CONTINUED)

'Never mind. I'm not sitting as a judge on you; I'm only trying to understand.'

I sighed shakily. 'I think perhaps that's impossible. When I'd done it, stolen that money, I could hardly believe it or understand it myself.'

'I didn't notice you rushing back.'

'No … And I shouldn't have done.'

'Well, that's honest anyway.'

'For one thing I should have been too afraid.'

We didn't say anything more for a while.

'It isn't always so easy to know the truth about yourself,' I said. 'Or is it with you? You've lived a different, easier life.'

He said nothing.

I said: 'Maybe you don't have two thoughts at the same time. I often have two thoughts—one belongs to the person I'm trying to be now, the other belongs to the kid from Devonport. And she's still a back-street urchin. I mean, you don't suddenly grow out of knowing what it's like to be hungry and knocked around and treated like dirt. You don't honestly. I mean, you may think you have, but then when you find yourself holding a thousand pounds in pound notes, well, you suddenly discover you want to bolt down the next dark alley. It's all mixed up with that. I can't explain to you, Mark.'

—Winston Graham, *Marnie* (p. 98–99)

Perhaps there was something wrong with me just then; I'd like to think so because it all got out of proportion. I think I was feeling more just then than I'd ever felt before in my life. Instead of being able to stand aside from things, as I always used to be able to, this was right in my stomach like a knife. It was happening terribly to me.

—Winston Graham, *Marnie* (p. 253)

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY
Voicing Marnie's Inner Life (CONTINUED)

TRACK 1

MARNIE: He came sliming up to me. I felt the smearing of his hand. I felt defiled.

Marnie opens the safe and empties it of banknotes.

Good-bye Mary Holland! She's exploded.
Leave that frump to rot. Captive rabbit.
Nibbles the lock. Shatters the bars.
I'm out! I'm out! Another last look around.
Another cut and run.
Another silent slip away.
How many done? How many more to come?

TRACK 2

The Shadow Marnies appear.

SHADOW MARNIE 1: Maybe we don't know you either.

MARNIE: Nobody knows who anyone really is.

The focus becomes on Marnie, as the others fade from sight.

MARNIE: When you're having a drink with your friends in a bar,
are you the same as you are with your old head-teacher,
or your gran, or the man of your dreams or the boy at the bus stop?
Do you change from day to day and hour to hour?
I could walk out of that door right now.
The sun would turn my hair to silver and my face would shine.
I could buy a scarlet dress and a pair of shoes with pointy heels
and I would dazzle everyone around me.
I could be as dainty as a princess or as waddling as a whore.
Am I how I was made, or what I have made myself to be?
And which are you?

SHADOW MARNIES: Am I/I am/And which are/you?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY
Voicing Marnie's Inner Life (CONTINUED)

TRACK 3

CHORUS: All night long the guilty hear malevolent voices.
The whisperings of suspicious neighbours.
The furtive gossipings.
The hinted accusations.
The sly inferences.
In the hours before the dawn the guilty lie and wonder.
When will discovery come?
Justice cannot be avoided.
Only the timing is indefinite.
Only the moment is unclear.
When will discovery come?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY
Minimalism, Aleatory Music, and Drones, Oh My!

TRACK 4

TRACK 5

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Minimalism, Aleatory Music, and Drones, Oh My! (CONTINUED)

TRACK 6

MARNIE: Ssh! What's that noise?
Cash a-crackle. Banknotes rustling in my handbag.
How many hundred quid, I wonder?
Six or seven if it's a penny.
This is the kill the hunter carries home.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY
Minimalism, Aleatory Music, and Drones, Oh My! (CONTINUED)

In various places, the chorus has passages in which they are asked to vacillate on a given set of pitches with a given set of lyrics. Freely sing any string of the text on any of the given pitches, incorporate rests between statements, and do not coordinate with any other singers.

In this example, singers are free to sing the names of contemporaneous drinks.

[names of drinks]

A VE-RY strong mar-ti-ni.   A side-car, please.   TWO___ side-cars.

TRACK 7

A pub. Marnie and Dawn join the other office workers at the bar as they claim their orders.

CHORUS: Cinzano and lemon.
Britvic Orange.
Half of shandy.
Lager and lime.
Liebfraumilch and soda.
Vodka and coke.
That's mine!
Mine is the Babycham.

(sing other drink names)

That leaves me with the gin and tonic.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY
Minimalism, Aleatory Music, and Drones, Oh My! (CONTINUED)

Throughout this passage, each chorus member should sing, on any of the given pitches (or a combination thereof) a short list of things they might drink. Incorporate rests; have this feel like the natural thought process of deciding between a gin & tonic or a white wine.

[names of drinks]

[names of drinks]

from here, create a busy, realistic din, dynamics ad lib.

from here, create a busy, realistic din, dynamics ad lib.

At the Met: *Who Are You Wearing?*

Use the boxes below to sketch a selection of Marnie's costumes, making notes on what her choices in clothing are meant to project about her character.

| As Mary Holland | As Maggie Hulbert | At the country club | At the fox hunt |

Marnie: My Highs & Lows

NOVEMBER 10, 2018

CONDUCTED BY ROBERT SPANO

REVIEWED BY _____

THE STARS	STAR POWER	MY COMMENTS
ISABEL LEONARD AS MARNIE	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆	
CHRISTOPHER MALTMAN AS MARK RUTLAND	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆	
DENYCE GRAVES AS MARNIE'S MOTHER	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆	
IESTYN DAVIES AS TERRY RUTLAND	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆	
JANIS KELLY AS MRS. RUTLAND	☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆	

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN/STAGING
MARY HOLLAND AT CROMBIE & STRUTT MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
MARNIE VISITS HER MOTHER MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
MARNIE'S JOB AT HALCYON PRINTING MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
AN EVENING OF POKER MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
AT MARK'S HOUSE MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
THE HONEYMOON CRUISE MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

MARK AND MARNIE AT HOME MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
MARNIE CONSULTS AN ANALYST MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
AT THE CLUB, A FIGURE FROM MARNIE'S PAST MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
MARK AND TERRY COME TO BLOWS MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
THE FOX HUNT MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
AT THE HOSPITAL MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
LUCY'S SECRET MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
AT THE GRAVESIDE MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5