

**ARCO**  
**Part I “Ostinato”**  
(a play)

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Entitled: **ARCO - Part I “Ostinato”**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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## ABSTRACT

### ARCO Part I “Ostinato” (a play)

Frederic (Nick) Carpenter

A great northern city is under siege. As it weathers its first dire winter, an orchestra of starving musicians is assembled to nourish the city with hope and the spirit of resistance. We need not look far beneath the gloss of this heroic narrative to find stories of acute desperation and moral collapse. While Maestro Prandius pushes his orchestra toward the performance of an ambitious new symphony, Bazkarian, a half-starved violinist, loses — through his own failure of courage — his wife and daughters to the void of the state’s paranoid authority. Bazkarian struggles to restore his family. Meanwhile the orchestra of which he is a member lives its finest hour; howling their defiance from within the besieged city in a performance that echoes through the century.

Fifty years later and half a world from its birthplace, Maestra Cutwater is set to conduct an anniversary edition of the now famous symphony.

*Arco - Part I* is inspired by the Leningrad Radio Orchestra’s 1942 performance of Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony under the baton of Karl Eliasberg. Once joined by *Part II*, the play will arch time, place and context to interrogate the heroic retellings of this story and to explore the legacies of war and extreme privation. The play contains preternatural moments that remind us of the diaphanous membrane between myth and memory, and haunt the plot with hunger’s own hallucinatory logic. Finally, *Arco* is about art as a substance of nourishment and the line beyond which it can no longer save the human body. Or soul.

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**ARCO**  
**Part I “Ostinato”**

by Nick Carpenter

Characters (in order of appearance)

UNGER BAZKARIAN	- a man in his 30's
YEDDA BAZKARIAN	- a woman in her 30's
JAJA BAZKARIAN	- a 7-year-old girl
LONA BAZKARIAN	- a 4-year-old girl
MAESTRO PRANDIUS	
MME TRAPEZA	
THE PHILOSOPHER	
FUNCTIONARY	
MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR	
STENOGRAPHER	
MAESTRA CUTWATER	- a woman in her 50's
PRISONERS / SOLDIERS	

This play can be performed by a minimum of 5 actors.

*(A besieged 20th century city. Winter. No food. No fuel. No electricity. No running water.)*

*(MAESTRO PRANDIUS  
conducts a familiar passage  
of an upbeat classic. The  
orchestra's sound is remarkably  
thin and loose.)*

*(On a park bench, UNGER sits  
and wolfs down bread.)*

*(In a freezing bedroom, YEDDA and  
her children — JAJA and LONA — sit  
in bed, propped up by pillows,  
huddled under blankets. They are all  
sharing a cigarette.)*

*(The music becomes so laboured  
that PRANDIUS waves his  
musicians into silence. With  
pleading eyes, he resets  
the tempo and counts the  
orchestra back in. No one plays.)*

\*\*\*\*

*(UNGER stands in the cold bedroom, at the foot of the bed that holds YEDDA, JAJA and LONA.  
They remain huddled under blankets, sharing a cigarette. LONA's eyes are closed. We know  
he's alive, because he inhales when the cigarette is put between his lips.)*

UNGER  
There was a crow  
She must have followed me  
I know  
How could there be a crow  
There are no more crows  
But  
There was a crow  
Must have watched me from the shop  
Between me and the sun  
The last bird in the city  
I had our bread in my coat  
Four-and-a-half hours I'd waited  
Got the bread  
Weighed the bread

And I was out  
Fast  
Along the water, past the old fish stalls  
Comida Street took two bombs last night  
So I went through the park  
But the new snow  
Soft as flour  
Up to my knees  
Every step  
I began to feel dizzy  
I stopped — I had to  
I sat — I had to Yedda  
To eat  
Or I would have fallen  
The queue for bread  
Four-and-a-half hours  
I ate my ration beneath the stone lions  
But still, I wasn't well  
It frightened me. I had this feeling of  
Of collapse  
I'd never felt before  
As if all the tunnels inside me were collapsing  
I was afraid to stand  
I was afraid even to try to stand  
So I took out the other pieces  
Your rations  
Just to look at them  
Your pieces of bread  
To give me strength  
I placed them on my knees and looked down at them  
And it worked  
Honestly children  
Yedina  
Just to look at the bread  
To imagine you all eating  
The strength it would give my family  
I felt this warmth inside me  
This warm idea  
Strings  
Gliding into my arms and legs  
And I knew I could stand  
And I was about to stand

YEDDA  
When the crow

UNGER  
Yes the crow

YEDDA  
From between you and the sun

UNGER  
Suddenly she was there  
I hadn't seen her the entire time  
But from the branch above me

YEDDA  
One crow stole all our bread

UNGER  
Stole  
No Yedina  
I gave it to her

JAJA  
You gave our bread to a crow

YEDDA  
Of course he didn't  
There's no crow Jaja  
Your father has eaten our bread

*(UNGER pulls a black feather from his coat pocket. He passes it to JAJA.)*

JAJA  
How do you know it was a she

UNGER  
By her voice

YEDDA  
Oh so this old crow spoke to you

UNGER  
She was young  
She was our age  
And yes we talked about everything  
The war  
The siege  
Our poor city  
Everything  
She has a family too  
She said that if I gave her bread, she would repay us one-thousand fold

*(JAJA passes the feather to LONA whose eyes have been closed throughout. LONA puts the feather in her mouth.)*



YEDDA

She wouldn't let you keep just a little for your own family

UNGER

She will repay us one-thousand fold

*(A piano is played in the next room.)*

YEDDA

Someone is here to see you  
I told him you'd be home an hour ago  
But you've been talking to a crow

*(UNGER leaves.)*

YEDDA (CONT'D)

Jaja, open your brother's eyes

*(JAJA open LONA's eyes with her fingers. LONA stares into some other world.)*

YEDDA (CONT'D)

I spy with my little eye  
Something in the shape of a pie  
With apples and currents and sugar and nuts  
And as tall as a cloud in the sky

\*\*\*

*(UNGER watches PRANDIUS play the piano. PRANDIUS, sensing a presence, brings his melody to a close.)*

UNGER

The music is nice  
But we have no food  
Across the hall  
Mrs Puhdin  
Her husband's hanging by a thread  
Wait around  
Tomorrow morning latest  
She'll need someone to carry him down to the street  
If you're lucky all the way to the morgue  
She may pay with bread.

PRANDIUS

I haven't come for food

UNGER

For a third of your payment you can borrow my sled

PRANDIUS  
I don't expect you to recognize me

*(UNGER peers at PRANDIUS)*

UNGER  
I know you?

PRANDIUS  
I was at your concert last week  
At the Centre for Elderly Patriots

UNGER  
*(suddenly defiant)*  
I have nothing but love for this city

PRANDIUS  
I'm sure

UNGER  
And it was an observation  
A comical observation  
a joke

PRANDIUS  
Mr Bazkarian—

UNGER  
Yedzeny's Band is as lousy as what they're passing off for bread these days  
Only fifty percent real music  
That's what I said

PRANDIUS  
You misunderstand—

UNGER  
And the audience laughed

PRANDIUS  
I was there

UNGER  
Alright they didn't laugh  
But a lot of them  
You would have seen then  
You were there  
A lot of them smiled  
From where I was on the stage you could clearly see

And to make even one person smile in times like this  
This is not defeatism  
Who sent you

PRANDIUS  
I came on my own—

UNGER  
To the concert I mean

PRANDIUS  
I had heard about it

UNGER  
I brought life to a roomful of people  
I redeemed a terrible day  
The depots in the west were burning  
And I played music  
For some the last they'll ever hear  
This is hardly defeatism  
Hardly a dissipation of the public morale  
No this is victory  
Excuse me sir  
Light head

*(UNGER puts his head on his keens)*

...Unless you're putting real bone meal in the prison soup  
In which case I've spoken grievously against the city  
And you should arrest me

PRANDIUS  
Is that another joke

UNGER  
I'm not sure

PRANDIUS  
I won't want you on a train headed east  
I'll need you every day

UNGER  
You're not the police

PRANDIUS  
I'm the conductor of an orchestra

*(UNGER looks up at PRANDIUS. Finally...recognition.)*

UNGER  
Maestro Prandius  
I didn't recognize—

PRANDIUS  
We've all changed

UNGER  
The piano  
My apologies  
Her last tuning was—  
*(shouting to the bedroom)*  
Yedda  
When was the piano last tuned  
Children  
Do you have any idea who is in our house

PRANDIUS  
It has a sweet tone

UNGER  
It was my grandmother's  
Yes a sweet tone  
My children  
Before all this  
You couldn't tear them away  
Not that I'm being defeatist

PRANDIUS  
It didn't enter my mind

UNGER  
In fact  
Time not spent at the piano  
And not playing outside  
Is more time for books  
We'll have a generation of scholars on our hands

PRANDIUS  
Scientists

UNGER  
Historians

*(YEDDA, JAJA and LONA appear. The children support themselves on their mother's arms. They are trembling.)*

UNGER (CONT'D)  
My family

YEDDA  
On our feet

PRANDIUS  
I am delighted to meet you all

UNGER  
Jaja  
Lona  
You like music don't you

*(JAJA nods.)*

UNGER (CONT'D)  
Well  
When you hear music on the radio  
This man  
Our visitor  
Is behind all that music

PRANDIUS  
I'm happier when I'm in front of it

UNGER  
Do you know what an orchestra conductor does

JAJA  
He makes the music have more colour

UNGER  
You see  
A generation of scholars

PRANDIUS  
That is an excellent answer young woman  
How did you know that

JAJA  
Colouring book

YEDDA  
Come children  
Let's make some tea for our guest

UNGER  
Tea

YEDDA

Yes  
Tea

UNGER  
Are you sure  
Tea  
That is  
Are you sure we have

YEDDA  
Of course we have

PRANDIUS  
I drank tea at lunch  
I am in no need of tea

YEDDA  
Nonsense  
Come children  
Let's make tea

*(YEDDA and the Children disappear.)*

UNGER  
The truth is  
Maestro Prandius  
Our shelves are completely bare

PRANDIUS  
I quite understand

UNGER  
I'm afraid we have nothing to offer you

PRANDIUS  
There you are wrong sir  
And this is why I've come

*(YEDDA appears holding up a bag full of tea.)*

UNGER  
Where did you find that

YEDDA  
If I told you then there really wouldn't be any left  
Maestro Prandius  
Strong  
Or weak

\*\*\*

*(An Orchestra settles in. Musicians warming up their instruments. A hushed but not desolate ambience.)*

PRANDIUS

When we gathered last week

I was not patient

I was not empathetic

I was not 'kind'

As one of you wrote in a note to management that has just been shared with me

I seemed to disregard the circumstances and the sacrifices that you had each made to be here last week

And will continue to make

And must continue to make

You think you don't have the strength to play

Well I don't have the strength to stand here waving my arms

But here I stand

Waving my arms.

I was pulled here this morning on a child's sled because my joints are powder and both my feet are the size of footballs

So

There it is

You won't hear another word about it

My discomforts interest you as much as yours interest *me*

I listen to your calamities

Not for their sake

Not for your sake

But only to buy the right to sing my own

Until every conversation becomes a cacophony of wretchedness

What interests me is the music we will make together

Music does not pity itself

Music does not whinge, complain or preach

Nor, mind you, does it deny

Anything

Any of this

It understands

It ennobles

It surrounds

It instructs

But can only do so if we play it

And play it well

Of course to play it at all we need to be alive

And the Radio Committee

As your bellies will testify

Has increased our chances of remaining so by insisting on certain rations

For which

To the Civic Defence Protectorate

We express our utmost and delighted gratitude  
Beyond this, it's not my duty to make you feel better  
It is my duty to ask you to lift your instruments from your knees  
And even as your arms shake  
Your heads ache  
Your breath fails  
To restore music to this city  
We attacked the Tchaikovsky with fifteen last week  
I can't say we played well  
But we played  
For fifteen minutes we played  
Today we are twenty-five  
So we play for twenty-five minutes  
Agreed?  
And next rehearsal  
A few more  
And next rehearsal  
A few more  
And in a month, our beloved town will have a symphony orchestra again  
And our enemy will be more frightened of us  
Here in this room  
Than all the barrels of all the cannons in the city  
Alright then  
The Capriccio  
From ninety-five  
We are quicksilver

*(PRANDIUS counts in and conducts a familiar passage of delicate, upbeat classical music. A new piece. The orchestra's sound is still rough, but there are new instruments and textures.*

*In their bedroom, YEDDA, JAJA and LONA are in bed, smoking. LONA remains closed-eyed and still. JAJA plays with a thin shaft of sunlight that cuts across the room via a gap in the boarded up window.*

*Something irks PRANDIUS and he waves the orchestra into silence.)*

PRANDIUS  
Great music never dies  
I don't know who said that  
But please my friends  
Let's not prove him wrong  
Woodwinds you're not watching me



In my hands are your next meals  
Watch them  
Ms Caloosha  
The harp at one-twenty-six is the whole eagle  
Not just its feathers  
Sergeant Buik  
You're a solider  
Play like one  
And  
Sergeant Buik  
Welcome  
And welcome too  
Senior Sergeant Zalu and Lieutenant Maag  
Former Brigade Brass Band wizards  
By day with us  
By night stationed in perimeter artillery units  
There will be more of you next week  
I have been promised  
Yes my friends  
I have seen much of the city this past week  
Perimeter barracks  
The yards and the factories  
Fire stations, breadlines, libraries and warming centres  
Pulled on my sled through fifty neighbourhoods  
Across our parks and along our boulevards  
And behind the windows of every building of every square I have found  
Reinforcements  
Musicians of every stroke  
Gathering now under one baton  
More than ever perhaps, an orchestra of and for our city  
Professor Tuleen of our Upper School of Art and Music  
On viola  
Welcome  
Mrs and Mr Stomak  
Trombone  
Clarinet  
On sabbatical from your widely toured and ferociously popular wedding band  
Welcome  
Handpicked from our Regional Youth Orchestra  
almost half our second violins  
Welcome to you all  
Unger Bazkarian of the River District Folk Ensemble  
Also on violin  
Welcome

*(UNGER stands and nods modestly)*

PRANDIUS  
No no Bazkarian

Save your energy  
Sit please  
But  
I must ask you my friend  
Why  
Just now  
You were not playing your instrument

UNGER  
Yes you see  
It's to do with the bow

PRANDIUS  
You have a problem with your bow

UNGER  
Yes maestro  
In a manner of speaking  
My bow is not  
At this moment  
With me

PRANDIUS  
You don't have your bow

UNGER  
My bow is being repaired

PRANDIUS  
You don't have a second one?

UNGER  
My replacement bows are also being repaired

PRANDIUS  
You've had a few days Bazkarian  
To have your bows repaired

UNGER  
The problem was not apparent until last night sir

PRANDIUS  
So you decided to wait until this morning to take up your instrument  
Cutting it a little close before a first rehearsal  
Especially as a musician not schooled in orchestral repertoire

UNGER  
I began to practice the moment you offered me this position

PRANDIUS

Yet only last night you realized a problem with—

UNGER

Our youngest is dying

I'm sorry

I'm not seeking anyone's pity

I bring her up only in so far as it explains the situation with my instrument

It's the horsehair you see

Why my violin bows are at the shop

It's because of the horsehair

My wife

She cut the hair from each bow

And boiled it

Nutrients perhaps

From the tails of the horses

A kind of soup

We must forgive my wife

She was

We were

Desperate

And so my bows are being re-haired

PRANDIUS

And how did it taste

This soup

UNGER

We all thought of onions

*(Sound of distant artillery.)*

PRANDIUS

Secretary

Please take a note

Provisional clause to be added to contracts

From hereon

No musician nor associate will leave this building with an instrument that holds

Or could be perceived as holding

Nutritional properties

Such instruments will be kept under key downstairs or at the Radio Committee office

Meanwhile

If someone could please lend Mr Bazkarian a violin bow

*(PRANDIUS raises his arms to conduct.)*

*A distant siren has begun to wail. The artillery continues in the distance.*

*PRANDIUS listens, his arms suspended.)*

UNGER  
The Acras Roads

PRANDIUS  
For anyone with the energy  
The shelters are open  
I cannot, by law, stop you  
For the rest of us  
We have a Capriccio on our desks  
Once more  
Ninety-five

*(PRANDIUS counts in and conducts the same passage of music.)*

*In their bedroom, YEDDA, JAJA and LONA are in bed, smoking. LONA is waxen, closed-eyed and still. Bombs are falling in their neighbourhood. Explosions shake the building. The tumult mingles with the music. Threads of plaster dust fall from the ceiling.*

*YEDDA rises and leaves the bed.*

*She stands under one of the threads of falling dust and lets it fill her cupped hands. She brings a small heap to her mouth and devours it.)*

\*\*\*

*(UNGER is in MADAME TRAPEZA's instrument repair shop. MADAME TRAPEZA shows UNGER his re-haired bows.)*

MME TRAPEZA  
Feel

*(UNGER runs his finger along one of the bows.)*

MME TRAPEZA (CONT'D)  
Mongolia horsetail  
Nice  
Thick near grip  
No twist  
No extra hair

Nice

UNGER

The work is very good  
Thank you

MME TRAPEZA

Feel

*(UNGER runs his finger along the hair of a second bow.)*

UNGER

I'm pleased

MME TRAPEZA

Take me much time

UNGER

Yes

MME TRAPEZA

Finger cold  
Hand slow  
Glue like brick

UNGER

Thank you for your hard work Mme Trapeza

MME TRAPEZA

Tired

UNGER

I'm sure

*(UNGER reaches for his wallet.)*

MME TRAPEZA

No no

UNGER

But Madame I must pay you

MME TRAPEZA

You pay  
Yes

UNGER

Yes I'm going to pay you

MME TRAPEZA  
Money no good

UNGER  
Now Madame Trapeza  
We made an agreement  
This morning—

MME TRAPEZA  
This morning long time ago

UNGER  
You looked me in the eye and you said  
One hundred and fifty—

MME TRAPEZA  
You play with orchestra now

UNGER  
Yes

MME TRAPEZA  
My friend I tell her I do job for Bazkarian  
She say Bazkarian in orchestra  
I say impossible  
Orchestra dead  
She say orchestra play again soon  
Up  
Rise  
Like Lazar  
I say impossible  
Everybody dead  
She say orchestra find many new musician  
You are new musician

UNGER  
The orchestra is rebuilding yes

MME TRAPEZA  
Good for you hah

UNGER  
Anything that helps our city  
I'm proud to be part of

MME TRAPEZA  
Not so good violin player

UNGER

Who

MME TRAPEZA

Orchestra many dead  
So take many not so good violin player

UNGER

Some of us have much to learn  
But we can't learn without practicing  
And we can't practice without our bows  
You've done a tremendous job Madame  
You always do  
And now I would like to pay you what we agreed upon

MME TRAPEZA

Why you not tell me

UNGER

Tell you what

MME TRAPEZA

I know you ten  
Maybe fifteen year  
You put poster in my shop  
You tell me of your life  
Of your students  
Of concert for dancing daughters of Commissar  
When you play for big General  
We talk about music from America  
We talk when you have getting married  
We drink when you have getting children  
Now you in orchestra  
And you not tell me

UNGER

You seemed tired this morning  
I didn't think it would interest you

MME TRAPEZA

My friend  
She say musician in orchestra receiving big ration

UNGER

We  
Yes  
We  
That is  
There is a certain category—

MME TRAPEZA  
Academician

UNGER  
Yes  
This is my new category

MME TRAPEZA  
What is food you receive

UNGER  
Why don't you ask your friend  
She seems to know everything about—

MME TRAPEZA  
Tell me food you receive

UNGER  
Today was my first day  
I must say it was a blur

MME TRAPEZA  
You are making a lie  
Nobody forget food they eat

UNGER  
A spoonful of wheatgerm

MME TRAPEZA  
Yes

UNGER  
Beans  
A few mouthfuls

MME TRAPEZA  
Beans

UNGER  
And a piece of chocolate

MME TRAPEZA  
Chocolate

UNGER  
The size of a wrist watch  
This is all

MME TRAPEZA



You bring me food

UNGER

This is not possible

MME TRAPEZA

Wheatgerm

Beans

Very good

Chocolate

Very good

You bring me

Then you receive of the good work I have made for you

UNGER

We eat everything there

At the Radio House

Like the factory workers

We're not permitted to share it

MME TRAPEZA

Pah

UNGER

With anybody

The food is for *our* stomachs

They check our pockets when we leave

TRAPEZA

You find a way

UNGER

If we could find a way

We would

And we would share it with our families

MME TRAPEZA

Family

Family

Who is family

I know you before you meet your little wife

I help you Bazkarian

When you have no work

I send you student

I say Bazkarian good man

Good citizen

Good teacher

Before war

Good years

You have many student  
Because me

UNGER  
If I could help you—

MME TRAPEZA  
If if if if  
Hah  
You will help me

UNGER  
I would like to help you

MME TRAPEZA  
Fine  
For today I take bread  
Just bread

UNGER  
I have no bread

MME TRAPEZA  
You have bread  
I see in your pocket

UNGER  
Not mine  
For my family  
Three hours outside a shop I waited and really I must go home

MME TRAPEZA  
Family  
I am family

UNGER  
No Madame  
You are not my family

MME TRAPEZA  
Family  
You protect

UNGER  
Yes

MME TRAPEZA  
And I protecting you  
So

Family  
Here  
You  
Me

*(pause)*

UNGER  
Who are you protecting me from

MME TRAPEZA  
From you

*(UNGER is perplexed.)*

MME TRAPEZA (CONT'D)  
*(Speaks part of a song)*

*(UNGER is uneasy.)*

MME TRAPEZA (CONT'D)  
You leave this morning your bows in old violin case  
In violin case I find envelope  
In envelope I find songs  
In songs I find jokes  
For me not to question if good joke bad joke  
But if wrong person hear  
*(sings from another song)*

UNGER  
They aren't mine

MME TRAPEZA  
No  
Whose are they

UNGER  
...

MME TRAPEZA  
Too bad  
Good songs  
Stay in my brain  
I remember from them  
A compliment perhaps  
To the composer  
Never do I tell where I find them  
In the violin case of Unger Bazkarian  
Even if one day I sing

By mistake  
To my friend  
She is curious friend  
Hungry  
Like all of us  
She ask maybe  
From where  
Madame Trapeza  
I coming this interesting song  
But  
You  
Me  
We are family  
So I not tell

*(UNGER reaches into his pockets. Instead of bread, he takes out money. TRAPEZA shakes her head. UNGER shrugs and leaves without his bows.)*

\*\*\*

*(MAESTRO PRANDIUS sits upon a child's sled.  
He is being pulled through the streets.  
The sound of a glorious orchestra playing  
a new and ambitious symphony.)*

*(YEDDA, JAJA and LONA sit in their bed,  
bolting meagre portions of bread.)*

\*\*\*

*(UNGER stands at the foot of YEDDA's, JAJA's and LONA's bed. He plays a muted folk melody on a wooden flute.*

*UNGER's wife and children seem to be asleep. He closes out the melody.*

*He goes to leave.)*

JAJA  
The window across the street

*(UNGER stops. He looks at their own boarded up window. There's not much to see beyond the dim yellow lamplight.)*

UNGER  
The window with the candle in it

JAJA  
How do you know if there's a candle

UNGER  
I don't  
Sorry  
I thought we were imagining

JAJA  
From before  
From when there wasn't a war  
When we would be in this bed with you and mum  
When it would be morning  
And I would put my toes under your legs  
And look out the window from here  
And there was another window across the street

UNGER  
Yes that window

JAJA  
I think it's a philosopher who lives there

UNGER  
What does he philosophize about

JAJA  
She

UNGER  
What does she philosophize about

JAJA  
I don't know  
Philosophy isn't for six years

UNGER  
Six years

JAJA  
Mr Malteve teaches it to the upper school

UNGER  
You don't have to go to school to be a philosopher

JAJA  
Really

UNGER  
Mr Malteve would agree I'm sure  
If he's a good teacher

JAJA  
He is a good teacher  
He writes books  
He was allowed to leave before the circle closed

UNGER  
Well that's good

JAJA  
With his family

UNGER  
Well  
Yes  
Some of us stayed back to resist  
To fight  
What if we had all left Jaja  
The enemy would just walk right in

JAJA  
I miss going to school

UNGER  
What do you miss about it

JAJA  
Lunchtime

UNGER  
That was my favourite subject too

JAJA  
Monday soup  
Tuesday meat  
Wednesday eggs  
Thursday beans  
Friday  
Surprise

UNGER  
What makes you think she's a philosopher  
Our woman in the window

JAJA  
She has long white hair

And she can't see  
Even with her eyes open  
She puts out blue flowers every morning in the summer  
And sneezes

UNGER  
Very philosophical of her

JAJA  
The flowers

UNGER  
No the sneezes  
The best philosophers are big sneezers

JAJA  
Really

UNGER  
Everybody thought Socrates' nose was from the wine  
It was from the sneezing

JAJA  
Do you think she's still there

UNGER  
At her window you mean

JAJA  
Yes

UNGER  
If she's sensible she'll have boarded it up  
Like us

JAJA  
But maybe she's still there

UNGER  
Who knows Jaja

JAJA  
We could know

UNGER  
How

JAJA  
You could go over and see

And then come back and tell me

UNGER

It's the middle of the night

JAJA

Don't you want to know

UNGER

Well

Yes

But perhaps it's not urgent

JAJA

Why are her flowers blue

Even if she can't see them

UNGER

I

Don't know

Perhaps they have a pleasant smell

JAJA

Why is her hair long

Did she ever cut her hair in her entire life

UNGER

I don't know Jaja

Try to sleep

JAJA

I think about her every day

UNGER

I'll go when you're asleep

JAJA

You will

UNGER

Yes

JAJA

This night

UNGER

But you have to sleep

Little girls who don't sleep are little girls who don't grow



JAJA  
Did the crow really eat our bread  
Or was it you

UNGER  
Is this a question for me Jaja  
Or for our philosopher

JAJA  
....

UNGER  
Jaja

JAJA  
...

UNGER  
Jaja

JAJA  
I'm asleep

\*\*\*

*(THE PHILOSOPHER sits on a chair. She is blind and has extremely long hair.*

*A knock on the door.*

*Another knock.*

*The door opens. UNGER walks in; hesitant, cautious.)*

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Good evening

UNGER  
Good evening

THE PHILOSOPHER  
What did you bring today

UNGER  
I  
I've  
Brought nothing today

THE PHILOSOPHER

You can leave it on the table

UNGER

I'm sorry  
I didn't bring anything

THE PHILOSOPHER

No need to apologize  
Just leave it on the table

UNGER

But I have nothing

THE PHILOSOPHER

Is it well cooked

UNGER

...

...yes

THE PHILOSOPHER

All the better  
Most people undercook it

UNGER

Undercook what

THE PHILOSOPHER

Spinning out their firewood  
Not unreasonable  
Still  
To leave it undercooked  
Could lead to bellyache

UNGER

Madame I  
I have brought nothing with me

THE PHILOSOPHER

Spices

UNGER

Spices

THE PHILOSOPHER

How did you spice it

UNGER

I'm sorry

Were you expecting someone

THE PHILOSOPHER  
I expect nothing  
But it always happens  
Sage

UNGER  
What  
No

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Hard to find

UNGER  
I keep it very simple  
Bayleaf  
Garlic  
Parsley

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Garlic

UNGER  
One clove

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Next time less garlic please  
It makes my hair smell

UNGER  
I'll remember that

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Where do you get the parsley

UNGER  
My daughter grows it

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Your daughter grows it

UNGER  
She  
Plants and grows it

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Marvellous

UNGER  
She has a whole field

THE PHILOSOPHER  
How admirable  
Which she waters every day

UNGER  
And pulls up the weeds

THE PHILOSOPHER  
What an extraordinary girl

UNGER  
She thinks very highly of you as well

THE PHILOSOPHER  
I would like to meet her

UNGER  
She would like to meet you

THE PHILOSOPHER  
When shall this meeting take place

UNGER  
When she's feeling a little better  
A little stronger

THE PHILOSOPHER  
She's not well

UNGER  
She is well  
But not as well as she would be  
Were she not so hungry

THE PHILOSOPHER  
The field of parsley is not quite enough

UNGER  
No  
Not quite

THE PHILOSOPHER  
What is her name

UNGER  
Jaja

*(We see YEDDA, JAJA and LONA asleep in their  
bed.)*

And she has a younger sister Lona  
And a mother Yedina  
And a father  
Me  
And we live across the street

THE PHILOSOPHER  
How astonishing  
I live across the street too

UNGER  
I thought you lived here

THE PHILOSOPHER  
I do  
Across the street from you  
So we all live across the street

UNGER  
My daughter says you're a philosopher

THE PHILOSOPHER  
How very flattering

UNGER  
Oh  
So you're not

THE PHILOSOPHER  
I am  
But it's still very flattering to be called one  
I have read all the books  
In all the libraries  
In all the cities

UNGER  
In the whole world

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Let's not exaggerate

UNGER  
Still  
A lot of books

THE PHILOSOPHER  
That's not to say I understood them all

UNGER

But you understood some

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Several

UNGER  
And since you are a philosopher  
And since you have read so many wonderful books

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Yes

UNGER  
My daughter has a question for you

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Yes

UNGER  
Which  
If you don't mind my asking on her behalf

THE PHILOSOPHER  
No

UNGER  
Well the question is

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Yes

UNGER  
Why are your flowers blue  
Even though you can't see them

THE PHILOSOPHER  
That's a very nice question  
And the answer is  
Because I like the sound that blue makes

UNGER  
Aha  
Jaja will like that answer very much  
And

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Yes

UNGER

Please tell me if I am overstepping  
But  
Would you mind if  
You see my daughter has another question

THE PHILOSOPHER  
What a curious parsley grower

UNGER  
She was wondering

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Yes

UNGER  
Do you ever cut your hair

THE PHILOSOPHER  
That is a fine question  
And the answer is  
I have cut my hair  
In my life  
Precisely once  
But the terrible consequence of that was shortness of hair

UNGER  
Why was that so terrible

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Because  
I do all my best thinking when I comb my hair  
When my hair was short  
I was only able to have short thoughts  
And I prefer to have long thoughts  
Long thoughts are  
On the whole  
Better than short thoughts

UNGER  
Yes  
I see  
Thank you  
Thank you so much for these generous answers  
I will take them home to Jaja

THE PHILOSOPHER  
I am pleased to accommodate

UNGER

I wonder if

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Yes

UNGER  
Would you mind  
Just one more  
For Jaja at home in bed  
For Lona too  
For all of us really

THE PHILOSOPHER  
One more question

UNGER  
Thank you

THE PHILOSOPHER  
And then I must be rest

UNGER  
It is late

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Lateness tastes like chewed gum

UNGER  
How can I repay you

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Less garlic next time

UNGER  
Less garlic  
Of course

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Well

UNGER  
Well

THE PHILOSOPHER  
The question

UNGER  
The question  
It's really perhaps not a very good question



Maybe it's a silly question  
But it's been on our minds lately  
Around the house

THE PHILOSOPHER  
The question please

UNGER  
The question is

THE PHILOSOPHER  
Yes

UNGER  
Why do we suffer

THE PHILOSOPHER  
...

*(YEDDA, JAJA and LONA are woken by violent knocking on the door of their apartment. YEDDA gathers the children close to her. The knocking continues.)*

UNGER  
It is isn't it  
A silly question  
An impertinent question  
A defeatist question

*(THE PHILOSOPHER produces a comb, falls into a deep silence and begins to comb her hair.)*

UNGER (CONT'D)  
And at any rate  
Victory is just days away  
We can all taste it now

\*\*\*

*(MAESTRO PRANDIUS addresses his orchestra.)*

PRANDIUS  
Trombones  
You're being completely unreasonable  
You cannot strike for more food where there is  
No  
More  
Food  
Or how do you intend for us to arrange this  
That the flutes receive less because note for note they burn less energy

Flutes  
Do you like this idea  
Clarinets  
Oboes  
Where do we draw the line  
Actually  
Clarinets are slightly heavier than oboes  
So oboists  
Two less mouthfuls of porridge at lunch please  
Just carry your extras over to the clarinet table  
They'll have just returned from delivering their unfair surplus to the poor bassoons  
Of course on Mozart days  
This must all move in the other direction  
I don't care how heavy a trombone is  
If you only play six notes every ten minutes  
and receive the same rations as everyone else  
Well surely gentlemen of the union of the back row  
You don't have to be a German nutritionist to see that this amounts to an exploitation of the rest  
of the orchestra  
How about this trombones  
In general  
Just don't play as loudly  
You'll use less energy  
And  
Frankly  
It'll sound better  
And if that's not enough  
Take mine  
Go ahead  
Take my rations  
Surely you deserve them more than me  
All I do is hold this little piece of birch tree in my hand  
Now  
Today  
My friends  
Aggrieved  
Exploited  
Factionalized  
But still  
One hopes  
An orchestra  
You will have found fresh partitions waiting on your stands  
Virgin charts  
A brand new symphony  
From our own dear son Černavaris  
Many of you know he began this here in the city  
Finally  
We have it  
We've actually had it two weeks

A round of applause for Maraq and Pulmentkov  
And for me as it happens  
Who  
For no extra rations  
Have transcribed 100 feet of microfilm onto the sheets that now sit before you  
It's a giant  
You all know what it is you are looking at  
A few lines from the great genius himself  
Sent by code this morning  
*(reading)*  
"I am outside  
But my heart is inside with you  
To not be with you  
In body too  
When you perform this work  
In my own afflicted city  
Will be my regret everlasting  
For it is truly for us  
For our families  
For our boulevards and peaceful parks  
Our flowing river  
For the unfailing courage of every citizen  
that I wrote this symphony  
And to which I dedicate its name—"

*(UNGER appears. He looks haunted and un-slept. He takes his place.)*

PRANDIUS  
Mister Bazkarian  
You are late

UNGER  
Yes maestro  
Apologies

PRANDIUS  
Miss the clock  
Rations docked

UNGER  
I know this

PRANDIUS  
Yet you come late

UNGER  
My family sir  
They've disappeared

PRANDIUS  
Well don't let it happen again

\*\*\*

*(UNGER stands before a desk. At the desk sits a FUNCTIONARY, pencil in hand, filling out a form.)*

UNGER  
Bazkarian  
Yedda Bazkarian

FUNCTIONARY  
Relation

UNGER  
Wife

FUNCTIONARY  
Age

UNGER  
Thirty-one years old

FUNCTIONARY  
Hair

UNGER  
Brown  
Some grey  
To her shoulders

FUNCTIONARY  
Eyes

UNGER  
Brown

FUNCTIONARY  
Notable features

UNGER  
She can play the accordion

*(The FUNCTIONARY looks up.)*

UNGER (CONT'D)

She wins at chess

She collects pictures of owls

Everybody likes her

FUNCTIONARY

I meant notable physical features

Something that would help—

UNGER

I know what you meant

I'm just

Look

There's been a mistake

FUNCTIONARY

Your wife's eyes are not brown

UNGER

No

Yes

They are brown

I mean about their disappearance

FUNCTIONARY

Your wife's eyes have disappeared

UNGER

My wife has disappeared

And my daughters

FUNCTIONARY

Disappeared you say

UNGER

Yes

FUNCTIONARY

But this is a Missing Persons report

UNGER

Indeed

FUNCTIONARY

Missing Persons means you don't know where they are

UNGER

I don't know where they are

FUNCTIONARY  
But you think we do

UNGER  
Yes

FUNCTIONARY  
That's a different form

UNGER  
So you know

FUNCTIONARY  
Know what

UNGER  
Where they are

FUNCTIONARY  
All I know is that we are presently filling out the incorrect form  
Your wife and daughters have not gone missing  
They've disappeared

UNGER  
So there's a chance

FUNCTIONARY  
Of what

UNGER  
Of finding them

FUNCTIONARY  
It depends on the level of disappearance

UNGER  
This would be a low level disappearance

FUNCTIONARY  
Please leave the categories to us

UNGER  
I left our apartment  
I returned  
They were no longer there  
Just the bedclothes on the floor  
I'd been gone twenty-minutes  
We're just a simple family

FUNCTIONARY  
You're jumping ahead  
We'll get to all that

UNGER  
I just mean to say there's been a mistake

FUNCTIONARY  
A misunderstanding

UNGER  
Sorry

FUNCTIONARY  
A misunderstanding  
Not a mistake

UNGER  
Indeed  
A misunderstanding  
A lowish level misunderstanding  
And I'd like to see someone as soon as

FUNCTIONARY  
I am someone sir

UNGER  
Of course of course

FUNCTIONARY  
I am here to help you with the forms

UNGER  
Indeed  
And I thank you  
Although I wonder if we could forego the paperwork and I could just speak with

FUNCTIONARY  
Notable features

UNGER  
Pardon

FUNCTIONARY  
Notable features  
Your wife  
I am here to help you with the forms

UNGER

Why 'notable features'

FUNCTIONARY

For identification purposes

UNGER

You make it sound like she's dead

FUNCTIONARY

That is not my intention

But not impossible that she is

UNGER

What if she is dead

What if they're all dead

How would I know

FUNCTIONARY

Bureau of Notification and Personal Effects Recuperation

Up one floor

End of the hall

UNGER

Maybe I should go straight to them

FUNCTIONARY

You'll need a stamp from me

UNGER

Very thin

My wife

Notable feature

She looks like Famine's horse

FUNCTIONARY

Not notable I think

These days

UNGER

Then none.

*(The FUNCTIONARY writes.)*

FUNCTIONARY

....notable...features...none

UNGER

But you just said this is the wrong form



FUNCTIONARY

Much of the information is transferable

UNGER

What is the name of the other form

FUNCTIONARY

It doesn't have a name

But it is not a Missing Persons report

UNGER

So the other form that is not a Missing Persons report

FUNCTIONARY

Yes

UNGER

Should we not be completing that form

FUNCTIONARY

We've run out of them

UNGER

Of course you have

FUNCTIONARY

We'll have more next week

UNGER

I see

FUNCTIONARY

One hopes

There are saboteurs among the machinists

UNGER

Good

FUNCTIONARY

And if not next week

The following

UNGER

The saboteurs I mean

Brave women and men

FUNCTIONARY

The saboteurs

UNGER  
Yes

FUNCTIONARY  
I  
Believe I misheard you

UNGER  
Surely you agree

FUNCTIONARY  
I cannot agree with what I have misheard

UNGER  
The sooner we crack from the inside  
The sooner this nightmare ends  
Come man  
You must want it too  
Don't look at me like that  
Mock astonishment  
Big eyes  
You know  
I know  
The city will fall  
Just a matter of time  
The situation is hopeless  
Yet for some point of honour  
Decided by fat-handed decadents a thousand miles away  
We die in waves by the day  
So long live the saboteurs and defeatists  
The dissipators of public morale  
They will save us from ourselves  
I see you've dropped your pencil sir  
You should be writing this down  
Happy to repeat everything if you can find the right form  
Otherwise  
Might I please finally speak with someone who has the power to arrest me

\*\*\*

*(UNGER sings.)*

UNGER (SINGING)  
*And the old mule brays  
And the billy goat climbs  
And Laura hangs laundry up on the line*

**Laura my angel  
My own darling mine  
Whose tunic is that up on the line**

*And the old mule brays  
And the billy goat climbs  
And Laura hangs laundry up on the line*

**It belonged to my brother  
Daring and proud  
His medals followed him into the ground**

*And the old mule brays  
And the billy goat climbs  
And Laura hangs laundry up on the line*

**Laura my angel  
My own darling mine  
There's a hole in that tunic up on the line**

*And the old mule brays  
And the billy goat climbs  
And Laura hangs laundry up on the line*

**That's where the bullet  
Spinning and sharp  
Tore through his tunic en route to his heart**

*And the old mule brays  
And the billy goat climbs  
And Laura hangs laundry up on the line*

**Laura my sweetheart  
My own flower bud  
There's a hole in that tunic but around it no blood**

*And the old mule brays  
And the billy goat climbs  
And Laura hangs laundry up on the line*

**He was a corp'ral  
Fighting the siege  
No food for weeks, no blood to bleed**

*And the old mule brays  
And the billy goat climbs  
And Laura hangs laundry up on the line*

**Laura my treasure**

***My apricot tree  
I love you so, will you marry me***

*And the old mule brays  
And the billy goat climbs  
And Laura hangs laundry up on the line*

***I fear that your love  
Shall me never save  
Where my heart was, lies a bottomless grave***

*And the old mule brays  
And the billy goat climbs  
And Laura hangs laundry up on the line*

*(UNGER stops singing. We become aware of his surroundings. He is in a featureless interrogation room.*

*MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR and a STENOGRAPHER are also in the room.)*

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
Very pretty  
Wrongheaded  
Uninformed  
Recalcitrant  
But pretty

UNGER  
And mine

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
How can we know this

UNGER  
You just heard me sing it from beginning to end

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
I can sing our national anthem  
Doesn't mean I wrote it

UNGER  
The old mule  
The billy goat  
They're allegorical figures

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
We wouldn't be here if they weren't  
Perhaps your wife should have buried her insults more deeply

UNGER

I'm telling you the song is mine  
Melody and words  
All the songs are mine

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR

Yet you said the exact opposite three days ago  
Junior-Sergeant  
Please read from the Evidence  
Bazkarian NKV—Case 543/9–9 third paragraph

STENOGRAPHER

Yes sir  
(reads)

Mister B on the 19th of March when presented with three defeatist songs hidden within his own instrument case handwritten upon Railway North stationary said referring to aforementioned songs quote "They are not mine"

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR

Do you deny that's what you said

UNGER

I was wrong

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR

Then why did you say it

UNGER

Guilty child  
Face covered in chocolate  
Crosses his fingers behind his back and says: it wasn't me

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR

Well you've grown up very quickly

UNGER

Not really

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR

Such a clear statement  
"They are not mine"

UNGER

I was caught off guard  
I was frightened

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR

So you don't do well with fear

UNGER  
It seems not

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
You do realize that by incriminating yourself you are filling your future with more of it

UNGER  
I wish to incriminate myself and clear my wife  
She has nothing to do with this  
Let her go home with the children  
Where are the children

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
They're secure and safe

UNGER  
Are they with their mother

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
No

UNGER  
They should be with their mother

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
I know  
It's tragic

UNGER  
Do you have children

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
Yes but their mother is not an enemy of the state

UNGER  
Are you sure

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
If she were  
I'd be the first to put her away

UNGER  
May I write to my family

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
Your children yes  
Your wife no  
Junior-Sergeant

Pencil and paper for this man

*(The STENOGRAPHER gives UNGER pencil and paper.)*

*UNGER scribbles furiously for a few moments, then hands the sheet to KUCHIVA-ZAR.)*

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
You wrote your children a song

UNGER  
I wrote you a song  
Sixteen notes  
Look at my penmanship  
Look at my treble clefs  
It will match your evidence

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
Of course it will  
Your wife cannot read or write music  
She sung her inventions into your ear  
You transcribed them  
We already know this

UNGER  
She told you that

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
Mister Bazkarian your wife has confessed  
Junior-Sergeant  
Please

*(The STENOGRAPHER hands KUCHIVA-ZAR a form. KUCHIVA-ZAR shows the form to UNGER.)*

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR (CONT'D)  
Her signature

UNGER  
Under duress

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
It makes me uncomfortable  
What you are suggesting

UNGER  
What did you do to her

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
Your imagination is running wild sir

UNGER

She would not lie to protect me  
I've been a terrible husband  
Terrible father  
The only reason she would confess is if she were being

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR

Yes

UNGER

Pressured

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR

We do  
Sometimes  
In the course of these conversations  
allow our guests to reconsider their positions  
But Yedda Bazkarian  
She sat where you are sitting  
I had hardly introduced myself before  
Junior-Sergeant

STENOGRAPHER

*(reads)*

The following songs "Old Mule" "The Great White Flag" and "Baker's Bacchanal" are mine and mine alone my intention was to mock darken futilicize and otherwise undermine resistance with a view to letting our city fall into enemy hands I was planning a campaign of memorization and dissemination via a network of saboteurs and vicious calumniators requiring little to no movement of the original document which I hid behind the felt of my husband's violin case I now understand my error repent my wayward and pernicious defeatism and all associated undertakings and accept the punishment of the state.

UNGER

That sounds just like her

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR

Of course we edited her statement for clarity

UNGER

And she signed it

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR

As you can see

UNGER

What will happen to her

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR



She'll be put to work  
For the greater good

UNGER  
Do you read music Major

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
As well as any survivor of a school orchestra

UNGER  
The composer writes a note  
And then  
Above it or below  
Another note  
Half the size  
It's up to us  
We can take our pick  
If we've got the breath  
Hit the B-flat  
If we're feeling a little harried  
Out of breath  
Nervous  
An E-flat will do the trick  
The melody will preserve its meaning either way

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
The composer should make up his mind

UNGER  
The larger note is the favoured note  
But it's not the necessary note  
Whoever you pick  
My wife  
Me  
The melody's not really going to change  
Is it

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
There is nobody that I would like to arrest more than you

UNGER  
I'm all yours

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
I know you wrote those songs

UNGER  
Then what are you waiting for

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
The death of Maestro Prandius

UNGER  
What

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
Or the amputation of his ego

UNGER  
What does Prandius have to do with

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
Apparently he needs all the violinists he can get

UNGER  
He doesn't need me

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
Your name is on a list

UNGER  
Well take it off

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
You are more important than you know Mister Bazkarian  
Junior-Sergeant  
Yesterday's Memo from the Committee for Public Enthusiasm and Morale.

STENOGRAPHER

Yes sir  
(*reads*)

This Committee acknowledging the paucity of musicians within the perimeter and circumstantial boundaries of our city and given the task of assembling an orchestra of significant magnitude toward the performance of a symphonic production composed by a favoured son of our own city and of immediate public benefit as well as tremendous national and international resonance has provided a list of musical personnel deemed essential to the successful operation of the event in question and requested that all medical legal professional emergencies of the listed be reported without delay to the CPEM where in collaboration with associated bodies their cases will be reviewed and arrangements for their continued and imperative participation in our collective struggle for freedom shall be undertaken.

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
Your glorious efforts outshine your petty mongering  
Meanwhile  
The songs were found  
I have a confession  
I must convict

UNGER  
Food  
You fed the children  
Didn't you  
In exchange for her confession  
You fed our children

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR

...

UNGER  
Well if you did  
Thank you  
How is Lona  
The youngest  
She was  
I don't know if she

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
Both of them are alive

UNGER  
Could I please  
Please  
See them

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
They have already been moved

UNGER  
Where

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
To a home  
For the children of dissidents

UNGER  
Does my wife know this

MAJOR KUCHIVA-ZAR  
It was she who requested it

*(KUCHIVA-ZAR leaves.)*

*UNGER and the STENOGRAPHER are alone.)*

STENOGRAPHER  
If you could just sign here  
A release form

Then you're free to go

*(As UNGER stares at the form...)*

STENOGRAPHER (CONT'D)

I used to play the piano

Until I was thirteen

My teacher got so impatient with me that I ended up falling in love with her

She assigned me Für Elise

I thought she was sending me a message

Her name was Olga

Maybe you know her

My neighbours died a couple of weeks ago

I was thinking I might move their piano into my apartment

Get back into it

But really practice this time

Twenty minutes a day no matter what

*(UNGER signs the release form and hands it to the STENOGRAPHER.)*

STENOGRAPHER (CONT'D)

Für Elise

What a melody though

No optional notes in that number

\*\*\*

*(PRANDIUS addresses his orchestra.)*

PRANDIUS

Sections nineteen through fifty-one

We have arrived

Corporal Sabela

We knew this day would come

We can avoid it no longer

There's only one way through

And it's through

We will play this leg in its entirety

We will play the notes that Černavaris has written for us to play

Every last one

Corporal Sabela

Feeling hearty

Hot for battle

Heroic

Because

I will tell you the truth dear orchestra

When I first looked this symphony in the eyes

It was this passage that pressed in on me  
I thought  
How could they  
How could they throw us a piece the very playing of which would surely kill us  
I've recovered myself since then  
But am no less in awe of what Corporal Sabala is about to do  
Now for this  
And I want to hear no grumbling  
For this once and once only  
We have granted Corporal Sabala twenty extra grams of chocolate  
Corporal  
If you need  
I can spare two second-violins to hold you up  
The expectation being that  
As we near performance week  
You will be standing on your own all the way through  
The audience must not  
In any moment  
See us falter  
Any of us  
You're all looking at me as if I'd tortured your children  
You will remember these as the happiest moments of your life  
So  
Section nineteen  
Bar one-forty-five  
a tempo  
The war breaks suddenly into our peaceful life  
Černavaris wrote this into the score  
And how it breaks  
How it breaks  
But first  
Almost inaudibly  
A quiet  
Wicked  
Creeping ostinato  
One hungry snare drum which  
Three-hundred-and-fifty measures later has drawn us into a tilting nightmare of anguish  
Which  
Twenty-nine measures after that  
Černavaris resolves resolutely and victoriously

*(PRANDIUS raises his baton.)*

PRANDIUS (CONT'D)

Corporal Sabala

I have already recommended you for a medal of courage

*(PRANDIUS counts in the "Invasion Theme" Section. The snare embarks on its seemingly endless ostinato. The orchestra gathers around it; steadily growing; steadily gathering; a relentless growing intensity underneath CUTWATER's speech.*

*The orchestra is now at full strength number-wise. The playing is by no means faultless but it's coming together.)*

\*\*\*

*(PRANDIUS sits in a child's sled beside the artists' entrance, wrapped in a greatcoat*

*UNGER appears from inside the building. He closes the door behind him and begins to walk away. He stops. Looks back at the man in the child's sled. Recognition.)*

UNGER  
Maestro

PRANDIUS  
Good evening Mister Bazkarian

UNGER  
Good evening sir  
I didn't

PRANDIUS  
It's mild  
A bit of fresh air  
Not so bad

UNGER  
It is mild  
Yes quite mild the air

PRANDIUS  
Long day

UNGER  
Practicing late

PRANDIUS  
Good  
Good

UNGER  
With one week

PRANDIUS  
Oh yes

UNGER  
It's the

PRANDIUS  
Yes

UNGER  
It's big

PRANDIUS  
What were you going to say

UNGER  
It's the shit and the rug too  
Something my father used to say

PRANDIUS  
Your father was a violinist

UNGER  
And my teacher too

PRANDIUS  
That concert I heard you play  
At the Centre for Elderly Patriots

UNGER  
My unknowing audition

PRANDIUS  
You performed a melody about a cricket

UNGER  
Just a little something  
Crickets fall in love too

PRANDIUS  
It made me weep

UNGER  
If they only knew  
Playing in a symphony orchestra

PRANDIUS  
Your parents

UNGER  
My everyone  
My sisters

My brothers  
Little fat-faced Unger in a suit  
Following a baton

PRANDIUS  
My father was a sewer of gentlemen's garments

UNGER  
But your mother loved the piano and encouraged you

PRANDIUS  
How did you know

UNGER  
I heard you speak on a radio broadcast

PRANDIUS  
Strange the things we tell the world

UNGER  
Stranger the things we don't

PRANDIUS  
I have children too

UNGER  
I'm sorry to hear that

PRANDIUS  
When we bring a child into the world  
We don't think  
Now how is this one going to die

UNGER  
Sir  
Are you  
Waiting for someone

PRANDIUS  
My horse is late

UNGER  
Who's your horse

PRANDIUS  
The son of my building's porter  
They won't have him at the front on account of his mind  
But he can pull a sled



UNGER  
Can he play a violin

PRANDIUS  
He only has seven fingers

UNGER  
Likely better than my ten

PRANDIUS  
You're having trouble with the pizz's in one-seventy-seven.  
Last movement  
That's all

UNGER  
The time signature  
It trips me up

PRANDIUS  
You'll get it

UNGER  
With some work

PRANDIUS  
And your intonation  
Just before the Victory section

UNGER  
That could be my desk mate  
I've noticed she does sometimes drift

PRANDIUS  
It's you

UNGER  
Thank you Maestro  
I'll work on it

PRANDIUS  
And your bowing is off

UNGER  
When

PRANDIUS  
Most of the time

UNGER

Did you receive my petition for dismissal

PRANDIUS

You're entitled to petition  
But I need you

UNGER

One second violin  
A drop in the sea  
What difference do I make

PRANDIUS

If I'm correcting you it means I can hear you  
If I can hear you it means you make a difference

UNGER

You wouldn't have to correct me if you fired me

PRANDIUS

The composer calls for thirty violins  
Not twenty-nine

UNGER

Sir my family

PRANDIUS

I've read your case

UNGER

The crime is mine  
My daughters in that reeducation centre

PRANDIUS

They are being fed

UNGER

My wife repairing barbed wire on the perimeter

PRANDIUS

Better her than you

UNGER

Well that's the difference between you and me

PRANDIUS

Stop with the heroics  
You're not a hero Mister Bazkarian  
Live with it  
Look where heroics got me

UNGER  
Where

PRANDIUS  
Here

UNGER  
What d'you mean  
Here

PRANDIUS  
Here  
Right here  
Huddled in this sled waiting for a half-wit to pull me home  
Here  
In this city  
Leading this band of  
Of  
Ghosts  
This  
God-forgotten  
Semi-competent  
Herd of  
It took me half an hour today to explain the diminuendos in the pastorale  
Half an hour

UNGER  
We are addled Maestro  
Forgive us

PRANDIUS  
Do you know why I'm the director of this Orchestra  
And not the Philharmonic

UNGER  
The question doesn't keep me up at night

PRANDIUS  
Felix Gosar  
Maybe you know his music  
No  
Didn't think so  
At university  
I wrote a paper praising Felix Gosar  
His string quartets  
They were popular at the time  
Everybody liked Gosar  
My professors liked Gosar

My friends liked Gosar  
The Committee for Musical Arts  
They loved Gosar  
Fifteen years later  
Gosar writes a children's opera where three mice drown a cat inside a pail of milk  
And he stops being popular  
So there I am  
I've put in my time  
I've toured Europe  
Guest conducted from all the right podiums  
I'm a rising comet  
I'm this close to being appointed to the Phil  
When  
Final interview  
Someone digs up my old paper  
We see that you're a fan of Murinism  
They say  
What the hell is Murinism  
I say  
They claim that Gosar's string quartets  
The ones I'd praised some fifteen years earlier  
Contained the seeds of his now full blown Murinism  
Well I do my best to try to defend my paper  
And the composer too  
Who had become a friend of mine  
I commend his sincerity  
His greatheartedness  
I point to his love of the people  
How he connects to the kinetics of human striving  
And I should have kept my mouth shut  
I should have just  
Shut  
My  
Mouth  
They give me one last chance  
Do you not agree with us that Col Gosar has embraced in his music the vilest of Murinistic  
procedures  
I stare them down across the table and I say  
I do not agree  
Heroics  
And look where it's brought me

UNGER  
Leading a band of semi-competent ghosts

PRANDIUS  
It's been a long day

UNGER

Yet you care whether you have twenty-nine violins or thirty

PRANDIUS  
Those are my orders

UNGER  
From who

PRANDIUS  
History

*(UNGER and PRANDIUS fall into silence.)*

PRANDIUS (CONT'D)  
Very well  
I'll annul your contract  
I'll do the paperwork tomorrow morning  
Come and pick it up before ten  
Then it's up to you Bazkarian  
You stay with us and make history  
Or play the hero and let it swallow you up

*(Music. The sound of a piano playing.)*

*UNGER walks away from PRANDIUS.*

*He stops.*

*He returns and picks up the sled's rope and pulls PRANDIUS off)*

\*\*\*

*(UNGER walks into the empty Bazkarian apartment.)*

*He is surprised to hear the piano being played in the next room.)*

\*\*\*

*(MADAME TRAPEZA plays UNGER's piano.)*

*Upon the piano sits a large birdcage. The birdcage holds a CROW, majestic and alive. Beak taped shut.*

*UNGER is mesmerized.*

*TRAPEZA, sensing a presence, brings her melody to a close. She looks up at UNGER.)*

MME TRAPEZA  
Your door was open

UNGER  
For my family  
They didn't take their keys

MME TRAPEZA  
Tuner from my shop always like to be chez Bazkarian  
Strong piano  
Body of wrestler  
Heart of dancer

UNGER  
What are you doing here

*(TRAPEZA holds up the two re-haired violin bows.)*

MME TRAPEZA (CONT'D)  
Take  
Please take  
Good work  
No pay me

UNGER  
I don't need them anymore  
The orchestra provided

MME TRAPEZA  
How is orchestra

UNGER  
What

MME TRAPEZA  
You are playing well  
You are improving  
You are sounding like fine orchestra

*(UNGER grabs the violin bows from TRAPEZA's hands, snaps them over his knee.)*

MME TRAPEZA  
I was crazy  
From no food  
I was like mad woman  
Please forgive

UNGER

You have destroyed my family

MME TRAPEZA

Was not me

Was animal inside me

Was animal who did eat even me

I am sorry Bazkarian

I am so sorry

I am so sorry

UNGER

You've said what you came to say

Now get out

*(UNGER throws the destroyed violin bows at MME TRAPEZA's feet.*

*TRAPEZA stands her ground. She gestures to the CROW.)*

MME TRAPEZA

How could there be bird you ask

In city no more bird

But

Yet

Here is bird

Kara meet Bazkarian

Bazkarian hello to Kara

UNGER

Where did you find her

MME TRAPEZA

No more bread in my district

I am walking to find bread station

New district

I am walking one

Two hours

I am little bit lost

I am in little park where I am only one person

I see Kara

Kara in sky

Making circle

Thinking maybe here is bread in pocket of old woman

Kara has been following me

Sun

Kara

Me

Last bird in city very intelligent bird

But Madame Trapeza more intelligent

Kara is hungry  
She find branch of tree near to me  
I say hello Kara  
She come to ground close to me  
Like from there you to me  
I make like bread in my hand  
And I sing  
I sing song from you Bazkarian  
Is in my head  
I sing very good melody from Unger Bazkarian and make like bread in my hand  
And Kara  
Hopping  
Hopping  
Closer  
Hopping  
I stop from singing  
I lie down upon ground  
I do not move  
I pretending to be dead  
I am dead woman on ground  
No breath  
No eyes  
But I hear Kara  
Hopping  
Hopping  
She very very close  
So close that beak of Kara is touching my hand where I have made like bread  
And then  
I close my hand  
Very quick  
So quick as the mouth of a dog  
Catching her by the beak  
I pull her toward me  
She is like storm in my arms  
Black wind  
Snow like great cloud  
She cannot cry  
I have her beak  
She cannot fly  
I have her soon inside my coat  
I feel her against my chest  
Her claws scratch make blood  
She is warm  
She is frightened  
She is food maybe three maybe four days  
I give her to you

UNGER  
Why



MME TRAPEZA  
Unger Bazkarian forgive Madame Trapeza

UNGER

...

MME TRAPEZA  
Bazkarian  
When is last time you have eat meat

UNGER

...

MME TRAPEZA  
You have heard  
Across city  
They cut rations again tomorrow  
Twenty percent

UNGER

...

*(UNGER stares at the CROW.)*

UNGER

Kara

MME TRAPEZA  
*(sound of a crow)*  
Karra!  
Is the name also from my grandchild

UNGER

Keep the meat for your grandchild

MME TRAPEZA  
Grandchild is far away  
Safe  
Here in city  
All family is gone  
Husband gone  
Sister gone  
Family of sister gone  
My shop  
You hear about bombs

UNGER

No

MME TRAPEZA  
Shop is damage  
Fire  
Roof falling down  
I find your violin bows  
But now  
They broken too  
Too difficult  
Old woman  
No build again

UNGER  
You must keep the bird

MME TRAPEZA  
The bird is for you

UNGER  
But with the cut in rations  
What are you going to do for food

MME TRAPEZA  
I am going to die Bazkarian

UNGER  
No  
No no no  
This is unnecessary

MME TRAPEZA  
When I am waiting for Kara  
When I am lying upon ground like dead woman  
I am thinking  
Here is peaceful  
Here is not so bad  
I see myself from eye of Kara  
Body of woman  
In old brown coat  
No hungry  
No frightened  
No sad  
When I did pretend to be dead I was not afraid anymore of death

UNGER  
This terrible time will be over

MME TRAPEZA  
Pah

Stop to be polite  
Accept my gift  
Food  
Life  
Meat  
Maybe three maybe four days

UNGER  
I wish you hadn't named her

MME TRAPEZA  
She is for you

UNGER  
Thank you

MME TRAPEZA  
And

UNGER  
Yes

*(TRAPEZA falls to her knees.)*

UNGER  
I forgive you Mme Trapeza  
I will need to seek the same for my own terrible acts

MME TRAPEZA  
And

UNGER  
And

MME TRAPEZA  
And one more thing

UNGER  
Yes

MME TRAPEZA  
Ticket to symphony

UNGER  
What

MME TRAPEZA  
Symphony performance is next week

UNGER  
On Sunday yes

MME TRAPEZA  
Is sold out  
I look everywhere for ticket  
Everyone have ticket except Madame Trapeza

UNGER  
You want a ticket to the concert

MME TRAPEZA  
All over world they send by radio  
Entire world will listen to us

CUTWATER (V.O.)  
Because to miss this concert was to miss the  
most important cultural event in that city in a  
lifetime

UNGER  
I thought you were planning to be dead

MME TRAPEZA  
They cut back ration tomorrow  
In two weeks I am dead  
But next week  
Still alive  
One seat Bazkarian  
Anywhere  
I sit in back  
Ask them for one ticket for old woman who will soon to die

UNGER  
Madame Trapeza

MME TRAPEZA  
I stand in back  
I sit with smelly men from army  
I listen from backstage  
I lie at foot of /Maestro Prandius

CUTWATER (V.O.)  
/Maestro Prandius who requested a massive  
artillery barrage to keep the enemy from firing  
upon the city for exactly the duration of the  
symphony

I lie on floor

I sit with ushers  
I sit behind woman with big hat  
I hide under your chair

CUTWATER (V.O.)

They set up a necklace of speakers around the perimeter and broadcast it out to the enemy who'd been at the city gates going on twelve months.

I hang from ceiling  
I hide in chandelier  
I hide inside timpani drum  
And if Madame Trapeza cannot be at Černavaris concert  
She write in her diary  
Madame Trapeza was at Černavaris concert

\*\*\*

*(Instant transition to fifty years later*

*MAESTRA CUTWATER addresses her orchestra.)*

CUTWATER  
And fifty years later  
Half a world away  
We have the privilege of recreating a piece of this miracle  
Thank you  
My friends  
For these exciting moments  
What a week  
What an honour  
Truly what an honour  
To guest-lead one of the finest orchestras in the world  
In one of the greatest cities  
On one of the most shattering  
Storied  
And soul-bearing pieces of music ever written  
A piece I have so often yearned to conduct  
And tonight  
Finally  
Tonight we will do Černavaris proud  
This nervous  
Chain-smoking  
Fidgety genius

Who in speaking to his own people  
Also spoke  
Also speaks  
To the rest of the world  
Continues  
Decades after his death  
To evoke and lead us through the flames of  
Pick your terror  
War  
Plague  
Brutal repression  
Fascism  
Thunderstorms  
Sure thunderstorms  
Dentists  
I'm joking  
But serious  
Public speaking  
Schoolyard bullies  
The march of Time  
The death of our parents  
The misery of our children  
He's speaking to us  
No matter the particulars  
He is saying I know your fear  
Let us stare at it  
Let us be deafened with the anxieties of our century  
And then  
Let us emerge  
Together  
Intact  
Having won this round  
And it is in that spirit of soul-bearing that I would like to make an announcement  
I consider you my friends  
And so  
Well  
You will be the first to know  
Before my press conference this afternoon  
Where I will be announcing my retirement  
This evening's concert will be my last  
Not  
Obviously  
As a lover of music  
But as a conductor on this privileged circuit  
Your next question  
Why  
Fair question  
Why  
At the height of her career

*(As CUTWATER speaks, a couple of GUARDS/  
SOLDIERS from the earlier time period enter,  
establish themselves in another space.*

*The Cast enters. They are PRISONERS dressed  
against the cold. They run cable, assemble a  
loudspeaker unit, run it up a pole, attach it.*

*We recognize YEDDA. She is the foreperson,  
overseeing the group task.*

*Music — a section from the Černavaris  
symphony — emerges from the loudspeaker)*

Next five years booked solid  
So why  
Maybe I'm not even sure  
March of time  
Death of parents  
Thunderstorms  
Short answer  
Midlife crisis  
Long answer is  
Reaching back a few  
I thought when I was younger that music would be  
enough  
And it has been enough  
It's been everything  
My soul  
My joy  
My sex  
My priest  
My net  
My big wide net  
Music keeps saving me  
And I need to go away from it  
Because I need to find out what music is saving me  
from  
In other words  
It's not you Music it's me  
In other words  
Yup  
Midlife crisis  
In other words I'm overtime  
I must let you go  
Your union rep just checked his watch  
Rest up  
Enjoy your afternoons  
I can think of no better place  
No better hall  
No better work  
And no finer artists with whom to share this moment  
Thank you  
And see you tonight

*(The music sounds hard and tinny and grows in intensity.)*

*(The PRISONERS swing the speaker around to face the audience.)*

*The PRISONERS and the GUARDS listen, some defiant, some soothed, some swaying, some motionless.)*

END OF  
**ARCO - PART I "OSTINATO"**