



Composed by Michael Hickey
Libretto by Ryan Gilliam
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'The Waistmakers' Opera' was produced by Downtown Art and performed outdoors at several sites, including the former Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. All the roles were performed by teen girls, ages 12-19.

Performances took place in May 2010, September 2010, and finally, in March 2011 to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Triangle Factory Fire.

Performers: Lily Abedin, Ari Anderson, Alyssa Burgos, Lauren Burgos, Olivia Cabrera, Lena Feliciano Hansen, Michela Garabedian, Gal Gelbard, Izzy Jenkins, Jeanne Kessira, Alice Quinn-Makwaia, Claritza Quezada, Lindiana Timmons, Erin Simone Wells (2011), Mariana Quinn Makwaia (2010), Lili Gehorsam (2010), Doris Alcantara (2010), Isabella Sullivan (2010)

Musicians: Eli Greenhoe, Hans Bilger (2010), Zach Crumrine (2010), Gabi Acevedo (Sept 2010-2011), Matt Berger (2011), Michael Hickey

On the Anniversary, March 25, 2011, the company met with friends and neighbors on 4th Street. After company members chalked a dedication on the sidewalk to Rosie Friedman, the following remarks were made by Ryan Gilliam.

"Today we are remembering how one hundred years ago a fire broke out in a factory a few blocks to our west. How 146 people died in that fire.

Across the street, at 77 East 4th Street, Rosie Friedman lived. She came from Bialystock in Poland when she was 14, part of a flood of Eastern European Jews hoping to leave violence and discrimination behind, hoping for something better in America. She came alone to live with her aunt and uncle, to find a job and send money home to her family. In her uncle's tiny apartment, there were also two boarders - five people in a one-bedroom apartment - and like many immigrant teens, it's likely she would have slept on the kitchen table or on a mat on the kitchen floor. There were some compensations to her life here. The Manhattan Lyceum, next door, offered concerts and lectures, as did Cooper Union and the Educational Alliance. There were dance halls, picture shows. There were young people everywhere. But most of her waking hours, she was a worker. Six days a week, she was a worker at the Triangle Factory.

Why does her death hurt us still? What is it about the Triangle Factory fire that makes it more than a horror story?

I think the fire woke us up to see that a great injustice was taking place. We had been lulled somehow into thinking that the conditions of factory workers were 'normal.' That the way the factories were managed by their owners was 'normal.' That things were hard for immigrants, but that this was 'normal.' It took the photos of Jacob Riis, it took the work of the Settlement Houses, of the newborn unions, and finally, it took the Triangle Fire to show us that things were not 'normal.' That, in fact, things were not right. That they must be, had to be changed. To

show us that we as a people had a responsibility to our younger, poorer, less Americanized brothers and sisters -- a responsibility which couldn't be ignored, couldn't be walked away from.

So much was wrong. For Rosie, as a woman, an immigrant, a Jew, a worker, a young person... so much was wrong. Could we really be asking people to put their lives at risk for a job in a factory? What happened on the road to success that had hardened the Triangle bosses, men who had once been sweatshop workers themselves, hardened them so they fought bitterly against the workers at every turn - so that they routinely locked the fire escape doors because they feared their young employees would steal scraps of fabric from their business.

We remember the Triangle Factory Fire. We remember the trapped girls that chose to leap nine stories to their deaths rather than burn. We remember them because we know that day we failed them.

We have responsibilities to each other, to justice, to fairness, and those responsibilities include that we look at our world closely, and that we question all that seems 'normal', because what history teaches us over and over again is that what seems 'normal' may, in fact, be very, very wrong."

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA

PROLOGUE

NARRATOR: 1911. March 25th. In the early morning, the city shook itself awake to greet another day of work. New York was a city of factories then, a crowded city, a city where each month thousands upon thousands of immigrants arrived in search of a better life. Forty thousand of those who trudged to work that morning were headed for the shirtwaist factories, where blouses were sewn and shipped to American women across the country. Most of these factory workers were young women, very young, thousands and thousands were teenagers.

Many of them came here. The building you see across the street housed the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory – a star among factories. Its owners, Max Blanck and Isaac Harris, themselves immigrants who had worked their way to power, were known as “The Shirtwaist Kings.”

But on March 25th, 1911, near the end of a long day, things went horribly wrong.

A fire. A terrible fierce fire sparked to life from a bin of scraps raged through the upper stories of the Triangle Factory. Only one exit was unlocked, the workers were too high up to be reached by the fire ladder trucks that raced to the scene, the fire escape collapsed under the weight of those trying to flee, and dozens of young women, caught by the flames, leapt from the ninth floor windows in their desperation.

The fire lasted only thirty minutes. One hundred and forty six workers died – most of them women, more than half of them girls. It has been called the worst workplace disaster in New York City before 9/11. The city was shocked and grieved, the owners tried for murder. It is a terrible story and it has not been forgotten.

But we haven't brought you here today to tell you the story of how these young women died. We brought you here to tell you how they lived. Before the fire of 1911, they had already made their mark on this city. And so, today we honor them, not as victims of a terrible fire, but as young people who lived remarkable and courageous lives.

\$10 A WEEK

GIRLS: Ten dollars a week

That's a good week – when the season is high

Ten dollars a week -- you can kind of get by

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Yes, with that you can buy
One bed in a crowded room
Four flights of stairs
Two meals a day if you're careful then there's
A few dollars left you can send home
Something to help your sister who's ill
A dollar to pay the doctor's bill
But on ten dollars a week there still
Might be something unspent
Something more than the rent
Something still in your pocket
Of course ten dollars a week is a good week
When the season is high
But there are times when the work can run dry
The low season
Months when the work disappears
A few months that can feel like years
You have to fight your fears
And shoes are two
Dollars a pair, but they're quickly worn through, what can you do?
Half hour for lunch – I try not to eat more than a bite
I like something sweet
My purse strings are tight cause I'm saving my pennies to treat myself to a new
Hat
How I want a new hat

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That

Makes me feel like a lady

GIRL: Let me tell you something about the way that we work.

GIRLS: Seven in the morning, at our machines

Seven at night, maybe we leave

Unless the bosses tell us to stay

not for more pay, there's never more pay

A slice of pie but no pay

it's a long day

ending at eight, ending at nine

they never say

you're expected to stay

It's a long day

Six days a week

you can't help but dream of

Sunday

FOREMEN: Faster!

GIRL: Let me tell you something. The bosses are not what you'd call educated men.

GIRLS: Despite how they bark, they're no better than us

And once they were us, men,

just men,

but they call us down

Not by name, the names they call us

Not my name, they call us

GIRL: 21

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GIRL: 42

GIRL: 86

GIRLS: 159

I'm Faster!

My name's Faster!

For them we're just part of a big machine

a big machine they are running

So it's hard not to dream

Of Sunday

Sunday – when you can sleep

No, not sleep

Even though you're weak from the week

You need to keep your spirits from sinking

So you put on your new hat and you hold your head high

as high as a lady

And with a bold heart you go forth to find

a life that's more than this deadening grind

To insist that the world

Notice your hat

And that

You're here.

I'm here.

GIRL: My mother is sick.

GIRLS: Ten dollars a week isn't much

To pay for the meat and the butter and bread to put on the table..

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I do what I'm able

And shoes, if they're new, cost two

dollars a pair

when the weather is fair, you can get almost three months of wear,

'til despite your best care, they're completely worn through

FOREMEN: Faster!

GIRL: Let me tell you something

GIRLS: When you go to the ladies room, they follow you

Ladies

FOREMEN: Ha ha, 'ladies'

GIRLS: And if you delay

Just stay a minute too long, they say

FOREMEN: Faster!

GIRLS: Faster, I dream,

faster, I run,

my arms ache but I go faster!

GIRL: Sometimes in my haste my finger is caught and the needle goes right through it. It goes quick, though, so it doesn't hurt much. I bind it up tight with a piece of cotton and go on working.

GIRLS: We all have accidents like that.

Ten dollars a week

you can kind of get by

Unless you arrive late

that's a dollar taken away

Or if the cloth gets damaged or torn

No matter the reason, you pay

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And at the end of the day

When we finally leave

They search us to see

If we're thieves

But where would I go

there's no place that's better

And here

At least I have them

the girls that know

I'm here

And ten dollars a week when the season is high

So we try

FOREMEN: FASTER!

GIRLS: To get by, to comply, not to cry, to be strong, to be proud, and hold our heads high

But let me tell you

sometimes

sometimes

Sometimes a girl has a new hat

Maybe not much to look at

A fifty cent hat

so maybe not all that

Yet ours

New

Our new hat

But the bosses won't give us a safe place to keep

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A hat, one that has feathers or maybe a rose,
One that needs care
A little protection
A small corner of safety
Just room for a hat
So that
When we step outside
We can hold our head high
Under our hat
and feel like a lady

THE BOSSES SONG

TRIANGLE BOSSES (BLANCK & HARRIS): It has come to our attention

GIRLS: Attention!

TRI BOSSES: That some of you attended

GIRLS: Attention!

TRI BOSSES: A meeting last night. Led by Local 25 of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and by the Women's Trade Union League

GIRLS: The meeting last night

TRI BOSSES: Ladies

GIRLS: Oh..ladies.

TRI BOSSES: As we have pointed out before, there is no need
to entangle yourselves,
to embroil yourselves,
to sully yourselves

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with these hotheaded radicals

GIRLS: They mean Local 25

TRI BOSSES: Or these misguided mistaken middle class progressives

GIRLS: The Women's Trade Union League

TRI BOSSES: Because!

Because we have generously provided you with

The Triangle Employees Benevolent Association

Yes, your management has generously provided you with

your own – your very own – your very own own own union.

The Triangle Employees Benevolent Association

A very nice creation

an end to your temptation

(You catch more flies with honey)

A place for your frustration

the means for our salvation

(Sweet)

A very nice union and quite ably led

BLANCK: By my nephew,

HARRIS: my cousin,

BLANCK: my favorite auntie,

TRI BOSSES: Our own vigilante

Your management generously gives

So let us be perfectly clear

GIRLS: Oh, dear

TRI BOSSES: Anyone discovered organizing for a competing union will be immediately dismissed.

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UNION MEN

NARRATOR: In 1909, almost 70% of the nation's women's clothing was manufactured in New York City. The 'shirtwaist' or blouse worn with a skirt and belt had become the dominant fashion for working women. It was practical, worn everywhere, and symbolized a new freedom for women – a revolt against corsets, bustles, and hoops.

Everyday, the shirtwaist empire built by Triangle owners Blanck and Harris bundled, boxed, and shipped 2000 garments. They watched that year as agitation and unrest moved through the workers of the garment industry and they become more and more determined that nothing would disturb the Triangle or its profits.

Clara Lemlich represented just the kind of trouble they feared. Young, fiery, and relentless, Lemlich was a founder of the tiny Local 25 of the Garment Worker's Union, a new branch meant to serve the mostly female waistmakers. The Union, itself still very young, was run by men and served men, many of whom saw women as unreliable allies in the battle against the bosses –

UNION MEN: Girls – they'll work for less than a man

Girls – they quit as soon as they land

A husband

Girls

They aren't in it

for more than a minute

No kind of game plan

CLARA'S SONG/TROUBLE

GIRL: They've locked the doors!

GIRL: They've locked us out!

GIRL: Trouble.

GIRLS: Lock out.

GIRL: Look at this.

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GIRL: Advertisement: The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory seeks new employees for its factories..

CLARA: You've got trouble.

GIRLS: They're giving our jobs away.

GIRLS: Our jobs!

GIRL: Because we talked to the union.

CLARA: Trouble, you've got trouble and you're not alone

Trouble's all around you, trouble's everywhere

GIRL: Read this: Previous employees need not apply.

GIRL: Not apply!

GIRL: But how do I

GIRLS: Pay my board – pay my rent – I've already spent

GIRL: This is trouble

GIRLS: How unfair! What did we do? Talk to you..

GIRL: Trouble.

CLARA: I'm Clara. I have a name. Clara Lemlich.

GIRLS: Trouble.

CLARA: Yes, I'm trouble, I'm trouble enough

They've broken my ribs

Bruised me and beat me

Yes, I'm trouble, I'm trouble enough

They've sent their thugs to defeat me

But what they can't see

Is that it's not about me

And I won't be put down

They will have trouble

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ALL: Until they make right

 All that is wrong

 I will incite

 I will inflame

 I will ignite

 A fire

 A fire, a fire, a fire

 The times require

 More than words

COOPER UNION

WOMAN: Local 25 invites you to a meeting, tonight, in the Great Hall at Cooper Union to discuss a general strike

NARRATOR: The Great Hall hall was packed.. overflowed onto the street... the shirt waistmakers pressed together, not an inch of space. Never had Cooper Union seen so many, not even the night Abraham Lincoln launched his way to the presidency, never more than now. One after another, hour into hour, the speakers addressed the crowd, saying:

SPEAKER: Fight, yes... but only if you are strong

SPEAKER: Fight, yes... but maybe not right now

SPEAKER: Think carefully, be practical

 How are the strike funds.. small?

 Maybe not right now

SPEAKERS: Maybe not at all.

GIRLS: One hour, two hours

 How much they talk

 the time goes by and the hall is hot

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CLARA: Talk, they only talk, where is the motion?

GIRLS: One hour, two hours.. talk, more talk
The time goes by and the room is..
Look! It's him!
Samuel Gompers, Samuel, Samuel Gompers

NARRATOR: Mr. Samuel Gompers, head of the AFL, the most powerful union leader in America.

GIRLS: Him. I've heard of him.
He's in the papers, the newspapers
Gompers Samuel Gompers Samuel
Now they'll know we're serious, this is serious
He came to speak to us, speak to us, speak to us

GOMPERS: The history of labor is littered with the skeletons of organizations done to death
because of hasty strikes gone into for the best of reasons but unprepared.
I have never declared a strike in all my life.

GIRLS: He's never declared a strike.
No strike.

GOMPERS: I have done my best to prevent strikes.

GIRLS: Not a strike. No strike.
Talk..talk.. more talk... talk, it's hot

GOMPERS: But of course,

GIRLS: Of course

GOMPERS: There comes a time when not to strike is to rivet the chains of slavery upon our wrists.

GIRLS: There comes a time when not to strike..

GOMPERS: Friends, friends, do not enter too hastily...
but when you can't get the manufacturer to give you what you want, then strike.

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GIRLS: Then strike!

GOMPERS: And when you strike, let the manufacturers know you are on strike.

GIRLS: On strike!

CLARA: Now now now now.. make the motion now..

GIRLS: The time goes, the hall's hot...
do we or do we not strike
do we strike do we...

CLARA: now now now now

MODERATOR: The next speaker is.. next speaker is..

CLARA: I ... want to say a few words!

SPEAKERS: Trouble

CLARA I want to say a few words!

SPEAKERS: Trouble

MODERATOR: The next speaker is..

GIRL: Clara!

GIRLS: Clara!

CLARA: I want to say a few words.

MODERATOR: Next speaker is..

GIRLS: Clara! Let her speak. Let her speak.
Let her speak.

MODERATOR/SPEAKERS: Trouble.

CLARA: I have listened to all these speakers and I have no further patience for talk,
as I am one of those

GIRLS: I am one of those.. I am one of those..

CLARA: who feels and suffers from the things pictured. I move that we go on a general strike!

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MODERATOR: Ladies..

SPEAKERS: Trouble.. trouble.. trouble..

MODERATOR: Ladies.. Ladies.... do I have a second?

GIRLS: I second.. I second... Second second second second.. Strike!

MODERATOR: Then we will put the motion to a vote.

But think carefully, think carefully..

those that fear hunger or cold,

should not be ashamed to vote against this

GIRLS: Strike.. strike.. strike.. strike...

MODERATOR: Think.. think carefully...

You are sealing a pact

GIRLS: Strike

MODERATOR: a pact to struggle to the end..

GIRLS: Strike.. strike..strike...

MODERATOR: Ladies.. oh ladies.. this is the question..

Think carefully, think carefully

Do you mean faith?

Do you mean faith?

GIRLS: Yes, we mean faith.

MODERATOR: Will you take the old oath?

The old Jewish oath?

GIRLS: If I turn traitor to the cause I now pledge,

may this hand wither from the arm I now raise

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STRIKE

GIRLS: Shall we wait like this? Do we wait?
Hats and coats beside us. Do we wait?
Strike
Who will get up first?

GIRL: Not me, not first

GIRL: First they will remember

GIRL: The bosses will remember

GIRLS: Strike, a general strike, there is a general strike

GIRLS: Who will get up first? Not me, not alone

GIRL: I don't want to be alone

GIRL: Hush, girl, you're not alone.

GIRLS: We're union. Union. Strike!

GIRLS: Who will get up first, who, someone who
Who, someone who

GIRL: What difference does it make who is first and who is last

GIRLS: We're together. Be together. And walk.
Walk. Walk. Walk. Walk.
It has begun
Walk. Walk. Walk. Walk out.
Walk out.
We're Out.
Strike. Strike. Strike. Strike. Strike!
What to do? Where to go? Where to go? Where where where
What to do? Where to go? Where where where

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GIRL: Telephone!

GIRLS: but I never, I don't know, I never never never

GIRL: Telephone!

GIRLS: But I never never never

GIRL: I know! I know!

GIRLS: She knows.

GIRL: I know how to telephone

GIRLS: She knows she knows

I never I don't know I never she knows

GIRL: I never did this before!

GIRLS: On strike. On strike.

It has begun. Union.

WOMAN: Women's Trade Union League.

WOMEN: You did? They..more...more...walked out...walked out

Hold on...wait...more more more more

GIRLS: Union

WOMAN: Get a hall, get many halls

WOMEN: We need a hall, music hall, lecture hall, any hall

Now, now, now please

GIRLS: Strike strike strike

WOMEN: Masonic hall, theater hall, many halls, more

GIRL: I never did this before

GIRLS: Strike strike strike

Twenty percent pay raise!

WOMEN: More, there are more...

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Lecture hall, any hall

ALL: More more more more

GIRLS: Fifty two hour work week!

ALL: Fifty two hour work week!

WOMEN: Halls, any hall, all halls

ALL: More more more more

WOMAN: How many? How many?

WOMEN: Five thousand, ten thousand

WOMAN: Ten thousand?

ALL: More more more more

GIRLS: Union, we are union

WOMEN: Masonic hall, theater hall, hall hall please hall

ALL: Five thousand, ten thousand

Fifteen thousand

Twenty

GIRLS: Twenty percent pay raise!

Fifty two hour work week!

And recognition of this union

ALL: And recognition of this union.. Strike!

PICKETS AND POCKETS

NEWS PAPER 1: Nov 24, 1909: Twenty thousand shirtwaist makers walk out.

NEWSPAPER 2: No one had guessed at this latent fire. Five hundred shops have been hit!

NEWS 1: Eighty-five to ninety percent of the strikers are young women.

NEWS 2: This may be the largest women's strike ever!

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CLARA: We know that if we stick together, and we are going to stick,
we will win

GIRLS: We know that if we stick together, and we are going to stick,
we will win!

WOMEN'S TRADE UNION LEAGUE (WTUL)

Tomorrow morning at seven, the picketing starts
We launch our campaign to win minds and hearts
An orderly, rational, quite polite strike
So, ladies, ladies, we must have
orderly, rational, quite polite girls

NEWS 1: Your reporter reports
these brave young women are fighting to break
the heartless machine of industry
Young women who've known no pleasure in life,
not an amusement or hearty full meal
not a pretty new dress...

NEWS 2: Your correspondent retorts
On the streets of New York, is a new leisure class
twenty thousand young women dressed in Sunday attire,
gossiping, visiting, a festive occasion,
full of fun and flirtation
I cannot discern any real grievance,
no widows and orphans, no starved desperation
Do these giggling girls really need more?
For what? A new ribbon or ruffle to catch the eye

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of some neighborhood guy?

NEWS 1: They fight for a living wage!

NEWS 2: For feathers and frivols

NEWS 1 AND 2: And again

NEWS/WTUL: In the morning at seven, the picketing starts
in the union's campaign to win minds and hearts

TRI BOSSES: Esteemed Gentlemen, the owners of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory invite you to an
Emergency Meeting!

GIRL: Seventy shops have already surrendered!

GIRLS: Seventy shops in twenty-four hours! Ha!

TRI BOSSES: Gentlemen, we must stick together
There must be no more surrender
Pickets can't match pockets and ours go deep
So reach, gentlemen, reach
'Cause if we don't pay now, there'll be hell to pay later
so reach

ALL BOSSES: Something for Tammany, something sweet
that will work its way down to the cop on the beat
so reach
Something to hire a nice bit of muscle
to swiftly hunt down those who oppose,
In some dark alley a couple hard blows
will buckle the knees of these radical joes,
so reach
Those union guys led our girls astray

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but just let them try to steal away

our profits

oh, it's certain that they'll give in

just as certain that we will win

with our pockets, gentlemen

So reach

because if we don't pay now,

there'll be hell to pay later

GIRLS: Twelve dollars a week, if we win

WTUL: But the strike fund can pay just a quarter a day

GIRL: A quarter a day?

GIRL: A quarter a day!

GIRLS/BOSES: Don't worry, be strong

none of this will last long

If we stick together, we will win

BOSS AND SHOPGIRL

REPORTERS: Day one, day two, we'd like to know your point of view

As a factory owner, what do you think

What do you think of this strike?

BOSS: I tell you, boys, I've made my way

in this big bad world, I've learned to play

hard, stay sharp, think quick and disobey

the rules -- when the rules don't work.

So I understand rebels

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but this strike reminds me how I dislike

fools

This is a foolish hysterical strike

lots of noise and hullabaloo

but not five in a hundred can tell you

what they're striking for

REPORTERS: Day three, day four

Will you walk with the others, Miss?

If this persists, will you walk out?

GIRL: No

REPORTERS: Why no?, why not?

GIRL: 'Cause I got plans

REPORTER: Plans?

GIRL: To marry a well to do man

and no well to do man wants to marry a girl's been in trouble

REPORTER: You're planning to marry a well to do man? A millionaire?

GIRL: I'm good enough and it's happened before

REPORTER: Sure. In the fiction you girls like to read

when you eat your lunch on the shop floor

but that's nothing like life

GIRL: Well I've read your stories

the ones that you write for your fancy newspaper

and they're nothing like life to me

Besides,

who ever said life can't be

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like stories
Stories where good things happen sometimes
We all got our dreams and I can have mine
I might be young but I know
fiction and fact ain't so far apart
that they don't meet
Yes, fiction and fact
like rich and poor
ain't so far apart
that they don't meet

CROSSING THE LINE

HANDOUT: Rules for Pickets
Don't walk in groups of more than two or three.
Don't stand in front of the shop; walk up and down the block.
Don't stop the person you wish to talk to; walk along side of him.
Don't get excited and shout when you are talking.
Don't put your hand on the person you are speaking to. Don't touch his sleeve or button. This may be construed as a "technical assault."
Don't call any one "scab" or use abusive language of any kind.
Plead, persuade, appeal, but do not threaten.

GIRLS: Day five six seven
WTUL: A quite polite strike
GIRLS: Here they come, here they come
OFFICERS: Step back, step back

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GIRLS: Don't do it, don't go in
Come to us, we'll help you win
what you deserve, what you should have

MUSCLE: Work is what they need!
You blew your chance now they've got theirs..
Work is what they need, not you

GIRLS: Come this way
It's just a few steps, sisters

OFFICERS: Keep walking! Keep walking!

GIRLS: Brothers! Brothers!
Stand with your sisters
Don't cross our line

MUSCLE: We're telling you be quiet if you don't want trouble

GIRLS: Come to us, you're one of us, you know it's true
We're you

MUSCLE: You leave these girls alone!
They want nothing to do with the likes of you

WTUL: An orderly, rational, quite polite strike

GIRLS: Don't do it, don't go in..
Come to us, we'll help you win

MUSCLE: You win? That's a laugh!
Riffraff you've made yourselves
all for a new pair of shoes
Couldn't tell when you had it good
A sweet job, a job for a girl

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

You had it good
But not today
Today you're on the outside
and we're on the side
of the cops
Muscle and law
You can't win against
muscle and law

THE ARREST

GIRL: Joseph Pilanski! What are you doing?
BOY: Ada...
OFFICER: Step back!
GIRL: You're crossing our line?
BOY: Ada, I need the work
MUSCLE: One more word and you'll be sorry!
2ND GIRL: We all need the work, Joseph Pilanski
MUSCLE: Who was that?
GIRL: Well, I ain't a bit sorry that I broke it off with you, Joseph Pilanski. You were never the man for me. You're a traitor --
GIRLS: A traitor to your kind!
WTUL: Orderly rational girls, please be orderly rational girls
MUSCLE: You ain't got enough trouble that you want more?
3RD GIRL: We can talk! We ain't doing nothing but talking.
4TH GIRL: You
You

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
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Downtown Art, May 2010

I see you

Come here and speak to me

It's all right

Come here and...

GIRLS: Oh!

MUSCLE: I warned you good, told you what would happen.

5TH GIRL: Officer, officer! He struck my friend, hit her hard!

OFFICER: Get to your feet, you're coming with me.

5TH GIRL: But what about him? He..

OFFICER: You're coming with me

5TH GIRL: Why? What did we do

OFFICER: Disorderly conduct

You're under arrest

5TH GIRL: but

OFFICER: Disorderly conduct

CHORUS: Disorderly conduct

Disorderly conduct

Disruptive, disturbing, disgraceful, distressing

Disorderly conduct!

JUDGES

OFFICERS: All Rise

JUDGE 1: Ah, we've seen it all

this bench has seen, we've seen it all

Yes?

OFFICERS: Disorderly conduct!

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
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Downtown Art, May 2010

FOREMAN: Your honor, she threw an egg at me, a bad egg

COURT: Ha ha, sweetheart, you are a bad egg!

JUDGE 1/OFFICERS: Order, order

FOREMAN: Your honor, she threw an egg at me

GIRL: But it missed!

GIRL DEFENDANT: Yeah, your honor, so that big lug grins and yells..

OFFICERS: Order order

JUDGE 1: What did you yell?

FOREMAN: I yelled how little Lena couldn't hit a barn door at twenty paces!

JUDGE 1: And then what happened?

COURT: Her aim got a whole lot better!

JUDGE 1: Order!

GIRL DEFENDANT: He come running at me like he was going to wallop me good

Well, I aint going down without a fight!

JUDGE/OFFICERS: Disorderly conduct!

JUDGE 1: Fine her. Five dollars!

Order order where are the days of order

Young women who fight, who yell and who strike

Where are the days of order?

PIKE: Your honor, I'm Violet Pike,

from the Women's Trade Union League

We'll pay the fine

These really are orderly quite polite girls, sir

Orderly quite polite girls

OFFICERS: All Rise!

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
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Downtown Art, May 2010

JUDGE 2: Ah we've seen it all, this bench has seen it all
What's the charge?

OFFICER: Disorderly conduct

JUDGE 2: Again? And what were they doing, officer?

OFFICER: Loitering outside a factory

JUDGE 2: Oh, yes, and what else?

OFFICER: Uh, nothing else, your honor.
That's what they were doing
Standing outside a factory, making trouble they were

COURT: Disorderly conduct, disruptive, disturbing

JUDGE 2: Dismissed!

OFFICER: But your honor

JUDGE 2: Dismissed. They have a right to picket.

OFFICER: But your honor - the other judges

JUDGE 2: I don't care what the other judges do...
these girls have the right to picket.
Dismissed

CHORUS: All rise!

JUDGE 3: Repeat that, Miss Rothnagle.

ATTORNEY: Miss Mokovsky

JUDGE 3: Miss Rothnagle is... what?

ATTORNEY: Miss Mokovsky, Miss Mokovsky

JUDGE 3: What?

ATTORNEY: Miss Rothnagle is Miss Mokovsky
and Pauline Rankus isn't Rankus

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
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Downtown Art, May 2010

she's Ida Scholinsky

JUDGE 3: What? Who? It's like a foreign country!

COURT: Miss Rothnagle is Miss Mokovsky

and Pauline Rankus isn't Rankus she's Ida Scholinsky

JUDGE 3: What??!

COURT: Rothnagle Rankus Mokovsky Scholinsky

JUDGE 3: Order!

OFFICERS: All rise!

JUDGE 4: Ah.. The bench has seen it all, seen it all all all

GIRL 5: He hit my friend but the officer arrested us!

JUDGE 4: Order, order, where are the days of order?

Young women who fight, who yell and who strike

PIKE: Your honor

JUDGE 4: Miss Pike

PIKE: I'm Violet Pike of the Women's Trade Union League

JUDGE 4: I know... the Women's Trade Union League.

A nice bunch of middle-class interfering women, I know.

PIKE: Your honor..

JUDGE 4: But do you know how many girls have been in my court these past few days?

PIKE: They are being arrested unfairly. The police..

COURT: Are controlled by Tammany Hall and Tammany Hall's on the side of the bosses!

JUDGE 4: Order! I will have order!

PIKE The police...

JUDGE 4: Tammany Hall may control just about everything in this city..

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
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Downtown Art, May 2010

COURT: They do!

JUDGE 4: Order!
but they don't control me
Let me tell you, young ladies, this strike...

GIRLS: Twenty percent pay raise

JUDGE 4: this strike...

GIRLS: Fifty two hour work week

JUDGE 4: this strike is disruptive, disturbing, disgraceful

GIRLS: Union

JUDGE: Disorderly conduct! But just as soon as I fine them, the Women's Trade Union League comes along and pays the fine. Yes, Miss Pike, and then these girls walk out and what does that teach them?

GIRLS: Strike strike strike strike

PIKE: What are you trying to teach them, sir?

JUDGE 4: This strike is rebellion of the worst kind
Industry sustains us, in work is our salvation
and this riotous discontent,
this malicious demand for more,
this socialism is poison to our city
An insult to the right order of things
This strike is a strike against God!

GIRLS: Union

JUDGE 4: Work is our lot in this world, and in God's name I'll teach you that lesson
You are sentenced to five days in the workhouse.

PIKE: But they're hardly more than children! They can't..

COURT: Order order

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

GIRLS: If we stick together we will win

PIKE: Your honor, cannot this sentence be mitigated?

JUDGE 4: No, ma'am. Rebellion like theirs has its price
and if they don't pay it now,
there'll be hell to pay later

GIRLS: Don't worry, be strong, none of this will last long
If we stick together, we will win

ACT 2

PROTEST TO THE MAYOR / TAMMANY HALL

GIRLS: To the Honorable George B. McClellan

NARRATOR: Nine days after the general strike began.. on the 3rd of December

GIRLS: Mayor of the City of New York

NARRATOR: Ten thousand young shirtwaistmakers marched on city hall

GIRLS: We, the members of the Ladies Shirtwaist Makers Union, request that you put an immediate stop to the insults, intimidations and abuses which we have been subjected to by your police.

NARRATOR: In the first 3 days of December alone, police had arrested over 200 strikers..

GIRLS: Picketing is our lawful right.

We protest the flagrant discrimination of the Police Department in favor of the employers.

Employers using every means...

CHORUS: Muscle and law

GIRLS: to incite us to violence.

MAYOR: Ladies, ladies

I thank all ten thousand of you

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

for bringing me this letter
I will certainly look into the matter
but ladies
you need to look deeper too
you need to see
what I can't show you
you need to listen to what I can't say

CHORUS: Tammany

MAYOR: Yes, I'm your Mayor
but look behind me..
what you don't see
That's Tammany

ALL: Tammany Hall
a system so sweet
so corrupt so complete Tammany
a machine built vote by vote
This is a hard city
people travel to its stony shores
bringing dreams too easily broken
as their fates in this new world unfold
trudging streets paved with hardship not gold
they scramble and stumble and wonder
On whom can you depend?
where do you find a friend?
sooner or later they're told

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

when you can't find a job, talk to Tammany
when you don't have the rent, go to Tammany
when the water's turned to ice,
when you'll sell at any price
speak to Tammany
and it's fixed
and when you can stand on your own, Tammany
gently spells out what you've known
without words
the silent expectation of an annual donation
and your vote
This is a hard city
and on its stony shores
any new business can fall and crack
When money is tight, on what do you spend?
You seek the guidance of a friend
so many hopes reach a dead end
How to push through?
When you can't land the contract, see Tammany
When you won't pass inspection, get Tammany
When you need a rule bent, some official consent
go to Tammany
and it's fixed
and when your profits have grown, Tammany
gently spells out what you've known

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

without words
the silent expectation of a generous donation
and your vote
Tammany Hall
A system so sweet
so corrupt so complete
So replete with deceit
Tammany
a machine built vote by vote

CLARA: Women can't vote

MAYOR: True

Unlucky for you

Yes, life can be sour

when you've nothing to sweeten Tammany

ALVA VANDERBILT BELMONT

ALVA Women can't vote! Change this and you change the world.

CHORUS: Alva Vanderbilt Belmont

the tarnished queen of a gilded age

Unafraid to take command

take a stand, make a grand gesture

for the cause she adopts as her own

ALVA: These ridiculous arrests! If women had the vote..

SECRETARY: Yes, Mrs. Belmont. Will you attend the Astors' party? It's a masquerade ball.

CHORUS: Alva Vanderbilt Belmont

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

the tarnished queen of a gilded age
the creme of the creme, the tip of the top
cranky and vocal, too mighty to stop
Society's leaders grin and bear her
Nothing will scare her
Among themselves they declare her
uncomfortably hot

ALVA: Do these girls even realize what they have done?

SECRETARY: Mrs. Belmont, the charity ball you chaired last week raised over twenty thousand...

CHORUS: Twenty thousand..

ALVA: This strike must be one of the largest political actions ever undertaken by women. But where can it ever lead until women have the vote?

My cause is their cause, and their cause is mine.

From this moment, I will shape a movement

GRAND NIGHT/ LONG WALK HOME

NEWS REPORTERS: Mrs. Alva Vanderbilt Belmont invites the shirtwaist strikers, and all involved in their cause to a "monster meeting" at the Hippodrome, the largest theater in the world

BELMONT: For you tonight, I have turned out the elephants
For you tonight, I've banned the circus from its stage
Tonight the spectacle is ours
A rally to launch our newest crusade
A show of shows, a campaign, a cause
Yes, its our turn to roar

GIRLS: Oh, it was a grand night full of fire and light
A night to remember

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

Oh, it was a grand night full of fire and light

A night to remember

BELMONT: Six thousand in seats, a thousand more on stage

We are sisters, my sisters;

I will fight by your side because my cause is your cause and your cause is mine

BELMONT/SUFFRAGETTES: For you tonight, we will hold a collection

we will wake up this town, shake it onto its feet

Cause it's our turn to roar

Votes for women!

GIRLS: Oh, it was a grand night full of fire and light

A night to remember

Oh, it was a grand night full of fire and light

A night to remember

GIRLS: I'll never forget what I heard, what I saw

The speakers the shouts, the cheers and the chants

A rally, a rally, a roar

GIRL: But later,

as I walk the long walk home

bit by the sharp teeth of the icy night

which hasn't got a heart to be warmed by a rally

Later, when I climb the dark stairs

to lie down on my cot in this stuffy crowded room

of spent men and women

its hard to rekindle that fire.

And I can't help but think

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

what's the good of a vote?

It won't pay your rent

can't be eaten for breakfast

so tell me

what's the good of a vote?

Each dream has a price

and with this strike I'm paying for one dream now

Each dream has a price

and ladies with houses and husbands,

ladies sleeping soundly through the night,

with a few dollars under their pillow

maybe they can afford to dream of votes

but not me..

I'm paying for one dream now

THE COST OF WAR

FACTORY BOSS: They are offering to negotiate!

TRIANGLE BOSSES: No!

FACTORY BOSS: But I can't hold out much longer! It's been four weeks!

FACTORY BOSS 2: My business is bleeding... and the girls of Philadelphia will no longer take our work.

FACTORY BOSS 3: They've sent it back and joined the strike!

TRIANGLE BOSSES: No!

FACTORY BOSSES: But we haven't your strength

we're feeling the pain

how bad could it be, how bad could it be

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

if we give them their raise, agree to their hours,
if we work with their union

TRIANGLE BOSSES: No!

They fired the shot that started this
They laid siege at our walls
And we won't give in to an army of girls
Outside our walls in the dark of December
they're starting to feel the cold, the hunger and want
They're learning the cost of war
Outside our walls in the dark of December
their funds are depleted, their doubts start to grow
They're learning the cost of war

ALL: And we will make sure they never forget
the price they paid to strike this blow
So stick to your guns and let their hearts sink
at the cost of war
An army of girls - they're only an army of girls
What's a man if he can't hold his ground with an army of girls?
We fought our way up from the streets and the sweatshops
out of the ranks
We fought our way up from the dirt and despair
away from the smell, out of that muck
we built our way up and we won't be pulled down
No, we won't be pulled down by an army of girls
So stick to your guns and let their hearts break

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

at the cost of war

ANN MORGAN ENTERS THE FRAY

NEWSPAPERS: Attention for the Front Page! Pay attention to the Front Page!

Anne Morgan, daughter of J. P. Morgan, the most powerful man on Wall Street, is lending her support to the shirtwaist strikers!

BOSES: Morgan? Anne Morgan?

ANNE: I have only known of this strike for a short time.

I find others know nothing about it.

But once we learn of these conditions, we can't live our lives without doing something.

The consumer must be protected..

BOSES: Yes

ANNE: and costs kept down...

BOSES: Yes

ANNE: But when you hear of a woman who presses 40 dozen skirts for \$8 a week, something must be wrong.

GIRLS: Something must be wrong

BOSES: J.P Morgan, king of the bankers

Does a man like him, a man of success,

deserve such an ungrateful daughter?

ANNE: I have invited several strikers to lunch at the Colony Club,

where they may tell their story in person

to myself and 150 other society women

GIRLS: Front page

We're on the front page

because Miss Morgan put us there

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

Are we important now?

Does this mean we're important now?

COLONY CLUB

GIRL: It was a strange day

I had a funny sort of feeling as I put on my dress

to go have lunch so far uptown

Am I important now?

MARY/WTUL: Let me introduce myself. I am Mary Dreier from the Women's Trade Union League

LADIES: It was a strange day

To see these girls, hear them speak, watch them eat

I wondered - has she ever dined on such a lunch before?

GIRL: We work eight days in the week.. this may seem strange to you, but sometimes we work a week and a half in one week

BOSESSES: Dear Miss Morgan, don't believe what they say

They will mislead you, Clara Lemlich will mislead you

GIRLS: It was a strange day, a very strange day..

the day we ate their lunch and tried to tell them

what the world is, what the world is when

you are me

GIRL: I have a sick mother and two little sisters to support.... but as hard as I work at the piecework, I get only four dollars a week

BOSESSES: They will mislead you, Miss Morgan,

Come tour our factories, we'll change your mind

GIRLS/LADIES: It was a strange day, strange and unusual

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
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Downtown Art, May 2010

CLARA: It is true. I earned more than many of the girls. But I did not strike for myself. I led this strike for all that have less. If we don't stick together, who will fight for us?

LADY: I'm not sure what this feeling is that tightens my heart

I don't think its their stories that catch in my throat

Maybe it's just to be so close, close enough to see

in twenty years time

she will look like me

GIRL: My employer got the priest to come around and tell the Italian girls that if we went on strike we would all go to hell. Excuse the language.

GIRL: I looked at her dress, at her rings, at her hair

and all that I could see was money

GIRLS: But she was so quiet, so quiet and still

that I looked again

at her face, at her eyes

Could she be like me?

ALL: What accident of fate made her life hers?

And what trick of fate made mine?

Strange

LADY: She raises her hand, the length of her fingers

GIRL: Her skirt brushed mine as she passed

LADY: Her eyes

LADIES: are the shape of my daughter's

ALL: Why did this happen to her?

Why does this happen to me?

On this strange day

I don't know, I could feel

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
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Downtown Art, May 2010

Strange enough I could see
that though the gulf is wide,
though she's on the farther side,
yet she's close
so close

My heart shivers, wants to ask
could she have been me?

ANNE: What do you need most?

MARY: Money to fight with.

ANNE: Then I hope I may have the honor of beginning the collection.

MOTOR PARADE

NEWS 2: Fortune appears to be shining on the shirtwaist strikers these days. Alva Belmont and her suffragettes are busily raising money for them.

NEWS 1: The Shubert Theaters have committed one week's profits from their hit show.

NEWS 2: And we have heard that Anne Morgan, who always receives a huge Christmas check from her father, is giving it all to the strike fund.

GIRLS: Automobiles!

We are ladies today, ha ha

A motor parade

Miss Morgan's motor parade

Wave the flags high, smile a brave smile

Give us your cheers

A motor parade

Miss Morgan's motor parade for right

WTUL: More allies to your cause

COLLEGE GIRLS: Sisters, we're from the Seven Sisters

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

GIRLS: College girls

COLLEGE GIRLS: The League trumpets your cause , your story fires us all

as it sweeps from college to college

as it marches from campus to hall

So we've come to answer the call

To all our sisters 'cross America

Join our boycott of nonunion waists!

NEWS 1: "the college girls have made a great hit.. they can be seen almost every night at the Grand Street restaurants, drinking russian tea and eating noodle soup prepared the real Russian way...

COLLEGE GIRLS: When young women like you stand up to power

Your story is more than a strike

In an age of men, it's a message for women

that this is the hour to fight

ALL: Wave the flags high, smile a brave smile

It's a sisters brigade, a moral crusade

a motor parade for right

THE SOCIALISTS PROTEST

NEWS 2: For almost the first time, women of widely different social ranks have joined forces in a common cause.

NARRATOR: But not everyone was pleased at this alliance with wealth and privilege.

SOCIALISTS: Automobiles! How can the automobiles of the rich drive the cause of the workers?

WTUL: They are allies, they bring resources. They want to help.

SOCIALISTS: How can you count them as fighters?

Their wealth is like armor, they'll never be hurt

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

How can you count their donations?

Their bankrolls don't suffer, their bellies stay full

No sense of history

Light of heart, like heedless children

They play on a field of graves

We who survived the old world -

its hatred and pogroms and csars -

find ourselves forced to fight again in the new

We who marched at the side of the workers

for countless years through countless frays

Where's our front page story?

Where's our fleeting glory?

All we receive over the years are scars

SHAKING TAMMANY

GIRLS: Don't cross our line

NEWS: Extra! In a study done by the Hearst newspapers, the young female shirtwaist strikers are receiving harsher treatment from the police and the courts than did the male taxi drivers in their big strike a year ago.

ALVA: Let me assure you, there will be a different order of things when we have women judges on the bench.

WTUL: Seven hundred twenty three arrests in a single month!

Only Tammany can tame the snarling police

Only Tammany can curb the cruelty of the courts

Tammany's power rests on a mountain of votes

Shake the voters and Tammany trembles

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
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Downtown Art, May 2010

ALL: We will shake the mountain with an alliance never seen before
of rich and poor, left and right, radical and socialite
We will shake the mountain
Carnegie Hall tomorrow night
A rally, a rally
How do you get to, how do you get to
How do you get to Carnegie Hall?

ALL: You march.

FACTORY OWNERS INSIST

FACTORY BOSSES: We must negotiate

TRI BOSSES: Why do you crumble and cry
Wait and we will triumph

FACTORY BOSSES: Wait!

The busy season is close at hand
We need each worker twelve hours a day to meet the demand
No, we don't have the time to wait
We must negotiate

INVASION OF WALL STREET

WTUL: Tomorrow night at Carnegie Hall we rally

CLARA: But we can act while you plan

ALVA: Something to tickle the newspapers

CLARA A skirmish on Wall Street

CLARA/GIRLS Call, five Cents - Call, five Cents

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

Support our strike

Buy this special edition of The Call

Workers of Wall Street, we're on your door

Five cents for our special edition

Hear our call and answer

WALL STREET WORKERS The Call?

You have the gall to hawk your socialist rag here?

This is the fortress of business

The citadel of industry

Go back where you came from, foolish girls

GIRLS

You think your jeers daunt us,
that we tremble when you taunt us?

No, gentlemen,

Our tenderness has been toughened

We are soldiers now

We may shiver with the cold

but you don't scare us

Call, five cents

Hear our call and answer

GIRL

23 Wall

CLARA

The office of J.P Morgan, king of the bankers

GIRLS

Anne Morgan's father

GIRLS

Master of Wall Street

We're at your door

Five cents for our special edition

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
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Downtown Art, May 2010

Hear our call and answer

CLERK Young ladies, why are you here?

Mr. Morgan will not see you

GIRLS Then Mr. Morgan closes his eyes because
we're here to be seen, we're here to be seen

CLERK Young ladies, leave.

Mr. Morgan will not see you.

CLARA/GIRLS Ah, Wall Street courtesy
When we knock on Wall Street's door
They can't see us, they are deaf
Calls like ours they ignore

CLERK Ladies, leave now,
before the guards punish your boldness

CLARA Bold you call us
But Mr. Morgan might remember
hunger begets boldness
just as cold kindles courage

CLERK Wait
I will buy your paper

GIRL You?

CLERK Boldness on Wall Street is often rewarded

GIRL Five cents

CLERK No, young ladies
I am clerk to J.P. Morgan
I don't pay five cents

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

To me you charge a dollar

Wall Street courtesy

GIRLS Thank you.

CARNEGIE HALL

WTUL Carnegie Hall

CHORUS On the second of January, five weeks in
the strike reached the pinnacle of its power
Dizzily stitching together a staggering coalition
right to left, left to right, radical to socialite
Oh, it was quite a sight to shake the backroom boys
Hundreds deep across the stage,
sashes draped across their chests
Sashes reading
Arrested
Workhouse Prisoner
Picketing is Not a Crime
A Picket's Not a Criminal
Spilling white across their chests
on their sashes
on their faces
you could read
a story
as women they draw women
as workers they draw labor

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
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as wronged they draw the righteous

and as a leaderless army

they draw those who would be generals

At Carnegie Hall they unfurled their banners

WTUL: The Women's Trade Union League

ALVA: The Political Equity League - Votes for Women!

SOCIALISTS: The Socialist Women's Committee

CHORUS: The strike that night dizzily reached its pinnacle

but hanging there in the pulsing air

was a crossroads

a choice

All the would be generals

All the willing soldiers

all all all

can feel a question hang in the pulsing air

Can feel an impending fate

The army has gathered, the leaders are here

Now, who will they follow?

Who will they follow?

Anne Morgan stood in her seat to see the crowd

Confident, she'd raised thousands for the cause

was front page news

She felt it was time to win this war, end this strike

restore her world to reason and peace

When he stepped to the stage, he was new to her

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
Music by Michael Hickey, libretto by Ryan Gilliam
Downtown Art, May 2010

Not new to the girls

How could you come from the lower east side and not know Morris Hillquit

Morris Hillquit

He was everywhere, looming large

A prominent passionate Socialist lit with the same fire

that burned in Clara Lemlich's eyes

a fervor as familiar as home

He sounded his call - familiar fare to the working girls that jammed the hall

But strange alarming music to fall on the ears of the privileged

HILLQUIT: Sisters, there is only one barrier
between you and the owners' greed

They hold all the power and unrestrained

they will crush you, crush you

And where will you turn for justice?

Justice? The courts are only personal prejudice

personal vindictiveness

And if you cry, walk out, or strike

the courts will punish you

ANNE/LADIES: Radical, this is radical

Too far

HILLQUIT: Sisters, there is only one chance

One

Your strength is in your union

Your only path to power

GIRLS: The only path to power

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HILLQUIT: And sisters, listen to me,
at the heart of the union
at the heart of the union
is the closed shop

ANNE/LADIES: The closed shop
Too much, too far
He's gone too far
We are the daughters and wives of owners
of honorable men of business
Have we gone too far?
They can't agree, they have to see he's
gone too far

HILLQUIT: But, you are not alone in your struggle.
Your fight is our fight,
and your victory will be glorious

ALL: The army has gathered
the leaders are here
the question hangs in the air
who will they follow?
They cheered.
The girls cheered.
And in their cheers Anne Morgan's fears
crowded close
The ringing shouts fell upon her
like the death of reason

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THE OFFER

ANNE: I wish to make a statement.

REPORTERS: A statement for the papers

ANNE: I'm heartily in favor of the strikers and I believe they have been badly treated by the courts. A sane and reasonable protest was justified but I object to Morris Hillquit and his fanatical Socialists.

I deplore their ill-considered words

For shame

You work on their feelings, you drive them from sense

Just now

When peace is at hand

SOCIALISTS: Peace?

GIRLS: Peace?

ANNE/WTUL: The offer has come, the owners' offer has come

ANNE: What you fought for, what you hungered for has come

GIRLS/SOCIALISTS: What do they offer?

ANNE: What you required

ANNE/WTUL: A fifty two hour work week

Four holidays a year

And they will cover the cost of your needles and thread

Raise your pay

The offer has come

ANNE: You have won

GIRLS: Do they recognize our union?

ANNE: Listen and think

You have won every other battle

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They concede every other point

This is your chance for peace

GIRLS: But where do they say
from this day
the union will speak for the workers?
The union will watch and protect
Where do they name our union?

ANNE/WTUL: They won't

ANNE: Not in so many words

WTUL: Naming your union would appear
to transfer, confer power

ANNE: But it's just a matter of language
and the contract does imply..

GIRLS: Imply?
We don't want to be implied
We want to be named
Name us

BOSSSES: Never

SOCIALISTS: You see, you see
You see who they are

GIRLS: Name us

BOSSSES: Never

ANNE: What does it matter? It's just words
You've won what you need
You can concede the union shop

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GIRLS: You don't know
We who have lived without names
Nameless girls, nameless ladies
We know how in names there is power
Name us

BOSSSES: Never

SOCIALISTS: You see

ANNE: Think and reason
You have nothing to fear
Men of business honor their agreements

GIRLS: Not with us
You don't know
You've never lived
the lives of those without names
Nameless girls, nameless ladies
nameless longings, nameless dreams
We want to be named

ANNE: But you've won what you need
In the cold, in the winter
you wanted your jobs
you wanted a raise

GIRLS: We've learned to want more
Name us
Recognize our union

BOSSSES: Never

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ANNE: You are unreasonable now
Peace and fair wages were honorable goals
but you are unreasonable now
and I will only fight
to the limits of reason

THE ALLIANCE SPLITS

FACTORY BOSSES: Miss Morgan has left them

TRIANGLE BOSSES: What did we tell you.. wait.. wait...

REPORTERS: It was swell and it was grand
We wish you well, kiss a hand
goodbye
Where Miss Morgan goes,
there goes the front page

TRIANGLE BOSSES: What did we tell you.. just wait

MARY/WTUL: We will do what we can
to stand with you
but our alliance is broken,
our board is split
We will do what we can
to stand
but in this breakup
we've been broken too

SOCIALISTS: Gone are the days of motor parades
of ladies who lunch, of Carnegie Hall

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and good riddance

Welcome to the world as it is

and what it is, is hard

The sympathies of the middle class have vanished

You can learn this lesson from us

The rich can never fight on the side of the worker

GIRLS If they had ever stood so alone in the world

If they'd ever been so small

could they have felt the yearning, the call,

the warmth, the strength of union?

SOLDIER ON

GIRLS Soldier on

We can walk this road

One step then one more

Soldier on

Gone is the glamour, the heat

Perhaps it was only a dream

never meant to be dreamt

by girls like us

Soldier on

We can walk this road

one week then one more

Soldier on

In a city of stone, you depend on soft hearted neighbors

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The Lower East Side shares its supper,
raises funds with a ten cent dance
so soldier on
Four weeks, the winter is long, the owners won't budge
Soldier on
We can walk this road
One step then one more
Soldier on, Soldier on, Soldier on

SOCIALISTS: Ladies, stop

GIRLS: We can go on

SOCIALISTS: Stop

The end has come

Stop

Go back to work

GIRLS But you said, you told us to fight on

SOCIALISTS You have done your best but the end has come

You have won what you need

You can concede the union shop

GIRLS: We can fight on

SOCIALISTS: No

GIRLS: They haven't named us

SOCIALISTS: They never will

GIRLS: We can fight on

SOCIALISTS: But we your leaders can't

We have another strike planned -

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
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the Cloakmaker's Union

Sixty thousand men are ready to walk

Sixty thousand!

They need our attention, our funds, our power

Oh, what a noise we will make, what a fight we will give them

Oh, what a victory we will win

Ladies, the end has come

You have won what you need

Sign and be pleased

GIRLS: Did they sign? Did the bosses all sign?

SOCIALISTS: All but the Triangle

GIRLS: The Triangle?

SOCIALISTS Don't worry

The end is here and even the Triangle bosses know it

The busy season has come, the busy season is here

Go back to work, you've won what you need

GIRLS: We wanted more

GIRL: Clara? Are you coming?

CLARA: No, sisters

I'm no longer a seamstress

I've burnt all my bridges and grown to love battle

I'm a soldier now

and I follow the fight

TWELVE DOLLARS A WEEK

THE WAISTMAKER'S OPERA
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NARRATOR February 15, 1910, after eleven long weeks, the strike ended and the workers returned to work.

GIRLS Twelve dollars a week,
twelve dollars a week when the season is high
so we try to remember
we're soldiers no more
There is no war
Be thankful for peace.
Twelve dollars a week
So forget your troubling thoughts and be glad
No more pickets, no fights
no arrests, no nights spent pressing down your fears
Forget your troubling thoughts
Peace
This is peace and
There's always a price for peace
There's always a price for peace
It's been paid.
No more pickets, no fights, no long troubled nights
Soldiers no more
Twelve dollars a week
Keep that in mind, keep your mind on your work
and quiet your thoughts, quiet them and think
when spring comes
and the back rent's paid

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with a little care, scrimping here and there
I'll have made enough
for a new hat
A new hat with feathers
or maybe a rose
for spring
when the wind blows
gently,
a season of change
Walking home through the crowded streets
in this city of cutting edges, a haunted city
filled with nameless longings and nameless dreams
Walking home through the crowded streets
I will hold my head high
under my new hat
I will hold my head high like a lady
and they will have to see, they will all have to know
that I'm here
I'm here

EPILOGUE

NARRATOR One year one month eleven days later a fire raced through the Triangle shirtwaist factory one hundred forty six workers, most of them girls, died many leaping to their deaths to escape the consuming flames

CHORUS The city knew these girls and the city grieved.

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NARRATOR One hundred thousand New Yorkers lined up on Misery Lane, waiting to get into the morgue to try and identify the bodies. Three hundred fifty thousand stood in the rain or walked with the caskets in a funeral march for the dead.

The fire ignited new battles, laid bare deep bitterness.

CHORUS Strike

CLARA I would be a traitor to these poor burned bodies if I came here to talk good fellowship. We have tried you good people of the public and we have found you wanting. We have tried you citizens; we are trying you now, and you have a couple of dollars for the sorrowing mothers, brothers and sisters by way of a charity gift. But every time the workers come out in the only way they know to protest against conditions which are unbearable - the strong hand of the law is allowed to press down heavily upon us. Public officials have only words of warning to us--warning that we must be intensely peaceable, and they have the workhouse just back of all their warnings. The strong hand of the law beats us back, when we rise, into the conditions that make life unbearable. I can't talk fellowship to you who are gathered here. Too much blood has been spilled.

CHORUS Union

Union

GIRLS But there was another fire, too

A fire worth remembering

A fire that burned in our hearts, that warmed us

that lit the way through a long cold winter

In that hopeful flame that gave us courage

that gave us each other

In that fire that burned in our hearts

in the fire that burns in your own

you can read

our names