

WRITE A MUSICAL?!
AACTFest 2015 WORKSHOP with LUCINDA LAWRENCE
handout for reference © 2015 Lucinda Lawrence

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

'Have a story that cries "musical theatre" but you're stuck for what is next? Using Tinman's heart, Scarecrow's brain, Lion's courage, and Dorothy's true-to-herself persistence, discover the "99% perspiration" **adventure of creating musical theatre**. Making a musical takes each of heart♥, courage☺, brains📖, and truthful persistence👄. A little insight goes a long way: these top 10 picks provide some practice and avoidance of pitfalls.

ASSUMPTIONS for this workshop

This is not how to write a play script or a song. This is how to collaborate, make songs that serve the storytelling, and begin to structure a musical, from individual syllables to the structure. We start the process with a **story already in hand**, and a playwright, lyricist, and composer will be involved, though those may be in the form of 1-to-3 people; the arranger can come later. We expect the process to change some things in the story: ☺ converting even a completed straight play to MT may change some of the story line, sequence of events, and so on.

BASIC PREMISES

- **Genuineness** 👄 While I enjoy fiction, I despise having anyone lie to me and, I would imagine, that is the same for most people. Applying this premise, we strive to make art **genuine, authentic**. Personally, I also prefer a story of 📖 **high literary value**, even if it is conveyed skillfully in comedy, but that seems to be optional these days. Class & style.
- **Regarding RULES** ☺ Take these with a grain of salt. Most rules for making art *can* be broken, and some probably *should* be broken on occasion.
- **Disclaimer** This "how to" for writing specifically for MT initially came from necessity: I had accepted work on my second foray in MT with a deadline for production already established. To save time, I figured out what worked (and did not work) during my first adventure in writing for MT. (*See more credentials in my tailored bio herein.*)

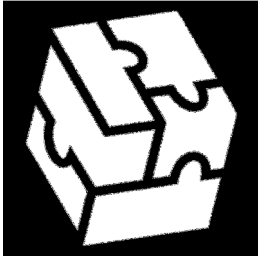
A LITTLE HISTORY

📖 Consider that what has evolved as musical theatre draws from **predecessors of storytelling** such as opera format (recitative, aria, duets/ trios/ quartets, choruses), Wagner's massive operatic events – "music dramas," Christian passions (vocal-choral church "events"), secular entertainers (troubadors and trouveres, as in Shakespeare's time, recounting ballads), early dance suites, ballet, vaudeville, chautauqua, and other **temporal arts** and entertainment.

BROAD OVERVIEW

Convert a story to scenes and dialog; convert selected dialog and commentary to song (lyrics + tune); use **music style translation** to convey **emotion ♥**, matching music style to the bit of story (generally); match tune to lyrics and/or lyrics to tune – I like to work in both directions at the same time and utilize the **spectrum** of combining spoken lines and music, e.g. underscore (*more about that when we get to the subject of "finesse"*). Consider what is the **theme** of the story – 1-2 sentences – which will impact the range and choices of music style(s).

TOP 10 PICKS *not necessarily in this order*



- 1) *This one is actually two items, but "Top 11" just won't do:*
flipping the "ON switch" for creating and working the puzzle*
- 2) matching music style and dramatic atmosphere*
- 3) collaborative communications using your natural learning preferences*
- 4) putting music with lyrics and vice versa (music prosody and lyrics priorities)
- 5) making lovely musical phrases for singing
- 6) choosing words for their vowel and consonant sounds*
- 7) why some dialog needs to be not a song
- 8) composing sing-able melodies
- 9) composing catchy tunes that don't get boring
- 10) trial period and simple strategies for maintenance of, or exit from a collaborative partnership with respect, professionalism, and great care*

* These five involve exercises, some with and some without a partner.

Q & A

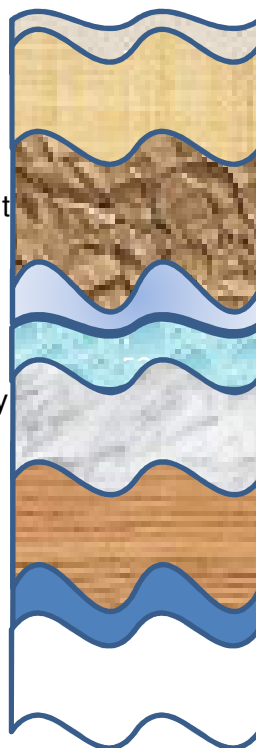
Handout includes more than 10 additional puzzle pieces to consider and a bio for Lawrence.

1a. My analogy for creating a musical – or any large-scale creative work – is like 📖 **reverse-engineering a multi-dimensional puzzle**, *starting* with unlimited numbers and kinds of pieces that *can* fit – many are blank until details are determined, and we have to be selective about which ones to include. This **2-dimensional jigsaw puzzle representation for each of 2 acts** has one puzzle piece standing for the **atmosphere and relative dynamics – intensity** – of **each scene segment, song, or transition.**

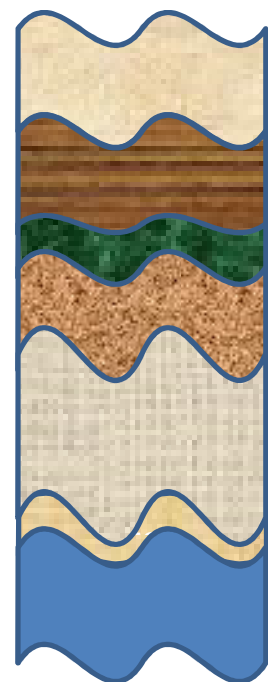
Run time



ACT I



ACT II



👂 Imagine that these strips are about 20-50 pieces long, and pieces are movable, interchangeable. 😊 Extras are unlimited. You will delete some.

Choose placement of 2-3 emotionally gripping moments ♥; select placement of a show-stopper song (a little into ACT II works). Make the act break song particularly tuneful, memorable, and sing-able; likewise for the *finale*. Allow for a shorter ACT II and some time for bows, exit music, etc.

Here, then, is how the fleshed-out puzzle pieces eventually can translate to fill a 📖🎭🕒 **TIME BUDGET TABLE**. Each **timed portion here correlates to a puzzle piece** for a bit of music, dialog, scene segment, portion with underscore, scene change, etc. Along with details of the character and content of each segment♥, this table helps identify potential problems and point to solutions. There is an unofficial limit to the duration of dialog without music and to music without a break; likewise for duration of each act (e.g. 60-90 min. and 50-75 min.) and total. Again, **perceived duration** is important in context, and so is total time before an audience member has to relieve the baby-sitter at home.

1787 the Musical SCENE DURATIONS

Ranges here allow for shorter or longer scene/set changes.

ACT I	Estimated durations *	ACT II	Estimated durations* perhaps too long
Prologue & 1	0:35 + 4:00 + 0:25 + 3:00 + (0:15 - 0:40) = 8:15 - 8:40	Entr'acte & 1	0:25 + 5:45+1:40 + 1:10 + 0:20 = 9:20
2	6:20 + 0:25 = 6:45	2	1:20 + 2:25 + (0:15 - 0:25) = 4:00 - 4:10
3	6:30 + (0:15-0:40) = 6:45-7:10	3	4:40 + 0:35 + 3:10 + 0:30 = 8:55
4	3:15+1:10+4:10+0:45+1:30+(0:20-0:30) = 11:10 - 11:20	4	2:20 + (0:20 - 0:30) = 2:40 - 2:50
5	2:50 + 0:40 + 2:00 + 0:20 = 5:50	5	5:00 + (0:10 - 0:25) = 5:10 - 5:25
6	1:45 + 0:20 + 3:40 + 0:20 = 6:05	6	2:05 + 5:00 + 0:50 = 7:55
7	3:15 + 1:05 + 0:20 = 4:40	7	0:10 + 5:00 + 0:20 = 5:30
8	0:55 + 1:20 + 3:05 + 0:20 = 5:40	8	3:50 + 0:35 + 3:30 = 7:55
9	6:10 + (0:50 -1:35) = 7:00 -7:45	9	6:25 + (0:25 - 1:05) = 6:50 - 7:30
10	2:50 + 0:15 = 3:05	10	4:45
11	4:50	11	5:15
subtotal	70:05 – 71:30*	subtotal	68:25 – 69:40*
		bows	2:25
cushion	+ up to 4:00 e.g. applause	cushion	+ up to 4:00 e.g. applause
TOTAL	70:05 – 75:30* estim.	TOTAL	up to 70:50 – 76:05* (+2:05 exit music) estim.

In general, **songs chew up run time relative to advancement of events conveyed by dialog**, except for a recitative or patter song, but ♥**songs are efficient in conveying mood and attitude** – emotion, atmosphere, etc. Concept of a **show “doctor”** job.

1b.* Choose a partner and designate an “A” and “B.” Exercises: A’s and B’s independently and creatively ☺♥🕒 imagine a part of one puzzle piece having music (2 minutes), then ☆ tell about what you have, verbally, to your listening partner (2 minutes: listener remains active, attentive, provides facial & posture feedback, does not speak except as useful to elicit clarity). Then swap roles (2 minutes). Repetition flips the **creative switch to “ON”** and it becomes easier to access that mode. Focused practice of communication strengthens the imaginer’s perception *while* both parties practice the communication of **collaboration**.

2.* ♥ Matching **music style and dramatic atmosphere**. For **printed music, the top left-hand words** usually *describes* the atmosphere and tempo together. For theatre, we make that description first, then compose music to match. Relating to this, several *utilities* and *genres* of music provide useful descriptions, e.g. *anthem, hymn, celebration, romance, nocturne*, and so on. Consider using 📖🕒 descriptive [English] language (adv., adj., v., n., prepositional phrase), style of verbal communication (acting, facial expressions, body language), auditory soundscape bits referenced (e.g. ocean waves), music samples, other music examples referenced, visual art

elements (color, texture, shape, graphics), empathy of kinesthetic imagery, more.... Exercise with a “given” piece of music for communications practice (LL improv musical sketch for scene from a hat), especially using *comparison* and *contrast*, not *criticism*.

3.* Review/share various collaborative communications styles around the room, then share with your partner what you think are 🗨️ your **natural learning preferences/strengths** (visual, aural, from telling about it, from reading about it, writing about it, drawing about it, kinesthetic sense, from mentally organizing/compartmentalizing the elements, other?). *If time allows at the end, try another #2 LL improv to another scene from a hat, but **work with a different partner**, then do #3 with that partner, too.*

4. **Words and music:** 📖🗨️ putting music with lyrics and vice versa – aligning rhythms, positioning of important words. Compare and contrast **scansion** and **music prosody**. Observe limits of matching word syllables with music meter and rhythm: avoid shoe-horning too many syllables into a music line or, conversely, too much melisma (more than one pitch per syllable). Compare and contrast lyrics priorities in a music phrase with a poetry phrase. Here is a problem: a poet or playwright wants to put the important word at the beginning or end of a line, but in music, the important part of a phrase is usually somewhere in the middle (*see phrases in #5*). Some composers may want to “set” rhythmic poetry to music – that can be easier (and I prefer using some of the wording to help me select the native meter and rhythm) – but I find that **writing lyrics with writing music allows flexibility** for advancing the story, characterizing the role, expressing the mood, etc. Meanwhile, the occasional hurdle to fit something can lead to unexpected musical interest. Observe phrasing regularity, if once established.

5. Making **lovely music phrases for singing**. ♥️🗨️ Create flow and ebb with rise to a high pitch (intensify) then come down again in pitch (relax); get a bit louder, then softer; create relative dissonance then consonance (tension and release) of harmony and melody relationship.

6.* 📖🗨️ Choose **good vowel sounds** and give those sounds strong placement in the music phrase; minimize bad ones; likewise for **good and bad consonant sounds**. *Good and bad* are not really the right terms, but you’ll get the point. Singers can develop their vocal sound on sustained, open vowels. Tight vowels, and consonants in general, provide largely the antithesis of that, but they are necessary to audience comprehension of the lyrics. For a singer’s high range, avoid tight vowel sounds (“ee” and any diphthong with it are considered ugly sounds for singers, the furthest from a lovely, round “ah” or “oh”) and specific voiced consonant sounds (b, d, hard g, j, voiced th, v, z, zh) which have a different result in a high vocal range, physics being what it is. Try the individual sounds yourself. Next, work with a partner to come up with a better-sounding near-synonym for *horrific, excruciating, Congratulations!* (A thesaurus helps.)

7. A song usually is a kind of monolog, even if sung by a full company chorus in homophony. **Some dialog (and monolog) needs to be not a song**, e.g. a lot of short lines among two or more people – it is very difficult to make that work musically; a lot of interruptions between or among players; sometimes the desired dramatic beats and pauses of the dramatic monolog would not make sense musically. Having said that, 📖♥️ an **organized cacophony** can be

lovely, e.g. polyphony of the street vendor quartet in *Oliver!* “Who Will Buy,” among the most difficult numbers in MT to that point historically, and later, shared bits of melody in *Into the Woods* “Your Fault.”

8. Composing **sing-able melodies** – 📖📖❤️👄 combines #5 (musical phrasing) and #6 (choosing and placing vowel and consonant sounds) above, while accomplishing #4 (combining words and music), *plus A) allow for breathing* (not just practical, but for ebb following flow); **B) use a lot of small music intervals** (e.g. along a scale, thirds, e.g. *Oliver!* “Where is Love?” – the melisma of *Where* word paints for his searching) and use wide intervals selectively (e.g. *Some – where o-ver the rain-bow...* involves word painting; *Ba-li Hai-* - - makes the place seem far away; also, the dissonance on *Hai* word paints with the exotic sound); D) allow time for a syllable so a singer can *use* open vowel sounds for phrasing. E) *See also #13 for vocal range.*

9. 📖👄 Composing **catchy tunes that don't get boring**. “Catchy” comes from selective repetition, e.g. a repeating 3-note pattern that gets placed on a different part of the measure. A) Use a setup of repeating a melodic bit or repeating it with some minor change, then when presenting it the third time, insert something unexpected (harmony, melodic twist, rhythmic upset, etc., e.g. *The Music Man* “Lida Rose”) – much like a 3-part joke. B) Apply the same for harmony sequence pattern. C) Likewise to the overall musical form, e.g. antecedent-consequent phrases for A, then A', then the B section (*bridge* in music terms), then a return to A somewhat modified. D) Combine a song with a song, e.g. “Lida Rose” with “Will I Ever Tell You.” E) If a song is poetry for a ballad having a lot of verses, try to re-structure to combine verses so the audience does not perceive so many, e.g. make the first *two* poetry lines into *one* music line and follow that pattern. F) Avoid having too-frequent dominant-tonic cadences, i.e. coming to a point of repose too often in the harmony. G) Start the tune *not* on the downbeat. H,I,J) *See also #14, 15, 16 strategies.*

10.* 📖👄 Trial period and simple strategies for **maintenance of, or exit from a collaborative partnership** with respect, professionalism, and great care. (☺️❤️ Group share. Directed turn-and-talk practice with a partner. Group share again.) I cannot advise well what to do if you already are well into the project, other than invoking a contractual clause such as, “We agreed that at any point we could choose to separate but we both share ownership of what exists”

BONUS, if time allows. To finesse a well-crafted work.

Consider the **spectrum of spoken lines and song** to ♥️get into and out of music skillfully.

A - dialog/monologue

B - underscored spoken lines (match general mood)

C - semi-aligned underscore and spoken lines (with vamp or inserts for flexible live performance alignment)

D - absolutely aligned underscore and non-metered spoken lines

E - absolutely aligned underscore with metered spoken lines (like rap or the opening of *The Music Man* “Rock Island”: ...you gotta know the territory...whatya talk whatya talk whatya talk)

F - straight song (singing throughout or with minimal unsung individual lines)

G - a song having segments of underscored dialog or monologue (introduction, interludes)

- H - a “song” in which only a refrain line or two are sung, and all else is absolutely aligned dialog/monologue and underscore
- I - combination of D and G above, e.g. *The Music Man* “Ya Got Trouble”

Use the entire **spectrum of silence-to-loud intensity**. (Sometimes *pp* can be quite intense.)

Be sure to allow for phrasing, a breath, a **moment of repose to transition between most scenes**. (I have a friend who wrote a gorgeous opera, but it is exhausting for the audience because he ignored that conform, leaving not one bit of silence between scenes.)

Q & A

Extras not addressed 11-23

11.&12. Apply **setup and “twist”** in a story-advancing ballad (like a 3-part joke); or set up the song refrain to have a different meaning following the third verse, for instance (C&W song writers are good at this).

13. Use little more than **1½-octave vocal range** relative to the key center (either 5th or 1st of the key scale placed at the bottom of the melody; peak of the melody, then, becomes either the 5th, 3rd, or 1st degree of the scale)... unless you are writing for a specific singer who can pull off a 2-octave range.

Keep a tune from becoming overly simplistic or draggy by **14.** avoiding too many alignments of phrase starts/ends with downbeats of the meter; **15.** avoiding placing too many simple triadic notes (1st, 3rd, 5th) in the melody on strong beats; **16.** avoiding going too long using only chords of close key relationship (tonic, subdominant, dominant – I, IV, V⁷ such as in three-chord tunes), and **17.** not going too long without using any V⁷- I resolution.

Variety is essential: keep a musical from becoming boring by **18.** avoiding overuse of music key relationships within and among songs; **19.** avoiding having all the musical numbers within a medium tempo range, too much at medium dynamics; and **20.** Avoiding all of a middle tempo, or same anything among musical parameters. (That’s one of my re-evaluation proof-editing passes.) Fast tempo, short songs fit the “immediate gratification” trend, but balance those with contrasting styles for MT. Explore the dramatic-comic spectrum. Include *diminuendo*, *molto rubato*, *p*, *mp*. Mix up **chord relationships** within songs, **key and mode relationships** between them.

21. Be selective for **placement of one or two show-stopper songs**; avoid too many intensely strong numbers in succession – that is exhausting for the audience (e.g. *Mary Poppins*) – and it negates opportunities for **contrasting dynamics, all-over ebb and flow**.

22. Similarly, be selective for placement of about **three intensely dramatic, gut-gripper emotional moments** in the story – these may *be* the show-stoppers and/or not with music.

23. Include some **silence** in the music. Movies like *Frozen* have about 2 minutes total without any song or underscore, but live theatre uses more non-music for contrast, transition, and repose.

Glossary of selected relevant terms for talking about music

<p>Potentially confusing terms</p> <p>Chorus – a piece of music in an opera or MT sung by a large ensemble. – the large ensemble singing such a piece. – the musical form structural segment in a ballad which [often stays the same and] alternates with verses.</p> <p>Melody and tune are <i>nearly</i> interchangeable; melodic and tuneful denote further description.</p> <p>Accent – relative term for articulation of a note harsher (louder, harder) than other adjacent notes</p> <p>Articulation – the kind of accent or non-accent for performing a note. – the sounding <i>of</i> a note. – each sounded pitch in music.</p> <p>Note – a pitch, e.g. in a melody or chord, or e.g. an articulation of a drum, i.e. without defined pitch</p> <p>Pitch – high or low frequency of a note. – marketing offer made to a producer to <i>sell</i> her/him on your product.</p> <p>Recitative – solo piece of opera music much like sung speech, in which the character advances the story, often without clear meter, often without rhyme</p> <p>Aria – solo piece of music that provides a display for the singer while providing emotional commentary on event or reaction, often following a recitative.</p> <p>Allegro – a mood/tempo. Sonata-Allegro – a specific music form. Sonata – don't get me started for the numerous definitions through music history.</p> <p>Part – individual line in choral music, e.g. soprano, alto, tenor, bass. – the group of singers <i>on</i> the part. – a structural segment of music form.</p> <p>Other useful ways to describe music</p> <p>Compare to [composer]</p> <p>Compare to one or more music [titles]</p> <p>Major mode, minor mode</p> <p>Modal – adj. for using one of several modes other than the standard major & minor of Western music: e.g. Dorian sounds like folk music of northern Europe; Lydian is exotic</p> <p>Thick chords, rich or simple harmonies</p> <p>Lilting melody</p> <p>Cantabile – lyrical, literally in a singing style</p> <p>Jazzy; bluesy</p> <p>Dynamics (loud & soft in music; intensity in theatre)</p> <p><i>a capella</i></p> <p>Tessitura – relative main range for the singer's voice. High or low tessitura uses that range of the singer. The high range for a voice has inherently greater intensity than mid- and low ranges.</p>	<p>Music terminology for time elements</p> <p>Beat – a regular pulse in music; strong and weak beats are relative terms; downbeat and upbeat are <i>nearly</i> absolute terms but do relate to one another</p> <p>Meter – (usually) regular pattern of relatively strong and weak beats, e.g. $\frac{4}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{6}{8}$; duple and triple meters, duple and triple subdivisions</p> <p>On the beat – with the downbeats; off-beats – the weaker beats <i>not</i> with the downbeats</p> <p>Rhythm – the relatively short and long notes of a melody or accompanimental figure, as compared to the meter</p> <p>Syncopation – rhythm that overtly accents some notes that are <i>not</i> the strong beats (off-beats) and likely has no note on one strong beat (a rest – silence – where we expect an accent, sort of an accented silence)</p> <p>Tempo – (fast, moderato, slow) absolute speed of the beats; also as a general description of the speed of the tune</p> <p>Grave, largo, lento, adagio, allegro, moderato, presto, vivace, con moto – Italian terms describing mood and tempo together (top left of printed music and at some structural changes)</p> <p>Swing – jazzy underlying rhythm of strong and weak beats (opposite of straight time)</p> <p>Rubato – getting slower and getting faster, having an intentionally unsteady beat of the meter</p> <p>Dance styles and genres in music</p> <p>waltz, minuet, soft-shoe, march, bourrée, allemande, czardas, nocturne, romance, fantasy, rhapsody, tone poem, chant, sea chanty, elegy, requiem, lament, vocalise, galop, gigue (also jig), chant, habanera, hymn, anthem, patriotic, hornpipe, processional, flamenco, <i>latin</i>, merengue, bossa nova, salsa, beguine, ländler, polka, mazurka, scherzo, tarantella</p> <p>Descriptive [English] language</p> <p>Dark, robust, busy, running, creepy, powerful...</p> <p>Note more from your workshop experience.</p>
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Good music dictionaries online: <http://www.dolmetsch.com/musictheorydefs.htm> (professional, scholarly) and <http://www.naxos.com/education/glossary.asp> (simpler)

WORKSHOP PRESENTER

<http://1787themusical.com/portal-to-other-music-and-interests-of-lucinda-lawrence/> for more

Recently elected as **AACT Representative for Region III** to begin a 2-year term at the end of AACTFest 2015, composer **Lucinda Lawrence** has been seen as soloist on the stages of Carnegie Hall and Chicago's Orchestra Hall (now Symphony Center), among other venues. She was published while still an undergraduate student – a solo for tuba commissioned for a Hal Leonard publication, still widely used more than 35 years later – and she has been cited in books on music for dance. Having put herself through college playing for dance classes and initially **composing in collaboration with choreographers** in modern dance, Lawrence taught the collaboration course for composers and choreographers at the University of Illinois, with similar guest spots at the University of Michigan and elsewhere. She then worked as a glorified administrative "go-fer" in the Composition/Theory Division while she and her husband had young children. A subsequent move 180 degrees from the world of avant-garde music to leading the U of IL Band Library came at the same time as music directing when their kids participated in musical theatre. She re-arranged those scores to fit a 'postage stamp' space for the pit orchestras. Then in 2005, while teaching the Arranging for Band course, she was consulted to recommend an arranger for a musical theatre work, but the area playwright didn't realize that he needed a composer first. Compelled by the subject of the work, Lawrence **returned to composing sooner than expected**, accepting that project well before the children graduated from high school.

While employed in full-time jobs, Lawrence worked with **writing partner Robert Picklesimer** to create **1787 the Musical**, writing the music, sharing the lyrics, and helping him with the story and script leading up to the 2009 University of Illinois Opera Studio semi-staged workshop presentation of 10 songs with brief narration, then the 2011 full premiere (1500-seat historic Virginia Theatre, Champaign, IL), and subsequent minor revisions.

She is in a learning curve for promotions and marketing of *1787*, as well as for management of Picklesimer's other literary works. Now both retired from full time jobs, they continue additional collaborative work, among which is a one-act MT version of an earlier play, now titled ***A Light for the Little Match Girl***, weaving together several Christmas stories with twists and turns on the original Hans Christian Andersen tale, including a bum who thinks he is Santa Claus and tries to save the Little Match Girl.

While pursuing other projects independently, none of similar styles, Lawrence also works on her original musical, ***Within This Old House***, for which she has the 17 songs well in progress and she has drafted dialog for 5 of the 9 dialog-heavy scenes using a comedic tone different from that of Picklesimer. As eminent domain law prompts the conflict, "...Hillary searches desperately for a way to save her grand old family home, but many think the Upscale Development would be great for their city. Friends, relatives, and family members 'past' point to buried secrets, and she and her childhood friend Davis discover a good deal more than relevant clues about the property. PG-rated mystery rolled into a romantic comedy; standard musical theatre format." Lawrence recently declined another MT project and has accepted yet one other.

In 2014 Lawrence authored a "magnum opus" free online Music Performance Collections Library (MPCL) Reference Resource, for (mostly instrumental) music directors, regarding management of a performance library. It has received "must have this now!" and similar rave reviews from conductors.

She and her husband, Bob Hart, have two adult children not living at home, and all the pets have moved on, as well.