

A system that I am a part of is the pit orchestra. The function of the system is to make music for the larger system, that is the musical itself. The parts of the system are the individual musicians and their instruments. I play the flute, which usually has the melody or sometimes the “sprinkles on top”, but would be nothing without the other instruments. The relationship between the instruments is essential for the success of the system, but it is something that is constantly changing. It depends on the song, on the measure, on the specific musicians and how they choose to play their instrument during that specific moment in time on that specific day. Not every instrument is always playing, but that does not make them any less important in that moment. In this way, the pit orchestra is an especially dynamic system. Even if you are reading the score while you listen, the outcome cannot necessarily be predicted. People play wrong notes, they are out of tune, or they get off tempo. Someone may forget to come in, or may come in too early. Even when the entire orchestra stops, the system hasn’t completely stopped. Everyone could be waiting in anticipation for their next cue. The tuba player could be breathing heavily, tired out, but proud of their effort. The trombonist may be tapping their foot, waiting impatiently for a song when they get to play more than “bum bum bum” and the occasional “whuuuummmmmuuuw”. The flautist may be frantically chewing a twizzler from the community bag, hoping to finish before the next song so that they will not start late and will not get any food in their flute. The bassist may be yawning, tired of standing the whole time. A violinist may have broken a string and be silently panicking, miming to the conductor and the rest of their section, WHAT DO I DO?!! The conductor may be digging around in their bag, looking for batteries to pass along to the bassoonist whose stand light has gone out. A viola player may have dropped all of their music, and be crouching trying to pick it up without making more noise or knocking anyone else’s stand over. (Did I mention how cramped pit orchestras usually are?) Also, and perhaps most importantly, the silences in a specific piece of music, or between pieces in a show or a musical, can be just as dramatic, intense, emotional, and significant as the loudest crescendo.

Although I truly believe that the pit orchestra is a system, a system within a system in fact, I am not sure whether it would qualify as a system for the purposes of this class. There isn’t exactly an input or an output that you could draw in a diagram. I don’t think it has a “flow” in the traditional sense. Maybe the flow could be the music stopping and starting at the twitch of the conductor’s baton, or even the quick stop of a quarter rest. However, there are exceptions, like a vamp, when the orchestra continues repeating a measure or two for an amount of time that varies depending on the singer, the audience, and the date and time of the performance. Additionally, as I said before, the silence in a piece can be just as important as the biggest climax. Every pit orchestra in every show is different, while there is a set standard for how many musicians you need to play each part, in student shows that I have been a part of, this is easily manipulated for the purpose of inclusion and also for lack of resources. I have been in shows where I was one of 3 flutes playing the same part, and I have been in shows where I was the only flautist and I also played the oboe part. What makes the system even more interesting is that the pit orchestra is not supposed to be seen, only heard. It is like the opposite of women and girls back in the

Renaissance and before. Many people do not think of the pit orchestra at all, and if they do, they surely do not think of the individual musicians. When the rules aren't exactly followed, no one really notices. It is like a secret system, one that often goes underappreciated, but could be considered more important than a few extra members of the chorus onstage. Not only this, but it could also simply be considered not as a system itself, but as a part of the musical as a whole. The actors, the lights, the sound, the costumes, the audience, and the orchestra. It depends on what your universe is and what your picked-out-bits are.

Despite my doubts about its classification, the pit orchestra reminds me of a system that we talked about in class. It reminds me of the tomato system in Professor Jahn's parable, where sometimes the outcome is not what you expected. For example, "the more the merrier" is a common phrase that one would think would be applicable to a pit orchestra. After all, the purpose is to make music, which is organized noise, and when you have more people playing you can be louder. However, the more musicians you have the more likely it is that not everyone will stay together. Humans make mistakes after all, and this is always a danger in a human driven system. Likewise, the more musicians you have the more likely you are to drown out the soloist who is singing onstage, or to cause them to strain their voice on opening night. It is difficult to know what the threshold is for number of musicians in the pit orchestra. Again, it is different in every situation.

Overall, I am going to have to stick with my guns and say that the pit orchestra is indeed a system. It is a weird one, it is constantly changing, bending, and breaking the rules, but that is what makes it so much fun. What matters is it does have rules to begin with. There is a score to follow, and all of the musicians and their instruments come together to complete the score and create the beautiful music. The parts are easily defined and their relationships, though not set in stone, are numerous and all relatively similar. We can try to describe the system with boxes and arrows, it may look complicated and messy, and depend on the specific pit orchestra during a specific performance, but it can be done. The flows I am uncertain of, but perhaps you could say the flows of the pit orchestra are the same as its truth. Perhaps you could say that when the system of the pit orchestra is "running" and when it is revealing it's truth to you, the music is making you feel something. I think that is beautiful.