

The Score

THE SCORE OF *Man of La Mancha* is somewhat anachronistic: while its musical style stays true to Spanish dances, none of those dances would actually have existed at the time of the story. Quixote's song "The Quest" ("The Impossible Dream") is a bolero, an immediately recognizable style with a patient but persistent beat, embodying Quixote's determination. The show's music and lyrics are very intense, even unpleasant, as often as they are sweet and optimistic. The relatively small orchestra (16 players originally) included two Spanish guitars, finger cymbals, castanets, and a tambourine, in addition to the more traditional brass and reeds. Wasserman also saw a production accompanied only by a single guitar, which he loved. As with most musicals, the characters' emotions are most vividly represented in their songs; but in the case of Aldonza, her character is built almost *entirely* through her songs, including her birth and childhood (in "Aldonza"), her current vocation and world view ("It's All the Same"), her confusion over Don Quixote ("What Does He Want of Me?"), and her eventual transformation and acceptance of Quixote (her reprises at the end). Two of her songs, "It's All the Same" and "Aldonza," share a similar rhythm, alternating between 6/8 and 3/4 meters. And "Aldonza" alternates between a minor key (representing her horrific life) and a major key (representing the better life she briefly experiences). In a way, "Aldonza" is a musical nervous breakdown, like other musical breakdowns including "Mama's Turn" in *Gypsy*, the title song in *Cabaret*, and "Live, Laugh, Love" in *Follies*. "Aldonza" is about the pain of re-birth; Aldonza has been given a new life by Quixote, a new sense of dignity and self-worth, but birth is a painful experience, and "Aldonza" expresses that pain.

Interestingly, Quixote also shares her rhythm in his song about her, "Dulcinea." Giving these two characters similar rhythms links them and shows that they are alike, that they belong together. This rhythm is the same pattern Leonard Bernstein used in the song "America" in *West Side Story*. Aldonza's song, "What Does He Want of Me?" is in a highly irregular 7/8 meter, giving it a feeling of impatience, discomfort, uneasiness. Quixote's attentions have thrown her off balance, so she can't sing in a regular meter.



Like Aldonza's music, both of Sancho's songs share the same accompaniment rhythm, a much simpler, much more repetitive accompaniment than the other characters' songs, based almost entirely on one or two chords in each case, perhaps to emphasize the simplicity and lack of education of Sancho. Appropriately, the instrumental music for "The Combat" and "The Abduction" both have constantly shifting meters to accompany the very explicit, violent action. And in one of composer Mitch Leigh's most interesting moves, he takes the seemingly innocuous love song "Little Bird" and turns it into the song the muleteers sing as they rape Aldonza later in the show.

In the last interior scene, back at Quijana's house, Aldonza and Sancho try to revive Quijana's memory of his adventures as Don Quixote, and as Quijana searches for those memories, Mitch Leigh dramatizes that with his music. We hear bits and pieces of "Dulcinea," "Man of La Mancha," "The Quest," and other songs, as bits and pieces of memory come back to Quijana; and his ultimate regaining of his memory is set to his opening number, a kind of re-birth as Quixote, the same music against which we first met our knight errant. ♦

Source: Scott Miller (1996), "From Assassins to West Side Story: The Director's Guide to Musical Theatre". Scott Miller is the founder and artistic director of New Line Theatre, an alternative musical theatre company he established in 1991 in St. Louis, Missouri.