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CONTEMPORARY OPERA IN BRITAIN, 1970-2010

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PHD in Music – Composition

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October 2011

CONTEMPORARY OPERA IN BRITAIN, 1970-2010

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PORTFOLIO
List of works/scores

No.	Title	Instrumentation	Duration	Year of Composition	First Performance
1	<i>Labirinto</i>	piano, violin, violoncello	Ca. 7'	2007	26/02/2008
2	<i>Yu</i>	flute, bassoon, horn, harp, piano, double bass	Ca. 9'	2008	22/05/2008
3	<i>Primavera (Spring)</i>	free-bass accordion	Ca. 6'	2009	24/03/2009
4	<i>Miragem (Mirage)</i>	full orchestra	Ca. 7'	2009	30/04/2009
5	<i>Trapézio (Trapeze)</i>	3 Bb clarinets, harp, percussion, piano	Ca. 9'	2009	15/05/2009
6	<i>Vitral</i>	flute/picc./a.flute, oboe, Bb clarinet/b.cl., mandolin, percussion, guitar, harp, piano, violin, viola, violoncello, double bass	Ca. 10'	2009	17/06/2009
7	<i>Pequena Suite Candanga (Little Suite for Guitar)</i>	guitar	Ca. 13'	2009	26/04/2010
8	<i>Eyes of Exile</i>	violin, viola, violoncello	Ca.10'30"	2010	23/02/2010
9	<i>Pressages</i>	Bb clarinet, bassoon, C trumpet, tenor trombone, percussion, violin, double bass	Ca. 9'	2010	08/05/2010
10	<i>Poema Torto (Tortuous Poem)</i>	guitar	Ca. 7'15"	2010	03/05/2011
11	<i>The Moonflower - Chamber Opera</i>	1 actor, 1 actress Singers: 2 sopranos, 1 mezzo-soprano, 1 tenor, 1 bass Ensemble: flute/picc./a.flute, Bb clarinet/b.cl., percussion, guitar, electronic keyboard, violin, viola, violoncello, double bass	Ca. 70'	2011	18/08/2011

PORTFOLIO
List of works included on the CDs and DVD

Track No.	Title	Performers	Date of Recording	
CD1	1	<i>Labirinto</i>	Hatty Stubbs (piano), Harriet Murray (violin), Alice Murray (violoncello)	09/11/2008
	2	<i>Yu</i>	The London Sinfonietta: Rebecca Miller (conductor), Frank Nolan (flute/picc./a.flute), John Orford (bassoon), Katie Pryce (horn), Helen Tunstall (harp), Clive Williamson (piano), Enno Senft (double bass)	22/05/2008
	3	<i>Primavera (Spring)</i>	Amadej Herzog (free-bass accordion)	24/03/2009
	4	<i>Miragem (Mirage)</i>	City University Orchestra: Anthony Weeden (conductor)	30/04/2009
	5	<i>Trapézio (Trapeze)</i>	The London Sinfonietta: Patrick Bailey (conductor), Anthony Pay, Andrew Webster, Duncan Prescott (clarinets), Manon Morris (harp), David Hockings (percussion), John Constable (piano)	15/05/2009
	6	<i>Vitral</i>	Nieuw Ensemble of Amsterdam: Ed Spanjaard (conductor), Margreet Niks (flute), Ernest Rombout (oboe), Arjan Kappers (clarinet), Herman Halewijn (percussion), Hans Wesseling (mandolin), Helenus de Rijke (guitar), Ernestine Stoop (harp), John Snijders (piano), Joe Puglia (violin), Frank Brakkee (viola), Maartje-Maria den Herder (violoncello), Dario Calderone (double bass)	17/06/2009
CD2	1-5	<i>Pequena Suíte Candanga (Little Suite for Guitar)</i>	Alvaro Henrique (guitar)	August 2011
	6	<i>Eyes of Exile</i>	Erdesz Trio: Tadasuke Iijima (violin), Yohei Nakajima (viola), Stjepan Hauser (violoncello)	23/02/2010
	7	<i>Pressages</i>	Contemporaneous Ensemble: Diogo Ahmed (conductor), Renata Rakova (clarinet), Luke Henry (bassoon), Christopher Carroll (trumpet), Hsiao-Fang Lin (trombone), Alex Friedman (percussion), Yue Sun (violin), Xinyue Zhang (double bass)	08/05/2010
	8	<i>Poema Torto (Tortuous Poem)</i>	Fabricao Mattos (guitar)	September 2011
CD3	1	<i>The Moonflower - Chamber Opera</i>	Andrew Morley (conductor) Actors: Laura Harling, Braz Henrique Singers: Maya Sapone (Lua), Rhiannon Llewellyn, Georgia Knower, Oliver Brignal, Simon Lobelson Ensemble: flute/picc./a. flute, Bb clarinet/b.cl., guitar, electronic keyboard, violin, viola, cello, double bass, percussion	19/08/2011
DVD	1	<i>The Moonflower - Chamber Opera</i>	Video Recording (of the second performance)	19/08/2011

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Declaration

I, Mario Jacinto Ferraro Jr, grant powers of discretion to City University Librarian to allow the thesis to be copied in whole or in part without further reference to the author. This permission covers only single copies made for study purposes, subject to normal conditions and acknowledgement.

Mario Jacinto Ferraro Jr

Abstract

This study of contemporary opera in Britain considers first, the theoretical aspects of the creation of an opera, then moves to a survey of British opera companies and their productions of modern opera over the past 40 years. There follows a detailed study of three works produced in Britain during this time, all of which are of particular significance to this composer: Maxwell Davies's *The Lighthouse*, Saariaho's *L'amour de loin*, and Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*. The final chapter concerns the production of my own opera, *The Moonflower* (2011).

The study was informed by established theories about opera and its history; an examination of scores, libretti and programme booklets for some operas produced in Britain, 1970 – 2010; direct contact between the author and composers, co-creators, and the works themselves (including attendance at many recent operatic productions in London), and the analysis of excerpts from the three contemporary operas mentioned above, while investigation of opera companies active in the period aimed to identify some possible trends in programming.

The creation and performance of the author's own opera was the culmination of this investigation; it illuminated many of the issues raised above, concerning the process of composing, designing and staging an operatic work in the early twenty-first century.

Preface

My interest in opera has been nurtured throughout my career in Brazil, my home country, where, prior to my becoming a composer of classical music, I was involved in the production of over 50 theatrical projects. This study, both theoretical and practical, has been undertaken in part in order to develop my musical skills and artistic knowledge of the composition of opera. As the culmination of it, I wrote a two-act chamber opera, *The Moonflower*.

As part of my research, I participated in a number of student schemes and educational programmes and communicated with participants in new opera productions either in person or via the internet. Despite all the prompt, valuable help I thus received, the information sometimes proved contradictory or insufficient. For instance, the opera houses' archives were often incomplete or not up-to-date. Further, data about festivals that no longer exist, like the Almeida Opera Festival, was sometimes only obtainable from sources such as the websites of the composers involved. This required a considerable amount of detective work outside the usual academic channels, which perhaps made it even more rewarding.

This study of contemporary opera productions in London remains for me part of a work in progress. It marks the first stage of my career, which, based now on a solid foundation of knowledge and practical application, can, I hope, be continued in my home country and further afield.

Introduction

This study of the production of new operas in Great Britain has been undertaken in part in order to develop my musical skills and artistic knowledge of the composition of opera. As well as taking into consideration established theories about the genre and its history, this investigation is also informed by my attendance at recent productions, and examining scores, libretti and programme booklets for these and other productions mounted in Britain, 1970 – 2010. All of the productions I have viewed have been in London. This is for pragmatic reasons, of course, but also because, during this time, London has offered a huge range of repertoire, both British and international, including operas by some of the most prominent British composers of all time, Benjamin Britten (who was still having new operas commissioned and premiered in Britain in the early 70s) and Harrison Birtwistle (who was already active in 1970, and has since then become internationally known).¹ But it has also included a profusion of operas by composers with disparate styles and approaches, including the British composers, Thomas Adès, Jonathan Dove and Mark-Anthony Turnage, Europeans, Kaija Saariaho and Peter Eötvös, and Americans, John Adams and Philip Glass.

For this study, I also participated in student schemes and educational programmes at the Royal Opera House, English National Opera, The Opera Group, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Tête-a-Tête: The Opera Festival

¹Birtwistle's position in 'a significant place in Twentieth-century Western art' is affirmed by Jonathan Cross. Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle: Man, Mind, Music* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000).

(even by having my own opera, *The Moonflower*, performed during its 2011 season). I also communicated with participants in new opera productions either in person or via the internet. Such contact with composers and co-creators, who on occasion spoke of their experiences of creating or staging works, has informed my research considerably and, along with the works themselves, has proved very inspiring for my compositional practice.

My research has also involved the analysis of excerpts from three contemporary operas. While my choice could be considered rather arbitrary (but what group of three out of several hundred would not?), these operas are amongst my favourites and, for this submission for a degree of PhD in musical composition, perhaps shed some light on my own attitudes and proclivities.

This study asks how a composer goes about writing an opera, and how s/he achieves a performance. It considers the craft of composing, designing and staging an operatic work, using as evidence many of those produced in Britain over the past four decades. It is informed primarily by a number of basic writings on the subject, also by attending, over the past four years, many contemporary-opera productions in London, and by investigating those British opera companies active between 1970 and 2010. Thus I have been able to identify which opera companies are inclined towards commissioning new productions, in particular, those by young or relatively unknown composers.

In the first chapter, an introduction to the theoretical issues involved in the composing of an opera is presented, as are some of the practicalities of creating an opera, from extra-musical concerns, including choosing the plot and libretto, to purely musical issues, like structuring the score and settling on

the music itself. Texts concerning operatic history, theory, analysis, and criticism have been particularly crucial in preparing me to develop this study. Seminal works like Joseph Kerman's *Opera as Drama* and Carl Dahlhaus' article 'What is Musical Drama?' examine opera as a genre.² They provide the critic or researcher with a theoretical basis for the analysis of opera. For the historical approach, much basic information was gathered from Matthew Boyden's *The Rough Guide to Opera* and George Martin's *Twentieth Century Opera: a Guide* as well as *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, edited by Mervyn Cooke.³ Also, particularly helpful was a series of 15 monographs, by operatic critics, producers, and composers, published by Opera America in the United States in the early 1980s as *Perspectives: Creating and Producing Contemporary Opera and Musical Theatre*.⁴ These offer not only valuable theoretical discussion, but also many useful, practical comments with regard to operatic issues, like training the opera composer and writer, the collaboration between composer and librettist, the new-opera commission and production, and even a description of a workshop process for

²Carl Dahlhaus, 'What is Musical Drama?', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 1.2 (July, 1989), 95-111; Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

³Matthew Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 4th ed. (London: Rough Guides Ltd, 2007); George Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera: a Guide* (New York: First Limelight Ed., 1999); Mervyn Cooke, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to 20th Century Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴Opera America was founded in 1970 as a non-profit service organisation for professional opera companies in North, Central and South America. See n.a. 'About Opera America', in n. ed., *Perspectives: Creating and Producing Contemporary Opera and Musical Theatre* (Washington, DC: Opera America, 1983), iii. Amongst these monographs, some invaluable insights can be gathered from Carlisle Floyd's article 'The Making of an Opera: Some Considerations', where he examines the composer's prerogatives and choices. Carlisle Floyd, 'The Making of an Opera: Some Considerations', in n.a., ed., *Perspectives: Creating and Producing Contemporary Opera and Musical Theatre*, (Washington DC: Opera America 1983), 19-26. After publishing this series, Opera America began 'Opera for the 80s and Beyond', a programme to encourage its members to commission and help create new work, such as Anthony Davies's *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, and Meredith Monk's *Atlas*. Roger W. Oliver, 'The Mystique of Opera', *Performing Arts Journal*, 14.2 (May 1992), 32-33.

creating an opera. This chapter continues with a survey of opera, briefly touching on historical examples, but focussing primarily on works from the past 40 years. Then, it examines the composer's role in providing the music, which creates the dramatic structure of the operatic spectacle and thus controls to some extent its visual and theatrical aspects.

Chapter 2 presents a detailed survey of the *repertoire of opera companies* in Britain during the past four decades, including works by some of the most celebrated composers of this time, as well as by some whose careers have just begun. This investigation aims to contextualize the operas to be studied in the following chapter, as well as to offer statistics concerning composers, their styles and the types of narrative used in their works. Finally, an attempt is made to identify trends in programming. It starts by categorising opera companies in Great Britain: the largest companies with orchestra and national funding; those companies that are active only in summer seasons; those smaller and touring companies; and some opera productions for television. A study of the recent history of opera which offers a valuable context for this research is Eric Salzman and Thomas Desi, *The New Music Theater* (also of much use for Chapter 3). Chapter 12, 'Music Theater in Northern Europe: Great Britain', offers an interesting introduction to Peter Maxwell Davies' and Harrison Birtwistle's operatic outputs placed in the context of the works of other British opera composers.⁵ Another relevant text is the chapter dedicated to British opera by Christopher Mark, entitled 'Birtwistle and After', in the afore-mentioned *Cambridge Companion to*

⁵See Eric Salzman and Thomas Desi, *The New Music Theater* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 215-222.

*Twentieth-Century Opera.*⁶

Chapter 3 presents a musical and dramatic analysis of aspects of three operas from this period. Two of them are by Britain's most celebrated living opera composers, Peter Maxwell Davies (*The Lighthouse*, 1980) and Harrison Birtwistle (*The Minotaur*, 2008). They are very different from each other in size and scope, while the third, *L'Amour de loin* (2000), by Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho, is an example of a contemporary European opera with a successful subsequent stage history. Its British premiere occurred in 2009.⁷

Texts important for the analysis of excerpts from these operas include, for Maxwell Davies and Saariaho, Paul Griffiths's and Pirkko Moisala's studies of these composers.⁸ With regard to Birtwistle, Rhian Samuel's essays, on his operas *Gawain* and *The Minotaur*, as well as book-length studies on the composer by Robert Adlington, Jonathan Cross, and Michael Hall, are informative.⁹ This consideration of the three works ends with a general conclusion about trends in opera on the London stage today, and indicates how such knowledge could be applied to operatic work in the future.

The separate, yet related, final chapter narrates the process of creating and staging the opera written as part of my doctoral studies, *The Moonflower*

⁶Christopher Mark, 'Opera in England: taking the plunge', in Mervyn Cooke, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to 20th Century Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 209-221.

⁷See n.a., Kaija Saariaho Website <<http://www.saariaho.org/>>, accessed 4 August 2011.

⁸Paul Griffiths, *Peter Maxwell Davies* (London: Robson Books Ltd., 1981) and Moisala, *Kaija Saariaho*.

⁹Rhian Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*: the Opera and a Diary of its First Production', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 20.2 (2008), 215-236; 'Birtwistle's *Gawain*: An Essay and a Diary', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 4.2 (July 1992), 163-178; and 'The Music of *The Minotaur*', programme booklet for the *The Minotaur*, Royal Opera House, London, 15 April 2008, 23; Robert Adlington, 'Birtwistle's Recent Music', *Tempo*, 196 (April 1996), 2-8; and *The Music of Harrison Birtwistle* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*; and Michael Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle in recent years* (London: Robson Books Ltd., 1998).

(2011), and recounts my attempt to apply what I have learned from this study while yet remaining true to my own personal aesthetic as a composer. For this project, some texts were very beneficial; these include Raymond Warren's *Opera Workshop* which, with the subtitle 'Studies in Understanding and Interpretation', presents how the medium actually works in practice, with all the interactions between its elements, of words, music and stagecraft, in a relationship that often involves compromise.¹⁰ Another valuable text is Virgil Thompson's *Music With Words: a Composer's View*. Thompson offers practical suggestions on how to compose for English poetry and prose. Particularly enlightening is his method of 'setting words to music' (and not the other way round), as well as the laying out the text in word-groups to 'clarify its musical meaning'.¹¹ Also, Paul Barker's *Composing for Voice* was helpful: Barker provides a survey of the issues concerned with the human voice as a musical instrument, and the relationship between voice and text, treating these from the particular point of view of the composer.¹² Finally, the series of 15 monographs, *Perspectives: Creating and Producing Contemporary Opera and Musical Theater*, cited above, again proved worthwhile. For instance, in his article 'Creating an Opera: the Composer as Collaborator', the successful, Britten-esque American opera composer, Stephen Paulus, looks into the collaborative efforts required by the creation of an opera, besides considering some other compositional concerns, like balance between orchestra and

¹⁰Raymond Warren, *Opera Workshop: Studies in Understanding and Interpretation* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995).

¹¹Virgil Thompson, *Music With Words: a Composer's View* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 16-21.

¹²Paul Barker, *Composing for Voice: a Guide for Composers, Singers, and Teachers* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

singers, dramatic pacing and timing, etc.¹³

¹³Stephen Paulus, 'Creating Opera: The Composer as Collaborator', in n.ed., *Perspectives*, 36-37.

Chapter 1. Creating an opera

This chapter presents an overview of theoretical writings on creating an opera and then attempts to test them against a wide range of examples particularly from recent opera productions in London.

1. Theatre/Opera: Historical Background

The relationship between theatre and opera/music drama is intimate and historic. Salzman asserts that the oldest theatre in nearly every culture is music theatre, because singing accompanied by physical movement is at the basis of all performing arts, with theatre originating in ritual, religion, and myth.¹ His definition of ‘music theatre’, very commonly entwined with ‘opera’ itself, is that in which music, predominantly vocal music, plays a role at least equivalent to language and dramatic movement.² Dahlhaus notes that one difference between theatre and opera is that, in theatre, part of the action can be remote in both space and time. Music, on the contrary, is tied to the place in which it occurs and relates to the moment in which it belongs, since melodies and singing express the present moment of a given situation, which is then

¹Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 7.

²Salzman, ‘Notes for an America Music Theater’, in n.a., ed., *Perspectives: Creating and Producing Contemporary Opera and Musical Theatre*, (Washington DC: Opera America 1983), 8. Such concept is the one adopted in this study. However, the term can also be used for a hybrid form explored mainly by experimental theatre companies, in which, despite the predominance of theatre, there is more music (and more complex music) than there would be in a normal musical. Gregory Sandow, ‘Definitions’, n.a., ed., *Perspectives: Creating and Producing Contemporary Opera and Musical Theatre*, (Washington DC: Opera America 1983), 5. Another definition of Music Theatre would be ‘the confluence or adding up of language-like expressions: verbal or spoken language (the story: the libretto), physical movement or body language (gesture, dance), images or visual language (décor or design), and sound or musical language (pitch and rhythm; vocal and instrumental). Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 13.

isolated from its context.³ He remarks that it is significant that reminiscence motifs and leitmotifs are almost always instrumental (though, *pace* Dahlhaus, this is not necessarily the case in, for instance, Berg's *Wozzeck*).⁴

Salzman compares Greek tragedy with opera, Greek and Roman comedies with musical comedies, and the medieval liturgical dramas with music dramas.⁵ He claims that much of the innovation in Western music took place or was invented in the theatre; opera was the vehicle for change in musical ideas and expression in the Baroque and Classical eras (and well beyond). This includes the development of the recitative and traditional harmony, for instance.⁶

The separation between spoken and sung theatre (and of dance) did not occur in Europe until the Renaissance. Opera would then be 'the classical European form of non-religious sung theatre', whereas modern spoken theatre originated in the seventeenth century.⁷ Whereas all-sung opera is a recent phenomenon, the relationship between speech and song in opera remains

³Dahlhaus, 'What is Musical Drama?', 102.

⁴Perle asserts that, although leitmotifs are hugely important in *Wozzeck*, they 'do not pervade the musical and dramatic texture of the work', exclusively; there are other features, some even not punctuated by musical figures, like verbal expressions ('verbal leitmotifs'), as well as 'visual correspondences' (lightings, stage settings, curtains, etc.), all recurrent and indicated in the score, that function as leitmotifs. George Perle, *The Operas of Alban Berg – Volume One/ Wozzeck* (Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, Ltd, 1980), 94.

⁵Salzman, 'Notes', 8.

⁶For instance, The Royal Opera House, in its 2010/2011 season, revived Jonathan Miller's production of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* which, like *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, shows the composer's 'action music' and sympathies for the characters, revealed by his selective orchestration for the musical numbers; ROH also produced Steffani's 1688 *Niobe, Regina di Tebe*, a mythological tragedy about a character who is transformed into stone; staged in Covent Garden for the first time, conducted by Baroque specialist Thomas Hengelbrock. Steffani's score is remarkable for its original instrumentation. From the ROH programme notes.

⁷Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 7.

complex as will be shown later.⁸

Dahlhaus affirms that the history of opera is largely a history of reform movements, of changes both in dramaturgical ideas and principles of musical form.⁹ In fact, since it was created in the late-sixteenth century by the Florentine Camerata so as to revive Greek Drama, opera has developed steadily and in diverse ways. Thus, as Ellen Blassingham points out, the modern operatic repertoire represents more nations and many more composers than did the contemporary repertoire of a century ago, when the genre's popularity had reached its apogee as a lively contemporary phenomenon, with a clear connection between composer and public.¹⁰ Of course, the public's needs and requirements have changed radically over the last hundred years (and even more rapidly during the past decades), and so the impact of opera as an art-form on audiences has also changed.

But the music of opera has remained theatrical. Romantic elements, contributing to this, occurred in the operas of Weber, Bellini, Berlioz, Verdi, and Wagner, the latter incurring radical changes in the conception of music drama and spectacle. With regard to early twentieth-century modernism, works by Strauss, Schoenberg and Berg often had theatrical components.¹¹

A challenging contemporary issue is how to relate to an audience with a highly diverse background. And, Blassingham claims, because

⁸Salzman, 'Notes', 9-10.

⁹Dahlhaus, 'What is Musical Drama?', 103 and 110.

¹⁰See Ellen Blassingham, 'Introduction' in n.a., ed., *Perspectives: Creating and Producing Contemporary Opera and Musical Theatre*, (Washington DC: Opera America 1983), x, and Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988). 204.

¹¹Schoenberg's pupil Alban Berg produced his opera *Wozzeck* (1922), with a score which combines extreme dissonance with rhapsodic lyricism. Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 413-415.

communication with the rest of the world is instantaneous, globalization and modern mass communication can make the opera composer an ‘overnight, nationwide success, or just as easily, an overnight worldwide failure, immediately after the premiere of a new work’.¹²

Martin claims that the European operatic tradition at the beginning of the twentieth-century can be loosely divided into four styles according to its subject matter and music.¹³ There is an Italian style, personified in Verdi, with operas about real people in real situations (the *verismo* style); a German style, dominated by Wagner, with operas about mythical people and symbolic matters; a French style, lead by Massenet, in a sort of a weaker version of the Italian style, when charm and pathos partly replace passion and tragedy, and a Slavic style, mainly Russian and Czech, with two different traditions, one nationalistic (presenting historical figures and events) and the other fantastic (with folk tales and ironic symbolism). However, after the first quarter of the century, these four styles diverged into a multiplicity, which became one of the main features of opera, both in Europe and in the USA (with the development of the so-called American/English style, including ‘Light Opera’ and Broadway musicals).¹⁴

Martin further claims that twentieth-century operatic music has seen two revolutions, the first with atonalism, twelve-tone techniques and serialism, and the second, which started in the 1920s with the experiments of sound

¹²Blassingham, ‘Introduction’, xi.

¹³Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 3-16.

¹⁴Elise K. Kirk, ‘American opera: innovation and tradition’, in Mervyn Cooke, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to 20th Century Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 197-208.

amplification (firstly by jazz musicians, then developing towards rock music), culminating in the mid-1970s, using new instruments and sounds in a form of diatonicism, and employing many staging resources, as in Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* (1975), to be discussed later in this chapter.¹⁵

2. New Approaches to Narrative

At this point, this study presents a brief survey of some of the most influential operas created during the last few decades, particularly referring to their distinctive and innovative use of narrative.

Boyden refers to the stylistic diversity in opera that flourished after World War II.¹⁶ Such heterogeneity is revealed by the coexistence, in the period, of the more conservative approach of some composers (such as Benjamin Britten [1913-1976], for instance), and the undogmatic and unconventional, rather experimental procedures of others, not only in their compositional styles and techniques, but more particularly in their treatment of narrative; composers like Luigi Dallapiccola (1909-1975), for example, who presented in his one-act opera in serial style, *Il Prigionero* (1950), a non-traditional, anti-realistic narrative, offering a story in which cogency is 'deliberately exploded', by corrupting its presumed normal sequence, or combining divergent or contradictory elements within it.¹⁷

An unorthodox narrative was created by Luigi Nono (1924-1990), 'the first truly experimental composer to tackle the theatre', according to Boyden,

¹⁵Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 3-16.

¹⁶Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 539-540.

¹⁷Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 637; see also Robert Adlington, 'Music theatre since the 1960s', *The Cambridge Companion to 20th Century Opera*, 229.

in his only opera, *Intolleranza* (1960), which presents a montage of fragmentary images and ideas based on various texts. First produced in 1961, it was never staged in London.¹⁸ In the same vein, Bernd Zimmermann (1918-1970), presented in *Die Soldaten* (1964, first produced in the UK by ENO, in 1996), an anti-military satire in which the music quotes from different historical styles while the action occurs in several and simultaneous layers.¹⁹

A particular development, begun in the late fifties and continuing until today, is ‘music-theatre’, with its influential anti-realistic portrayal of dramatic situations and psychological states, for instance, in contrast to the rather naturalistic attributes of traditional opera.²⁰ It is important to note that the two terms, ‘Music Theatre’ (often applied to opera) and ‘Music-theatre’, should not be confused. As for the latter, Adlington claims that the presence of the human voice is not a prerequisite: the genre developed as theatrical orientation began to saturate the instrumental music of the early 1960s and 1970s.²¹ Björn Heile elucidates: he argues that opera is founded on the maintenance of scenic illusion, for which separation of stage and orchestra pit, but unification of singing and acting amongst the protagonists, are indispensable.²² Contrastingly, in experimental music-theatre the music-making IS the dramatic action; scenic action often does not represent any external reality and

¹⁸*Intolleranza* was premiered at the Biennale, in Venice, in 1961, and although it has had a few other productions since then, the work remains well-known mainly because of the scandal of its first reception. Its quite political plot tells a story of an immigrant worker and the hostility he faces. Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 651. The information on *Die Soldaten*, was gathered from ENO Archives.

¹⁹Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 539; see also Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 82, 655.

²⁰Adlington, ‘Music theatre since the 1960s’, 229.

²¹Adlington, ‘Music theatre since the 1960s’, 227.

²²Björn Heile, ‘Recent Approaches to Experimental Music Theatre and Contemporary Opera’, *Music & Letters*, 87.1 (2006), 79.

frequently no continuous dramatic roles are enunciated by singing. Mauricio Kagel (1931-2008) is often considered one of the first to produce works in this genre, as for instance, *Match* (1964), a tennis game for cellists with a percussionist as umpire.²³

Hans Werner Henze (b. 1926) is probably the most enthusiastic and prolific opera composer of this generation, having written over 15 works in a style that combines a great diversity of musical idioms while sustaining an ‘incisive theatricality’.²⁴ His *The Bassarids* (1966), with an English libretto by W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman after Euripides's *The Bacchae*, was revived by the English National Opera in 1974.²⁵

Luciano Berio (1925-2003), in his turn, was more concerned with the relationship between performer and audience, having given great importance to the versatility of human voice, as in his opera *Un Re in Ascolto (A King Listens)*, 1984), mounted by the Royal Opera House in 1989.²⁶

In his first opera, *Die Teufel von Loudon (The Devils of Loudon)*, 1969), Krzysztof Penderecki (b. 1933) had earlier combined an ‘expressive and highly wrought musical language with dramatically extreme subject matter’.²⁷

²³Paul Griffiths, ‘Unnecessary Music: Kagel at 50’, *Musical Times* 122:8 (1981) 11–12. Members of *Fluxus*, Cage, George Crumb, and others, as well as Kagel, developed the notion of ‘instrumental theatre’, where instrumentalists are required to take physical, singing, or speaking roles, while singers/actors are expected to play instruments, etc. Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 70.

²⁴Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 540.

²⁵Contrasting with ‘grand opera’, *The Bassarids*, Henze's *El Cimarrón (The Runaway Slave)*, 1970), is a ‘music-theatre’ piece for baritone, guitar, flute and percussion and is called ‘a recital for four musicians’, by the composer. Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 584-589. Also from the ENO Archives.

²⁶Berio's work often combines different layers of meanings and music, which is generally the result of the use of tape and of the reworking of music already heard; such a feature is not apparent in *Un Re in Ascolto*, though. Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 635. Also from the ROH Archives.

²⁷Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 574. *The Devils of Loudon* was based on Aldous Huxley's novel, and like the composer's other first works, its music presents tone-

Sadler's Wells Company (ENO) gave the British Premiere of *The Devils* in 1974.²⁸

Le Grand Macabre (1977), the only opera by George Ligeti (1923-2006), presents an even more exploratory and inventive combination of styles within an anarchic and satirical vision; ENO gave the British premiere of *Le Grand Macabre* in 1982, and a second and highly-acclaimed production of the opera in September 2009.²⁹

One of the most significant figures in the development of opera during the late twentieth century, employing elements of music-theatre and a diversified exploration of the narrative is Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007). In the late 1970s, he created *Licht (Light)*, an epic series of seven operas designed to be performed on each evening of the week, when ritual replaces a more traditional story-telling.³⁰ *Donnerstag aus Licht (Thursday)*, 1981) was given its British Premiere at The ROH, in 1985.³¹

Composers including Wolfgang Rihm (b. 1952), with his opera *Die Eroberung von Mexico (The Conquest of Mexico)*, 1981), have developed

clusters, sometimes brutal orchestration and harsh vocal line. Martin alleges that the music accompaniments in *The Devils* was so exceedingly graphic that some in the audience were turned against the work. Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 652.

²⁸From ENO Archives.

²⁹*Le Grand Macabre* (1975-77, revised version 1996), a two-act opera, with a libretto by Michael Meschke and Ligeti himself (after Michael de Ghelderode's play, *La ballade du Grand Macabre*), was premiered by the Royal Opera, Stockholm, in 1978. Originally written in German, the opera has also been performed in Swedish, English, French and Italian. Unlike many operas, this one was written specifically with flexibility of language in mind, and only a few notes need be changed to perform the opera in any of these languages. (Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers* [1902-11] is an earlier example of this phenomenon). From ENO Archives. This author attended the 2009 production.

³⁰Work on *Licht* lasted between 1977 and 2003. Six of the operas have been so far staged at La Scala, Covent Garden, the Leipzig Opera, and the Cologne Opera. Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 657.

³¹From the ROH Archives.

Stockhausen's music-theatre into a more lyrical genre, influenced by the anti-naturalistic aesthetic of Antonin Artaud. *The Conquest* was only successful in the composer's native Germany, though, and was never mounted in London.³² Neither was *Luci mie Traditrici* (*My Treacherous Sight*, 1998), by Salvatore Sciarrino (b. 1947), one of Europe's most prolific composers, despite its combination of a richly poetic text with an 'extremely idiosyncratic musical language'.³³

The operatic style of Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992), has also been influential. The 'colossal' *Saint Francis of Assisi* (1983) did make it across the channel, in a concert performance at the Royal Albert Hall, London, during the 2008 Proms.³⁴ This indelible Frenchness has been transmitted to other works, including those of the Finnish Kaija Saariaho (b. 1952), who lives and works in Paris. Other Finnish composers, Aulis Salinen (b. 1935), Einojuhani Rautavaara (b. 1928), as well as the Danish Paul Ruders (b. 1949), have all been widely performed in Britain, though Ruders' *The Handmaid's Tale* (1998), produced at ENO in the 2002/03 season, received mixed reviews.³⁵ Salinen's *The King Goes Forth to France* (1984) was produced at the ROH in 1987, and Saariaho's *L'Amour de loin* was performed at the London Coliseum (ENO) in 2009.³⁶

British composer Maxwell Davies presents a particularly eclectic

³²Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 570-571.

³³Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 553-554.

³⁴Christopher Dingle, 'Sin isn't interesting. I prefer flowers', *The Guardian*, 29 August 2008 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2008/aug/29/classicalmusicandopera.proms>>, accessed 29 September 2011.

³⁵Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 584. For *The Handmaid's Tale*: ENO Archives.

³⁶From the ROH and ENO Archives, respectively.

approach, mixing, in his earlier operas and monodramas, a ‘Schoenbergian vocal style with aggressive parody’, when social and political evils are generally the focus of attention, as in *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969).³⁷ His later works, particularly the most recent, show an even more marked tendency towards eclecticism.³⁸

Harrison Birtwistle began with a similarly ‘violent and strident’ *Punch and Judy* (1968, first mounted in Aldeburgh Festival), but later produced more ritualistic, formal and richly orchestrated operas like *The Mask of Orpheus* (1986), *Gawain* (1991), and *The Minotaur* (2008). All Birtwistle's operas have been produced in London: *The Mask*, an ENO commission, was produced at the Coliseum in 1986; *Gawain* and *The Minotaur* were produced at the Royal Opera House in 1991 and 2008, respectively; lately (2008), *Punch* received two new productions, at the same time: by ENO, at the Young Vic Theatre, London, and on tour by Music Theatre Wales, with a production in the Linbury Theatre.³⁹

More recently, composers like Judith Weir (b. 1954), Mark-Anthony Turnage (b. 1960), and Thomas Adès (b. 1971) also have presented a ‘refusal

³⁷Adlington, ‘Music theatre since the 1960s’, 237.

³⁸Critic Andrew Clements wrote about *Kommilitonen!* (2011), Davies's last opera: ‘Davies's music delineating each strand with remarkable clarity. His score is extraordinarily fluent: the vocal lines are perfectly judged and the instrumental writing full of wonderful touches, with marching band, jazz trio, solo harp and erhu players on stage. It is as good as any theatre score he has ever composed’. Andrew Clements, ‘Kommilitonen! - review’, *The Guardian*, 21 March 2011 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/mar/21/kommilitonen-review>>, accessed 29 September 2011.

³⁹Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 540. For *Punch and Judy*: Edward Seckerson, ‘Punch And Judy, Young Vic, London’, *The Independent*, 22 April 2008 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/punch-and-judy-young-vic-london-813251.html>>, accessed 30 September 2011; for *The Mask of Orpheus*: ENO Archives; for *Gawain*: the ROH Archives; this author attended *The Minotaur* in 2008, at Covent Garden, (main stage).

to be doctrinaire' and reveal a remarkable receptivity to a wide range of musical influences, from folk music in Weir in her ironic parables such as *Blond Eckbert* (premiered by ENO, 1984) and *A Night at the Chinese Opera* (a BBC commission for Kent Opera, premiered in Cheltenham, England, 1987), to jazz in Turnage's 'savage' and 'visceral' *Greek* (a transposition of the Oedipus story to London's West End in the late twentieth century; premiered in Munich, 1988).⁴⁰ Adès' first opera *Powder her Face* (1995, a commission by Almeida Opera) also presents a 'kaleidoscopic range of influences'; it received a new production at the Linbury Theatre, ROH, in 2008.⁴¹

In parallel, and also investigating new forms of story-telling, the so-called American 'Minimalists', whose 'hypnotic' and repetitive music is more allied with progressive popular music than with the classical tradition, have brought to the operatic repertoire many works to illustrate a kind of 'ritualistic approach'. They have achieved their greatest success with operas by Philip Glass (b. 1937) and Steve Reich (b. 1936).⁴²

Einstein on the Beach, Glass's first opera, was made in collaboration with Robert Wilson, one of the most influential figures on the American

⁴⁰For *Blond Eckbert*: ENO Archives; for *A Night at the Chinese Opera*: Andrew Clements, 'Night at the Chinese Opera, A', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 ed.), 603-604. For *Greek*: Andrew Clements, 'Greek', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 530. A new production of *Greek* by Music Theatre Wales will tour to Edinburgh, Oxford, Basingstoke, Mold, Aberystwyth, Huddersfield, and Newport, England, in September-November 2011. 'Mark-Anthony Turnage Greek', *Music Theatre Wales* <<http://www.musictheatrewales.org.uk/>>, accessed 30 September 2011.

⁴¹Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 540. Also from ENO Archives.

⁴²Glass has written twelve operas, mostly for traditional opera house performance as well as several works for live performance with film in the manner of a live sound track. Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 239-248. *Satyagraha* (1980) draws the story of Gandhi's peaceful protests in South Africa early in the twentieth-century to explore the 'truth-force' of the opera's title in past, present and future. The work was followed by *Akhnaten* (1983), and preceded by *Einstein on the Beach* (1975), the three constituting Glass' 'portrait operas'. Caroline Harvey, 'Words and Actions', in Cooke, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to 20th Century Opera*, 55. See also Arved Ashby, 'Minimalist opera', in Cooke, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to 20th Century Opera*, 244.

progressive drama scene.⁴³ Some of the composer's later operas, like *Satyagraha* (1980) and *Akhmaten* (1983), have become established in the repertoire of opera houses throughout the world, like the English National Opera, which produced the latter in its 1984/85 season. The former was staged by this company in 2007 with such great success that it was remounted in 2010.⁴⁴

Steve Reich's *The Cave* (1990-1993), co-created by Beryl Corot, is described as 'music and video theatre work';⁴⁵ based on video-taped interviews and commentaries, besides texts from the Bible and the Koran, the musical score is performed simultaneously with a six-screen projection and multi-channel sound playback of the videos.⁴⁶ *The Cave* was performed at the Barbican Centre, London, in 2006.⁴⁷

Notwithstanding, John Adams (b. 1947), first considered a minimalist himself, is now seen as more mainstream, addressing contemporary issues in operas such as *Nixon in China* (1987), *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991), and

⁴³*Einstein on the Beach*, premiered on July 25, 1976 at the Avignon Festival in France, was also staged that summer in Hamburg, Paris, Belgrade, Venice, Brussels, Rotterdam, and at the Metropolitan Opera House, in November 1976. Ashby, 'Minimalist opera', 249-252.

⁴⁴According to ENO Artistic Director John Berry, *Satyagraha*'s first production in 2007 signalled a new direction for the company, having been an 'unforgettable production of Philip Glass's hypnotic opera', one that has become 'the most popular contemporary work ever staged at ENO'. The company re-staging of it in April 2010 was attended by this author. From ENO Programme Notes.

⁴⁵Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 244-245.

⁴⁶In *The Cave*, the interviews and commentaries are with Israelis, Palestinians, and Americans, concerning alleged burial place of the patriarch Abraham at Hebron; also, the biblical stories of Abraham, Sarah, Ishmael, and Isaac, all common figures for both Muslims and Jews, are included. The Music score is for singing voices, woodwinds, percussion, keyboards, and solo strings. Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 244-245.

⁴⁷From the programme notes of Major Festival of Steve Reich@70 (Phases – the Music of Steve Reich) at Barbican Centre, London, September 28-October 8, 2006, found at n.a., 'News', Steve Reich website <<http://www.steverreich.com/images/phases.pdf>>, accessed 30 September 2011.

Dr Atomic (2005, performed at the ENO Coliseum in 2009).⁴⁸

Minimalist music employed in the conveying of a narrative has also influenced the Dutch composer Louis Andriessen (b. 1939), as in his ‘aggressively dynamic and political’ work *De Materie* (1985-1988, commissioned by Welsh film-maker Peter Greenaway), and also the British Michael Nyman (b. 1944). Andriessen's ‘opera-monologue’ *Anais Nin* was performed (and co-commissioned) by the London Sinfonietta, at the Queen Elisabeth Hall, London, in 2011; Nyman's *Man and Boy: Dada* (2003, commissioned by Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe) was produced in London by Almeida Opera, in 2004.⁴⁹

3. The Libretto

Usually the first crucial step in the process of creating an opera is the choice of a suitable and appropriate subject for the plot; traditionally, this commonly rests rather with the composer. The next is to consider the ‘operatic nature’ of the characters (with their personalities clearly exposed, generally in situations of extreme psychological pressure); this falls further into the realm of the librettist.⁵⁰

Gary Schmidgall considers the librettist’s task historically: he first cites Piero Jacopo Martello’s *Della Tragedia Antica e Moderna* (1715), where

⁴⁸See n.a., John Adams website <<http://www.earbox.com/>>, accessed 04 August 2011. This author attended the 2009 ENO production.

⁴⁹See n.a., ‘Michael Nyman: Man and Boy: Dada, Chester Novello, <http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=2432&State_3041=2&WorkId_3041=14355>, accessed 30 September 2011.

⁵⁰Gary Schmidgall, ‘Some observations on the libretto’, in n.a., ed., *Perspectives: Creating and Producing Contemporary Opera and Musical Theatre*, (Washington DC: Opera America 1983), 67.

he calls the librettist a ‘versifying poetaster’ (il *poetastro verseggiatore*), or ‘verse-weaver’ (*testor dei versi*), instead of a poet.⁵¹ Then, Schmidgall turns to Stendhal, writing over a century later in his *Life of Rossini*, who says that there is no need of a librettist to be a great poet: ‘Only one must not be so harsh as to read the libretto’.⁵² The next commentator to be cited is the nineteenth-century novelist and musical connoisseur, Thomas Love Peacock. In a less individualistic approach to the matter, this writer refers to the librettist as the ‘lyrical dramatist’, with a point-of-view that ‘is pre-eminently drama rather than poetry that both librettist and composer are concerned to put on the stage’.⁵³ Still, Peacock, by defining opera as an ‘intensifying rather than a discursive genre’, attests that the librettist’s art has primarily to do with artistic economy.

The considerations described above have not changed much in recent times, though: the relationship between composer and librettist can still range from mostly separate (where the librettist/adaptor simply delivers the material to the composer, and little alteration occurs, as in the case of John Adams’ operas, to be discussed further below), through collaboration (where the two work closely together to produce the libretto, as in Saariaho’s *Adriana Mater*, also approached below), or dominance by the composer, to complete fusion, where composer and librettist are one and the same. Despite some luke-warm protestations to the contrary on his part, as will be seen below, Birtwistle falls

⁵¹Schmidgall, ‘Some observations’, 60.

⁵²Schmidgall, ‘Some observations’, 60.

⁵³Schmidgall, ‘Some observations’, 61.

into the category of dominant composer (with compliant librettist).⁵⁴ A minority of composers write all their own libretti; Judith Weir and Gian Carlo Menotti are two such;⁵⁵ Peter Maxwell Davies has written the texts for four of his seven, including that for *The Lighthouse*, another work to be discussed later.⁵⁶ Notwithstanding, American opera director H. Wesley Balk claims that ‘composers who write their own libretti risk losing those vital statements that can only emerge from the conflict of opposing points of view’.⁵⁷

A libretto may not necessarily precede a composer’s concept of his/her opera; however, if it is drawn up before the music itself, it can have a profound effect on the opera, from overall structure to dramatic detail. It can be based on an idea chosen by the composer, or by the librettist, or else (as is often the case) is an adaptation, reduction, or reproduction of a pre-existing work (like Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* [1902], a word-by-word setting of Maeterlinck's play).⁵⁸

But librettos can be assembled from a variety of sources. *Dr Atomic*, for instance, has a libretto adapted by Peter Sellars from highly distinct sources, some of whose original outlines are strictly preserved in the final text. The result in this particular case is a fragmentary, rather inarticulate, plot.⁵⁹

⁵⁴In her diary of the first production of *The Minotaur* at the ROH, 03/04/2008, Rhian Samuel writes that composer cited Auden's definition of the best libretto as “a dumbshow”. Samuel, ‘Birtwistle’s *The Minotaur*’, 125.

⁵⁵Weir affirms that she never considered herself a poet, and that it was ‘entirely a matter of expediency’. Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 621-623, 627-630.

⁵⁶These are the operas: *Taverner* (1962-1970), *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* (1977), *The Lighthouse* (1979), and *Resurrection* (1987). N.a., Maxopus.com (Peter Maxwell Davies's website) <http://www.maxopus.com/work_list.aspx>, accessed 1 October 2011.

⁵⁷H. Wesley Balk, ‘The craft of creating opera – restoring a lost legacy through the workshop process’, in n.a., ed., *Perspectives: Creating and Producing Contemporary Opera and Musical Theatre*, (Washington DC: Opera America 1983), 84.

⁵⁸Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 399.

⁵⁹*Doctor Atomic* premiered at the San Francisco Opera on October 2005, and in the

Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* was inspired by Michel de Ghelderode's play, *La ballade du Grand Macabre*, but also by Magritte's surrealism, Bruegel's paintings and Ligeti's personal memories.⁶⁰ *After Life*, a multimedia opera which features a mixture of live performance and movie sequences, by the Dutch composer Michel van der Aa, is based on a film: Hirokazu Kore-eda's 1998 movie of the same name.⁶¹ In contrast, Birtwistle chooses a well-known theme, for instance a Greek myth, for each of his operas. In fact, with regard to *Gawain*, he has said that another plot would have done just as well.⁶² The implication is that his musical concerns drive the opera, not any libretto-plot.

What are the attributes of a 'good' libretto? Schmidgall describes a vivid image of an 'ideal' libretto as of 'a container that must hold the volatile ether called music in one engagingly dramatic place'.⁶³ According to Salzman and Desi, traditionally, a good libretto was one that offered the composer the possibilities of combining gestures or expressions with musical motives, thus making a connection between what is heard and what is seen.⁶⁴ Even though such elements may be understood differently according to the audiences' cultural backgrounds, the public generally still gets the message that the eponymous hero in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is 'stretching the truth' when, for

United Kingdom, by the English National Opera, on 25 February 2009.

⁶⁰From ENO's programme notes.

⁶¹Michel van der Aa's opera *After Life*, for 6 singers, ensemble, video and electronic soundtrack, with a libretto by the composer, had its premiere at The Muziekgebouw of Amsterdam in 2 June 2006; a new version of the work was premiered at the Muziektheater, also in Amsterdam, on 28 September 2009. I personally attended a seminar about *After Life* with the composer, at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam (The Netherlands, October, 2009), and a full-stage performance of the opera at the Barbican Centre (15 May, 2010).

⁶²Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *Gawain*', 163-178.

⁶³Schmidgall, 'Some Observations', 73.

⁶⁴Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 83.

instance, the music presents a snide, laughing figure to accompany his assurances.

More precisely, the term ‘libretto’ means ‘a little book’, implying it is supposed to be short or abbreviated, and to present a concentration of material, thus being a suggestive more than a descriptive text, in such a way that, according to Kerman, ‘the composer can sense and develop a feeling latent in the most unprepossessing bit of it’.⁶⁵ Reinforcing this conception, Balk describes a libretto as an incomplete work that must be completed by the addition of a different art.⁶⁶

Martin Crimp, the librettist of George Benjamin’s *Into the Little Hill*, says:

A libretto should not draw attention to itself. Horizontally it must tell a clear story; vertically it needs to go deep; unlike a play, a text for music can occasionally afford to stand still, since music itself is always, however slowly, moving forward.⁶⁷

Also exemplifying the sort of ‘simplicity’ that is required of the libretto, George Benjamin said of Crimp’s, ‘There are only a handful of words [in it] with more than three syllables’. Both composer and librettist hoped, in this case, to avoid what they perceived as hackneyed nineteenth-century realism techniques (in the first production, the designer followed the stage directions that there be no costumes, for instance, just concert attire for the

⁶⁵Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, 64. The librettist usually keeps the right to print and sell the libretto as an extra source of income. Besides, libretti also include information on the cast, setting, and stage directions. Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 81.

⁶⁶Balk, ‘The craft of creating opera’, 84.

⁶⁷George Benjamin’s first operatic work, *Into the Little Hill*, a collaboration with playwright Martin Crimp, was premiered at the *Festival d’Automne* in Paris in 2006 and has toured widely on both sides of the Atlantic. It received its London premiere at the Royal Opera House in February 2009. The quotation is taken from the *Into the Little Hill* programme notes. The composer’s words were noted by me at an interview I attended, prior to the first performance of *Into the Little Hill* (February, 2009).

singers), while retaining an emotional directness.

Floyd claims that the necessity for concision and lack of complication in the libretto is dictated by several factors, but mostly because it takes longer to sing words than to speak them; also, operatic moments of emotional and dramatic crystallization are dependent on lyrical expansion (commonly in the form of set pieces), that needs time to be achieved.⁶⁸ He affirms that such moments, which he calls ‘catalytic occasions’, are like ‘uncommon occurrences, the crisis situation against which characters reveal themselves and their true feelings in a heightened emotional state’. Moreover, these moments are not just theatrical artifices, but ‘organic dramatic situations which supply colour, excitement, and a double dramatic reality onstage, each intensified by the other’. To illustrate this, he cites the moment when Peter Grimes enters the tavern at the height of the storm and the merry-making, when his quiet monologue is juxtaposed against both the turbulence outside and the crowded, noisy interior of the tavern.⁶⁹

Dahlhaus claims that, in opera, the musical setting of the text transforms its content, so much so that it can never be retold on its own, as ‘pure content’, without detriment.⁷⁰ He claims that this distorts or even destroys the principle that the content and form of a literary text (i.e. its rhythmic and syntactical structure) are inseparable. Here, literary form is

⁶⁸Floyd, ‘The Making of an Opera’, 20-23.

⁶⁹*Peter Grimes* (1945) is an opera by Benjamin Britten, with a libretto adapted by Montagu Slater from the Peter Grimes section of George Crabbe’s poem *The Borough*. The opera established Britten not only as a remarkable composer but also as a sincere commentator on social and political events, something that runs throughout most of his output. Joe Staines, ed., *The Rough Guide to Classical Music*, 5th ed. (London: Rough Guides Ltd, 2010): 103-108.

⁷⁰Dahlhaus, ‘What is Musical Drama?’, 101-102.

transferred to musical form, and the story underlying an opera as a musical drama is somewhat different from the story in the libretto, since it only partially represents the real action onstage. For instance, some striking parts in the libretto can be absolutely inexpressive in the course of the musical drama; or vice-versa.

The latter situation is illustrated clearly in Saariaho's *Adriana Mater*, at an instance of emotional climax, just before the final scene, which comprises purely instrumental music; it proves an intense experience for the audience.⁷¹ The moment of truth comes when Tsargo, now blind, returns at the end of the war and meets for the first time his son, Yonas, conceived through rape. Yonas raises his hand to kill his father, but, registering his blindness, cannot bring himself to strike the blow. The orchestra reaches its highest degree of density, illuminating an extremely slow, tiny gesture: Tsargo keeps moving his hand towards Yonas' face, so as to touch it. This minimal movement lasts a considerable time, so that temporality becomes a dramatic feature which intensifies the instant. The music is dense, but ambiguous as well, since it expresses psychological conflict. It stops at the very moment at which Yonas refuses his father's touch and leaves. This moment in the score illustrates how the music can realise dramatic potential with such strength that it could not be fully predicted in the text alone. Later on, Yonas considers that not killing his father was a weakness, but his mother, Adriana, sings: 'We are not avenged,

⁷¹*Adriana Mater* is the second opera by Saariaho, with a libretto in French by her frequent collaborator, Amin Maalouf. It received its world premiere at the Opéra Bastille on April 2006 in a production directed by Peter Sellars, and its UK premiere in a concert performance on 24 April 2008, which I attended. N.a., 'Adriana Mater', Chester Novello website, <http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=2432&State_3041=2&workId_3041=14461>, accessed 4 June, 2011.

we are saved'. The music makes this moment luminous; its strength is in how urgently it responds to dramatic events. In the opera's reliance on instrumental music to evoke the strongest emotions, it is reminiscent of the final interlude of *Wozzeck*, which occurs after the protagonist's death by drowning. The difference is that, in the latter opera, the music is an interpolation, added to the libretto. In *Adriana Mater*, it illuminates the actions already built in. In sum, an opera's content is determined by both the musical and theatrical realization of action, not by the action that can be read in the text alone.

Speaking of action as 'the fundamental mode of presentation in drama', Kerman affirms that the relationship or interplay between action and music has been always the central problem in opera.⁷² Still, the musical generation of action must continue to be one of the greatest challenges for composers, since with action inadequately projected in music, the lyrical, spectacular or ritual elements always present in opera overtake the dramatic.⁷³ American composer Carlisle Floyd claims that the two vital ingredients in opera are action and passion.⁷⁴

Indeed, when a plot can be externalized through action, in a context of sufficiently dramatic events to provoke expressive characters into intense emotion (and then a genuine emotional response in the audiences), one does not need to rely totally on verbal comprehension to assure intelligibility of what is being portrayed onstage. Even subtle and subliminal elements of mood and characterization can be presented physically/visually, and of course,

⁷²Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, 58.

⁷³Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, 226.

⁷⁴Floyd, 'The Making of an Opera', 20.

musically, instead of being expressed in words by the characters themselves. In Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), for instance, the gradual tightening of tension in the plot as the situation becomes more and more claustrophobic is expressed in the music by the consecutive variations of the twelve-note 'Screw' theme (presented in the first scene after the Prologue), scene by scene, throughout the opera.⁷⁵

The fact is that many modern operas, even successful ones, have been criticised for the quality of their libretti; these include several of Birtwistle's and Maxwell Davies's works, in particular the latter's *Doctor of Myddfai*.⁷⁶ Critics complained of the 'absence of elaboration of the libretto', its 'deliberately nebulous plot', and questioned its sense of comprehensibility.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, in modern theatre and music theatre, the 'natural' and historic relationship between what we hear and what we see can be broken for artistic purposes. This is particularly the case when the whole conception of the composition is based on a combination of contradictory elements, as a matter of discovering and exploring different kinds of language, particularly found in *Dr Atomic*, mentioned earlier in this study.⁷⁸

Opera has always been an amalgam of aural and visual effects; in the Baroque period, for instance, dance played a very prominent role, as in

⁷⁵*The Turn of the Screw*, with a libretto by Myfanwy Piper, is based on the classic ghost story by the American-born author Henry James (1843-1916). Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 522-529.

⁷⁶*The Doctors of Myddfai* is an opera in two acts composed by Peter Maxwell Davies, to a libretto by David Pountney. The work premiered at the New Theatre in Cardiff, on June 1996. The libretto was adapted from an ancient Welsh legend which inspired *The Lady of the Lake*. Notwithstanding these criticisms, Davies used Pountney as his librettist again in his most recent opera, *Kommilitonen!* (2011).

⁷⁷Rodger Dunnet, 'The Doctors of Myddfai', *Tempo*, 198 (Oct. 1996), 36. Here, the critic points out that 'the absence of elaboration may possibly be the libretto's Achilles heel'.

⁷⁸Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 84-85.

Handel's *Alcina* (1735), which contains several musical sequences with opportunity for dance (allegedly composed for dancer Marie Sallé).⁷⁹ To add all these elements to the text, while still being concerned with exposition of character, thought and action as well as creating the structure of the work, is one of the librettist's most challenging tasks.

Thus, as the examples above show, the more a libretto allows space for events and for physical and psychological expression, the more effective it can be. Thus composers tend to alter it at will. In fact, as Kerman affirms, in the beginning, the libretto is the inspiration, but in the end, it is a limitation.⁸⁰ Of Birtwistle's settings, Adlington writes censoriously that the text's significance is not a priority for the composer, since words frequently 'get mangled in his contorted melody, and pivotal moments in the text are often curiously rushed through'.⁸¹ However, while Birtwistle sometimes treats the words merely as an 'inconvenient necessity', he is sometimes inspired by the possible correspondences between text and music to a deep and quite personal degree; for instance, isolated words are sometimes chosen for musical emphasis, therefore losing their context or coherent interpretation, so that the operation of language is more important than its conventional meaning.

After Birtwistle has received from his librettist sets of 'words for music' (almost always according to a previously-conceived musical structure) he evaluates them in detail, requesting some additions and ignoring other parts

⁷⁹Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 65.

⁸⁰Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, 21.

⁸¹Adlington, 'Birtwistle's Recent Music', 2-8.

already written.⁸² With regard to *Gawain*, the composer himself admitted that the final (and crucial) organization of the libretto was his.⁸³ The librettist David Harsent (also the librettist for *The Minotaur* and *Theatre of Melancholy* [2009]) complained about some of Birtwistle's usual 'mis-setting', by not stressing a particular word in the line that he (Harsent) wanted stressed, for instance; he commented that in *Gawain*, with regard to a number of riddles, each varied and carefully crafted to its particular text, the composer set the same words each time, as well as changing the word-order, even reconstructing them to make them singable.⁸⁴

The Minotaur, written almost 20 years later, perhaps shows an easier balance between the two creators, and therefore a greater understanding on the part of Harsent of the needs of the composer.⁸⁵ (In fact, in the meantime, he has written a number of other libretti, for instance, for Julian Grant and Jonathan Dove).⁸⁶ The story, a retelling of the well-known myth, dramatically painting the inner, merciless and narrow world of the Minotaur himself, was then communicated with a coherence and integrity which balanced the intricacy of Birtwistle's music.

⁸²The quotation is taken from the discussion that preceded *The Theatre of Melancholy*, which I attended, mentioned previously.

⁸³*Gawain's* story is based on the medieval tale *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The opera was a commission from the Royal Opera House, London, where it was first performed on 30 May 1991. Birtwistle revised it in 1994, and the premiere of the revised version was given at the Royal Opera House on 20 April, 1994. Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *Gawain*', 163-178.

⁸⁴*Theatre of Melancholy* comprises two fully-staged new music-theatre works by Harrison Birtwistle: *The Corridor* (with libretto by David Harsent) and *Semper Dowland, semper dolens* (John Dowland's Elizabethan songs interwoven with new settings by Harrison Birtwistle). This was premiered at the Aldeburgh Festival in 12 June 2009, and a second performance was given in London on 6 July 2009, which this author attended. From the Royal Festival Hall programme notes. For *The Minotaur*, see Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 227.

⁸⁵Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 215-236.

⁸⁶See n.a., 'Music Theatre', David Harsent website, <<http://www.davidharsent.com/music.html>>, accessed 04 August 2011.

Birtwistle's particular appreciation of collaboration between composer and librettist was noted just preceding the London première of the *Theatre of Melancholy*, when he and Harsent discussed the work. They revealed their views of music, narrative, and myth, but more particularly their process for conceiving the libretto, taking into consideration the visual and dramaturgical aspects from, mostly, the composer's point of view. As with Birtwistle's previous operas, the concept of the work was intimately related to the creation of the musical score itself. The composer described his initial approach, saying that he first 'imagines a space, or a secret theatre, with details', revealing that this vision of the opera remains constant from the first draft till the premiere.⁸⁷ Elsewhere, though, he has revealed that he is 'quite open to suggestions, particularly if there are good reasons for changes'.⁸⁸ Regardless, in Birtwistle's *Theatre of Melancholy* we see the composer as ultimate controller, able to succeed because of (in part) his knowledge of the elements of dramaturgy. The music brings with it ideas for staging, concerning not only scene-settings but even movements and actions on the stage. In the end, by comprising two pieces of music-theatre that 'capture the devastating impact of lost love', the *Theatre of Melancholy* comes to be 'a true compelling experience for the audience'.⁸⁹

'Allowing room for the music' seems most easily achieved when

⁸⁷Harrison Birtwistle and David Harsent, live interview on *The Theatre of Melancholy*, part of the London Literature Festival, Sunday, 5 July, 2009.

⁸⁸Samuel, 'Birtwistle's The Minotaur', 215-236.

⁸⁹Samuel's articles on Birtwistle's *The Minotaur* and *Gawain* also detail the process of creating an opera and the role of Birtwistle and Harsent in this, confirming the comments made by the two in the interview mentioned above. Samuel, 'Birtwistle's The Minotaur', 215-236, and 'Birtwistle's Gawain', 163-178. See also *The Theatre of Melancholy* programme notes.

collaboration occurs. The process of creating the libretto for James MacMillan's *The Sacrifice* (another example of a plot rooted in a mythic story) was yet more collaborative than *The Minotaur*, and involved, as do many other modern operas, the use of 'workshops' along the way.⁹⁰ After the librettist, Michael S. Roberts, had sent a full synopsis of three acts round for discussion, the team of composer, director, set designer, and producer kept alive a conversation, in which the structure was hammered out, for months.⁹¹ By the time the libretto was written, almost every aspect of story and character had been extensively discussed and challenged. After a certain point, the collaboration became more fragmented, each working individually, but workshops led by the director continued to be held, allowing both composer and librettist to tighten the drama.

While in traditional opera the libretto generally offers a narrative structure (in respect to a straightforward sequence of facts, as explained above), contemporary opera sometimes offers a plot that is not linear. Temporality as an issue may be emancipated, in large part as a result of 'cinema-effect', or montage. *Wozzeck* is considered one of the twentieth-century's first examples of this technique, this structure being facilitated by the fact that the original play on which it is based, *Woyzeck*, by Georg Büchner, was, at his death, left with the ordering of scenes unresolved.⁹² At

⁹⁰*The Sacrifice*, opera in three acts by James MacMillan, libretto by Michael S. Roberts, is based on the Branwen story from the ancient collection of Welsh folktales, the Mabinogion. The world premiere took place on 22/09/2007, in Cardiff. The London premiere, which I attended, was in November 2007. Other operas which involved workshops in the creative process include Martin Butler's *A Better Place* (2001), at ENO, as well as many of The Opera Group productions.

⁹¹From *The Sacrifice* programme notes, by the librettist.

⁹²None of the original manuscripts of *Woyzeck* contained a continuous draft of the complete play, and the scenes were neither numbered nor grouped into acts. According to

the end of the century, Birtwistle highlighted the issue of temporality in both *Gawain*, whose repeated scenes ‘turn the clock back’, and the earlier *Mask of Orpheus* (1986), which explores various versions of the Orpheus myth simultaneously.⁹³ The previously mentioned *Einstein on the Beach*, another example of a ‘non-narrative’ opera, takes approximately five long hours, with no intermission, while the audience is free to enter and leave as it desires. There is no storyline attached to the image of the historical figure, who is symbolically represented in the opera’s scenery as well as in its characters as a set of impersonations, and of course in its music, all within the context of a ‘non-plot’.⁹⁴

An open narrative can sometimes intensify the audience’s interest in the work of art, but it is not always the case. Although not as open in its structure as Glass’s opera, the above mentioned fragmentary text of Adams’ *Dr Atomic* attempts to present a supposedly true story in a semi-coherent narrative style, yet chronologically built. It offers the events just before the 1945 atomic bomb test at Los Alamos, with a particular emphasis on traces of sensitivity and spirituality in the personality of Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, the controversial physicist who developed the bomb. The deficiency of continuity here is due mainly to the amount of contrasting genres and styles of the texts assembled in the libretto. It includes personal memoirs, recorded interviews, technical manuals of nuclear physics and declassified government documents,

Perle, this has kept the work open to the most divergent interpretations, which is thus in the nature of the play itself. Perle, *The Operas of Alban Berg – Volume One/Wozzeck*, 25.

⁹³Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle: Man, Mind, Music*, 15. Also from ENO Programme Notes (May 1986).

⁹⁴See fnn. 42 and 43.

as well as the *Bhagavad Gita* and the poetry of John Donne, Charles Baudelaire and Muriel Rukeyser, an American contemporary of Oppenheimer. Adam's score offers very expressive and colourful music, but ultimately, *Dr Atomic* presents many problems by virtue of its lack of specificity.⁹⁵

Michel van der Aa's *After Life*, cited above, offers live performance alternating with video sequences.⁹⁶ The film on which the opera is based tells us about an office in a building where people arrive after they die. They are interviewed by death counsellors who help them choose one memory to bring with them into their next life. The idea came to Kore-eda (the film director), after watching his grandfather's memories of friends and family members slowly deteriorate due to Alzheimer's disease. In the film, the counsellors not only help people choose a particular memory, but also film a makeshift reenactment of that event, to be played back for the person immediately before they move on to 'the great beyond' (whatever that may be). Back in the opera, a documentary based on assorted interviews (including one with a middle-aged South African woman who missed her homeland and another with a young boy who amusingly tells us about his baby dog), made two years

⁹⁵Critic Rupert Christiansen wrote about the opera's libretto and how it somewhat determined the music: 'What Sellars has assembled may be scrupulously fair to all parties and the deeper "for" and "against" ramifications of the issue, but it doesn't come alive as theatre. Adams has also been left to grapple with some very clunky text, which he fails to animate into a flow of meaningful melody – tracts of the vocal writing are so dull that they have no business being music at all.' Rupert Christiansen, 'Dr Atomic performed by the ENO at the London Coliseum, review', *The Telegraph*, 26 February 2009 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/opera/4840135/Dr-Atomic-performed-by-the-ENO-at-the-London-Coliseum-review.html>>, accessed 04 August 2011.

⁹⁶Michel van der Aa's music theatre works include the chamber opera, *One* (2002), the opera *After Life* (2006, revised in 2009, Amsterdam) and the music theatre work, *The Book of Disquiet*. According to his website, 'The innovative aspect of these operas is their use of film images and sampled soundtracks as an essential element of the score. Staging, film and music are interwoven into a collage of transparent layers, resulting in a work that is part documentary film, part philosophy'. See n.a., 'Works', Michel van der Aa website <<http://www.vanderaa.net/works/>>, accessed 04 June 2011.

earlier, is inserted into the scenes, creating what the composer calls a 'very strange realistic layer'. To this multilayered work of art, electronic music is added. At a certain point, the singers/characters also appear in the video images, interacting with the interviewees from 'real life'. This offers the most significant visual connection between what happens onstage and the images from the documentary. The composer explains that the music was made for both live action and recorded images, all predictably balanced in the libretto according to their respective pace and moods. The music acts as a sort of unifying layer and implies a similar integrity in the narrative, despite the frequent alternation of radically-contrasting media throughout the spectacle. When asked why there are so many layers in *After Life*, Michel van der Aa said that music alone would not be enough to communicate the drama; he also announced that he had enjoyed the artistic experimentation involved in providing the audience with a diverse set of stimuli for musical drama.

Kerman believes that the fact that texts from the spoken theatre have served the operatic repertory extensively throughout history is mostly due to the parallels in dramatic rhythm, technique, convention, etc., among the two genres.⁹⁷ Good operas have evolved from good plays, including many of Shakespeare's, as shown in the following selected examples: Verdi's *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893, based on *The Merry Wives of Windsor* while integrating elements from the *Henry IV* plays);⁹⁸ Benjamin Britten's *A*

⁹⁷Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, 109.

⁹⁸This list was provided by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica's Guide to Shakespeare* (Online). More than 200 operas based on Shakespeare's plays have been written since 1945, but very few of them have remained in repertory. Outside the traditional mainstream, Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate* (1948, based on *The Taming of the Shrew*) was followed by Leonard

Midsummer Night's Dream (1960, credited with being the only successful modern setting of Shakespeare's words); two earlier *Falstaff*-inspired works: Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Sir John in Love* (1929) and Gustav Holst's *At the Boar's Head* (1925); two recent European adaptations: Aribert Reimann's *Lear* (1978, with an UK premiere produced by ENO in 1989), and Luciano Berio's *Un re in ascolto* (1984, *A King Listens*, a reflection on creation and the complex workings of memory that is based on *The Tempest*; produced by the ROH in 1989);⁹⁹ French composer Pascal Dusapin's *Roméo et Juliette* (1988, a 'metatheatrical opera' built around a rehearsal of Shakespeare's play; performed at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, England, in 1997);¹⁰⁰ *Wintermärchen* (1999, an adaptation in German of *The Winter's Tale*) by Belgian composer Philippe Boesmans (born 1936); *The Tempest* (2004, with a libretto by Meredith Oakes, a completely rewritten text following the original plot), by composer Thomas Adès (born 1971), was premiered at the ROH in 2004.¹⁰¹

4. The Music

The opera composer is of course always concerned with fundamental musical issues, like form, texture, timbre, melodic contour, etc. However, the field of action is indeed much broader and quite eclectic: it is the composer's task to

Bernstein's *West Side Story* (1957, which transposed the story of Romeo and Juliet to a mid-20th-century New York torn apart by rival gangs). N.a., 'Shakespeare and Opera'. Encyclopaedia Britannica's Guide to Shakespeare, <<http://www.britannica.com/shakespeare/article-248478>>, accessed 29 June 2011.

⁹⁹For *Lear*: the ENO Archives; for *Un re in ascolto*: the ROH Archives.

¹⁰⁰Ian Pace, 'Never to be naught: Ian Pace explores the exciting, engaging and evolving world of Pascal Dusapin, *The Musical Times*, 138.1857 (Nov 1997), 17-20.

¹⁰¹From the ROH Archives.

provide musical material not only for the libretto, but for all aspects of the spectacle as a whole, in which the music controls everything from textual readings to over-arching interpretive points.¹⁰² According to Kerman, the composer has the power to determine, by music articulation, the integrity of the operatic dramaturgy.¹⁰³ Dahlhaus asserts that ‘A libretto is not a drama until music makes it one. It’s the music that – under preconditions outlined in the libretto – constitutes the drama’.¹⁰⁴ In other words, the composer dictates, via the dramatic pace of a scene, either how a character is to be played, or his/her attitude, as if the player were a sort of a ‘silent-actor’.¹⁰⁵

Music can be effective in supporting characterization. Indeed, Dahlhaus claims that opera, as a ‘drama of affects’, imposes the configuration of characters on the action represented.¹⁰⁶ Floyd argues that the opera composer develops the characters through music, but also adopts particular points-of-view for each of them, often commenting on, and revealing to the audience, things that the characters themselves are unaware of.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, music can also distort and subvert characters by suggesting their subtle ambiguities or making them seem inconsistent or even absurd. Dr Oppenheimer in Adams’s opera is an example of an ambiguous character, represented musically in conflicting ways, as already discussed.

Samuel, in her analytical essay concerning *The Minotaur*, claims that there are some crucial differences between the Ariadne painted by the libretto,

¹⁰²Gregory Sandow, ‘Definitions’. 3.

¹⁰³Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, 4, 10, 21.

¹⁰⁴Dahlhaus, ‘What is Musical Drama?’, 102.

¹⁰⁵Floyd, ‘The Making of an Opera’, 23.

¹⁰⁶Dahlhaus, *Opera as Drama*, 96.

¹⁰⁷Floyd, ‘The Making of an Opera’, 23-24.

a fearful and devious character, and her musical characterization, where her extraordinarily expressive vocal lines denote sensitive treatment of the female lead. Further, Ariadne has a special relationship with the orchestra: the alto saxophone almost always accompanies and amplifies her vocal lines, acting as an extension of it.¹⁰⁸ This attachment of the saxophone to Ariadne's melodies in *The Minotaur* is just one example of a relationship that can be set up by the music, like those that are often established by a *leitmotif*, a recurrent musical idea, associated with an extra-musical element such as a character, or an *idée fixe*, for instance. In such cases, the music endows a special significance on words, actions, and things seen or remembered.

Paulus claims that the audience's interest in opera is in the characters, when the extra time needed for the text to be sung allows the audience to slowly digest, bask or wallow in a predicament, a crisis, and to develop sympathies, yearnings, for a particular character or characters.¹⁰⁹ Still, he opines that in many of today's operas there is a lack of interesting characters. Similarly, Kerman asserts that, even though not every dramatic situation in opera requires finely marked characterization through music, achieving characterization also presents greater problems to contemporary composers.¹¹⁰

Whereas theories about meaning in musical expression and their practical application are so vast that they go considerably beyond the scope of this study, it is worth alluding to them briefly, as these issues are relevant to many of the operas discussed here. Leonard B. Meyer, in his influential

¹⁰⁸Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 232-233.

¹⁰⁹Paulus, 'Creating Opera: the composer as collaborator' in n.a., ed., *Perspectives: Creating and Producing Contemporary Opera and Musical Theatre*, (Washington DC: Opera America 1983), 36-37.

¹¹⁰Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, 224.

Emotion and Meaning in Music, proposes that the work may possess either an intrinsic musical meaning or else be referential (to any extramusical concept, action, emotional state, or character); he postulates that ‘absolute’ and ‘referential’ meanings can coexist in the same piece of music, as a result of ‘the understanding of and response to relationships inherent in the musical progress’.¹¹¹ The fact is that, from the seventeenth century on, tonal-harmonic music theory developed a system of rhetorical figures (so-called *topoi*), by which emotions or gestures could be described (or transformed, by contradiction). Thus these figures are considered to belong to the ‘absolute’ group of musical meanings.¹¹² They include such gestures as scales moving upward, indicating ascent, and descending figures, symbolizing humiliation, for instance. Some *topoi*, like hunting horns and militaristic trumpets and drums, remain easily understood today.¹¹³ They are still of use in contemporary operas, as in the Prologue of Maxwell Davies' *The Lighthouse* where the music clearly suggests elements of the landscape described in the text. (This will be discussed further in Chapter 3).

Modern opera, like traditional opera, needs structure, though a composer can range from the use of clear patterning and order to a more seamless, through-composed, approach. A pragmatic issue is that a long work needs to be broken up into acts, so that the audience can have respite (and the opera’s bar can sell drinks!). On the more aesthetic level, some composers tend to desire clear structure: Stravinsky returned to the ‘number operas’ of

¹¹¹Leonard B Meyer, *Meaning and Emotion in Music* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956), 1-4.

¹¹²Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 83-85.

¹¹³Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 83-85.

Mozart and Handel in *The Rake's Progress*; Berg used such abstract forms as theme and variations and sonata form in *Wozzeck*. Particularly crucial is that the musical structure constantly matches the tension level of the scenes. Obvious structural devices, like the division into sections of 'acts' and 'scenes', are articulated by musical devices such as changes of instrumentation, texture, colour and density, as well as the interaction between orchestra and singers, the characterization of the choir's role, etc.

The coherence and adequacy of the musical form and style of an opera can be determined by many elements, either related to a particular musical concept (like the 'toccatas' in Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*, whose structure is further examined in Chapter 4, or Berg's use of variations, etc., in *Wozzeck*), or more specifically to the dramatic action, where, for instance, one scene might be a soliloquy, or conversation between two actors/singers, while another might be a crowd scene. Moreover, the libretto may be written as dramatic poetry, prose, realistic or fantastic description, or as a simply descriptive narrative; its own poetic form will affect the setting to differing degrees. For instance the poetic scansion of Verdi opera-libretti is taken as a given; Verdi rises above any limitations that it could impose on him, creating a series of highly contrasting dramatic operas from stylised texts.¹¹⁴ The libretto of *Dr Atomic* has already been proffered as an example of a collage of variegated and contrasting texts to which the composer responded according to their genre and style. Therefore, this opera offers an example of how text can drive music. Significantly, some of the most lyrical and plangent moments

¹¹⁴Julian Budden, *Verdi* (London & Melbourne: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1985), 232-279.

occur when poems are quoted by the singers, as during the second scene, when Oppenheimer quotes Baudelaire. In contrast, in the very first scene, the chorus presents a quite 'arid' text, extracted from a scientific source, its terms quite strange to the public. Here, the music efficiently employs as little expressiveness as the words permit.

Musical texture, delineating form, can help indicate the dramatic structure; the chorus has an important role here, as it did (though as a single voice) in Greek drama. In *Peter Grimes*, for instance, the choir personifies the Borough, with its determination to hunt and punish the fisherman Peter Grimes, after having judged him as guilty for the murders of his boy apprentices.¹¹⁵ While there is no absolute requirement that the use of different layers, textures, sections, and their articulations should coincide with the drama, many recent operas, like MacMillan's *The Sacrifice* (2007), or Adès's *Powder her Face* (1995), for instance, continue to treat the relationship in this way.

Music can indicate or emphasise the climax of the drama, a turning point, a moment of preparation, revelation, evocation of an image, remembrance, or feeling.¹¹⁶ The instant of the most intense emotional content in *Adriana Mater*, described above, is a good example of how the music can prepare the audience for a maximum increase of psychological tension, and then sustain it till the end of the culminating dramatic point in the opera. Nevertheless, there are other ways of dealing musically with climaxes. For

¹¹⁵See fn. 69.

¹¹⁶Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, 214-228.

instance, the Duchess of Argyll's sexual exploits, the subject of Thomas Adès' *Powder Her Face*, are explicitly exposed in the opera's language and details. The turning point in the plot is the musical depiction of fellatio: the music does not really contradict what is seen onstage at that moment, but rather seems to trivialize it, making a sort-of mockery of the Duchess's situation at that point. Such might imply a neutral 'open-minded' presentation of the scene, allowing society (the audience) to judge and classify such sexual behaviour for itself.

Traditional textures and musical numbers, like overtures, arias, recitatives, or small and large ensembles, can also be important options for the composer to build a context of wide emotional range, even nowadays; they can, in addition, be associated with symbolic meanings. An aria, for instance, can offer a change of pace in the narrative, as a musical number that can propel an action or allow reflective glimpses into a character or situation. This is often employed in Saariaho's *L'Amour de loin* (see Chapter 3).

The last interlude in *Wozzeck* has already been mentioned; like the 'Sea Interludes' of Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*, *The Minotaur* employs its own interpolations, not so much reflective as diversionary, emphasising the importance of abstract structure here: three brief and purely instrumental 'toccatas' which punctuate the score (see Table 1, Chapter 3).

Of course the opera composer must be competent in writing for voice and instruments. The instrumental ensemble in an opera must support the singers while still allowing the words to be heard and understood; its music

may enhance the action, yet avoid impeding the drama.¹¹⁷ A good example of an operatic score that presented a remarkably skilful instrumentation is *Anna Nicole* (2010), by Mark-Anthony Turnage (b. 1960), premiered by the Royal Opera House in February 2011, which includes jazz and rock musicians, as well as a jazz band in the orchestra itself.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, concerning the music style in *Anna Nicole*, the composer admitted:

There is a lot of American music deep down in my style, so I didn't feel I needed to go much further than this. I avoided pastiche, like creating a mock Country & Western sound, as this would have cheapened things.¹¹⁹

Furthermore, a good balance between the voices and the instruments is usually the aim of the opera composer, and for that s/he must know how to accurately choose elements like dynamics, pitches and their nuances, in order to exploit the singer's capabilities, avoid stressing their weaknesses, and ultimately assure they will not be overshadowed by the orchestra.¹²⁰ It must be acknowledged that it is a rare opera house whose acoustics allow all singers' words to be heard all the time, and in very few operas is this ever achieved.

¹¹⁷Paulus, 'Creating opera', 36.

¹¹⁸*Anna Nicole* is Turnage's third full-length opera, following *Greek* (1988) and *The Silver Tassie* (2000), and 'inhabits a new world for the composer, closer to musical theatre with its focus on words and action'. It exploits the story and lifestyle of the American model and actress Anna Nicole Smith (1967-2007), who became a paparazzi target when she married a billionaire oilman 60 years her senior, fought his family over the will and died after an apparent drug overdose at the age of 39. N.a., 'Turnage: Anna Nicole takes the stage in London (December 2010)', Boosey & Hawkes website <<http://www.boosey.com/cr/news/Turnage-Anna-Nicole-takes-the-stage-in-London/12130>>, accessed 01 July 2011.

¹¹⁹The critic Fiona Maddocks, in her review of the opera for *The Guardian*, gives a brief description of the clever use of instruments in it: 'In Act I, a high-profile jazz trio. . . colours the sound with sexy, bluesy riffs. . . . This changed radically in Act II, where Turnage's own, spikier voice, full of smoky, plangent woodwind, wah-wah muted brass and elegiac, at times waltzing strings, at last found room to breathe. It's possible that opera novices will like Act I while fans prefer Act II'. Fiona Maddocks, 'Anna Nicole review', *The Guardian*, 20 February 2011 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/feb/20/anna-nicole-parsifal-nixon-china-review>>, accessed 29 June 2011.

¹²⁰Paulus, 'Creating opera', 37.

At the same time, with the addition of surtitles in large opera houses for operas in foreign languages and the vernacular too, the challenge of producing a sung text that is constantly intelligible might be considered to have diminished.

In fact, singing being a physical act and the voice possessing natural possibilities and limitations, successful modern opera composers, like their predecessors, often address the specific abilities of the performers for whom they are writing. Birtwistle confirmed that he had created the vocal parts in *Gawain* with specific singers in mind, for instance.¹²¹ Similarly, Kaija Saariaho said that ‘one of the first fixed points in the creation of *L’Amour de loin* was deciding that the role of Clémence (the leading female character) had to be sung by Dawn Upshaw’.¹²² Of course Upshaw would not be the exclusive singer of the role, but the colours and capabilities of her voice undoubtedly guided the composer to create Clémence’s music. For this listener, the music of *L’Amour* invokes feelings of emptiness and anxiety, impressions of distant times and unknown, wide spaces. Along with all those visual and theatrical stimuli, Saariaho’s score, filled with unusual sonorities, textures and timbres, as well as beautiful vocal lines and harmony, once again leads the listener into another world. Thus it fulfils what, according to Dahlhaus, opera looks for, ‘seeking out the marvellous’.¹²³

Continuing with regard to the relationship between the musical settings of texts (the vocal music), and the orchestral music of an opera, Dahlhaus coins the term ‘musical prose’ to refer to orchestral accompaniment that is constructed from phrases of irregular length and in an arbitrary order just to

¹²¹Samuel, ‘Birtwistle’s *Gawain*’, 171.

¹²²Dawn Upshaw is a world-renowned American soprano.

¹²³Dahlhaus, *Opera as Drama*, 102.

project the text, thus being dissolved into prose (with no periodic syntax, but plenty of twists and turns at every moment of the dialogue).¹²⁴ He asserts that, when opera uses such naturalistic dialogue, it becomes ‘plausible’, which is the aesthetic principle of the spoken play. This is the principle underlying Wagner's music dramas from *Das Rheingold* onwards, with his use of the leitmotif not only for dramaturgical effect, but also for formal structure.¹²⁵ However, Dahlhaus asserts that such a partial revocation of traditional formal principles (by founding musical drama on dialogue) is a challenging task for the composer who wishes to preserve continuity, and hence the inner coherence of the music.¹²⁶

Some modern operas present naturalistic word-setting/musical treatment, to the point of speech, like *Angels in America* (2004), by Hungarian composer Peter Eötvös (born 1944), one of the most intriguing operas I attended during this research in London.¹²⁷ Based on Tony Kushner's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, its text explores more particularly the spread of AIDS in the United States during the 1980s. The plot unfolds a ‘layered drama’, with two scenes often taking place simultaneously, and ‘dramatic elisions as one story collides with another’, particularly when an angel, existing only in the protagonist's mind, comes to help him, therefore dealing with both abstract and concrete, fantastic and real worlds, all at the same time. Among other

¹²⁴Dahlhaus, ‘What is Musical Drama?’, 104 and 108-109.

¹²⁵Dahlhaus, ‘What is Musical Drama?’, 107.

¹²⁶Dahlhaus, ‘What is Musical Drama?’, 109.

¹²⁷*Angels in America* is an opera in two parts, with a libretto by Mari Mezei. It was premiered in 2004 at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, has since been staged in Hamburg, Boston and Fort Worth, among others. The opera had its British premiere (concert staging version) in March 2010, which this author attended. Information has been gathered from the Barbican Centre programme notes, by Christopher Cook.

elements in the work, all performers have their voices and instruments amplified (as a reference to the Broadway shows). The issue in question here is the way the composer sets the music to the text, often in its original prose structure and style, in a mixture of speech, recitative and arioso.

Nevertheless, reiterating Dahlhaus postulate:

[A]n operatic action manifested in singing differs aesthetically from the plot of a spoken play in that it does not look for plausibility or verisimilitude, but seeks out the 'marvellous' – the mythological or fairy-tale subject.¹²⁸

5. Stage Direction

The composer must be able to understand and empathise with the roles of actor-singer and stage director (and even, on occasion, set-designer, by suggesting visual effects through music, as will be shown with regard to another of Saariaho's operas, *L'amour de loin*).¹²⁹ The more involved the composer is in the theatre, the more easily will s/he be able to fulfil this obligation. A particular example of this is Harrison Birtwistle, who worked as musical director of the Royal National Theatre in London from 1975 to 1982.¹³⁰

Opera libretti and scores themselves often include a certain number of stage directions which may be considered by their creators to be fundamental to the production. For instance, *Wozzeck* is required to take place between the rising and the setting of the sun and so the sun needs to be seen prominently at

¹²⁸Dahlhaus, 'What is Musical Drama?', 104.

¹²⁹Sandow, 'Definitions', 3.

¹³⁰N.a., 'Sir Harrison Birtwistle,' Ircam Website, <<http://brahms.ircam.fr/composers/composer/417/>>, accessed 08 August 2011.

various times in the opera.¹³¹ Some stage directors follow these and less vital stage directions avidly; others ignore them completely to create their own fantasies, which often snub the implications of the score in particular.

There is a long tradition of well-known theatre directors staging operas, like Stanislavsky, Max Reinhardt, Tyrone Guthrie, and film directors like Ingmar Bergman, Roman Polansky and Ken Russell.¹³² In contemporary theatre, for instance, it is almost mandatory for a theatre director to include opera in his or her repertory.¹³³ And, today, each director must leave his/her mark, with varying results. Jonathan Miller's ENO production of *Rigoletto* as a mafia opera (premiered in 1982 and remounted in 2009), and Nicholas Hytner's of *Rienzi* as a Nazi spectacular (ENO, 1983) are both examples of producers adding ingredients of their own, far from the original conception, very successfully.¹³⁴

Yet the extent to which a composer is able to affect production decisions, either from within the score or the libretto, for the premiere, varies

¹³¹According to George Perle, such visual aspects in *Wozzeck*, all created by the composer, are strictly related to the musical aspects, and must be adhered to in the whole performance. Perle, *The Operas of Alban Berg – Volume One/Wozzeck*, 40-41.

¹³²Film directors with an opera record: Ingmar Bergman, Anthony Minghella and more', *The Telegraph*, 10 September 2008 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturereviews/3560203/Film-directors-with-an-opera-record-Ingmar-Bergman-Anthony-Minghella-and-more.html>>, accessed 10 August 2011.

¹³³John Berry, ENO's Artistic Director since 2006, in his article on the future of opera, wrote: 'We start our 2010/11 season with Gounod's *Faust* directed by Des McAnuff (the award-winning director of *Jersey Boys* and *Tommy*), one of eight international directors to make their UK opera-directing debuts. People criticise us for working with theatre and film directors: they say they are too literal in their approach and are unmusical. I admit not every choice I have made has been successful, but with the talents of our music director Edward Gardner, and the high level of casting, ENO definitely has a palpable buzz'. John Berry, 'The art of risk-taking', *Spectator.co.uk*, 11 September 2010 <<http://www.spectator.co.uk/arts-and-culture/featured/6257623/the-art-of-risktaking.thtml>>, accessed 01 August 2011.

¹³⁴For Jonathan Miller's *Rigoletto*, see Alexandra Coghlan, 'Verdi: *Rigoletto*', *Musicalcriticism.com*, 24 September 2009 <<http://www.musicalcriticism.com/opera/eno-rigoletto-0909.shtml>> accessed 20 October 2011.

enormously. So perhaps one challenge for the composer of operas is to be able to control the ways in which a director might conceive the work, while allowing enough space for positive creative ideas; in any case, it is a difficult line to tread: the composer needs to be as specific as possible about those aspects of the opera that s/he considers crucial to it. One way of avoiding conflicts between the visions of the various creators is for the whole team to work together from the start, as often occurs when workshops are involved. Of course, this applies mostly to the first production; this, after all, is the defining one for any opera, often determining whether it will ever be staged again. In fact, the audience's interpretation of the work can of course be much influenced, if not subverted, by the producer's own interpretation of it.

Samuel points out at least four examples of the producer's contribution/intervention in the Covent Garden first production of *The Minotaur*: first, though the relationship between Ariadne and Theseus is presented in score and libretto as quite ambivalent (he being a reluctant participant), it was made more explicit (and mildly sexual) on stage.¹³⁵ This could be seen as a creative contribution by the producer (Stephen Langridge). Yet ironically, two other instances might be considered the result of his inhibitions: the 'sanitization' of both the rape (scene 5) and Ariadne's 'masturbation scene' (scene 4).¹³⁶ None of these, however, had any major effect on the opera's reception. Perhaps more significant was the omission of any visual presentation (included in the libretto's stage directions) of the ship taking Theseus and Ariadne away from the Labyrinth at the very end of the

¹³⁵Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 235.

¹³⁶Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 235.

opera. This, the same boat that brought Theseus to the island in the first place, would have conveyed the ‘typically Birtwistlean cyclic conceit’ of timelessness; yet it was cut out for ‘practical reasons’.¹³⁷ Birtwistle acknowledged this pragmatic decision and accepted it, perhaps more easily than critics and students of his work might do.¹³⁸

Barry Millington talks about the beginning of an ‘age of the producer’, in the 1970s, when many directors from the spoken theatre came to opera.¹³⁹ This was part of the phenomenon of change in the reception of opera in the modern era. Opera as a genre apparently needed to be presented in a new way: the cult of the diva, the individuality of singers, the figure of the charismatic and controller conductor, had all passed.¹⁴⁰ Millington refers to some ‘interventionist’ approaches, like productions with a political intention; with a psychological vantage-point; prioritising emotional directness; emphasizing the universality and timeless relevance of some works (using visual aspects and costumes of various eras, for instance), thus ‘reinterpreting’ their symbols.¹⁴¹ ‘Interventionist’ productions are much influenced by critical theory such as structuralism, post-structuralism, reader-oriented approaches and feminism.¹⁴²

However, such radical and iconoclastic developments of the last

¹³⁷Samuel, ‘Birtwistle's The Minotaur’, 235.

¹³⁸But it must be acknowledged that Birtwistle himself made pragmatic decisions which reaped havoc with the original structure of the opera: for instance, he changed sections of Theseus's music, removing structural motives, ‘because the singer asked him to’. Samuel, ‘Birtwistle's The Minotaur’, 221.

¹³⁹Barry Millington, ‘Production since World War II’, *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 ed.), 1125-1126.

¹⁴⁰Millington, ‘Production’, 1126.

¹⁴¹Millington, ‘Production’, 1126.

¹⁴²Millington, ‘Production’, 1126.

decades have coexisted with the traditionalism of Luchino Visconti and Franco Zeffirelli, for example.¹⁴³ Zeffirelli (b. 1923), an Italian stage and film director, and designer, has been, since the 1950s, a major director of opera productions in Europe and the United States, particularly for nineteenth-century romantic repertoire.¹⁴⁴ According to Andrew Clark,

Zeffirelli accepts all the conventions of grand opera, and matches the lyrical spirit of the music with visual beauty and a feeling for broad dramatic contours.¹⁴⁵

More recently the list of opera producers has included Peter Brook, Giorgio Strehler, Peter Stein, Luca Ronconi, Patrice Chéreau, Peter Hall, Trevor Nunn, and the late John Dexter.¹⁴⁶ Chéreau (b. 1944), for instance, is a French theatre, opera and film director, who allegedly changed the face of modern opera with his iconic centenary *Ring* cycle at Bayreuth in 1976, when he ‘infuriated traditionalists by replacing Wagnerian horns and bearskins with the trappings of 19th-century plutocracy’.¹⁴⁷ Other stage directors, like David Pountney (b. 1947) in Britain, have made important contributions to the operatic field. Pountney is best-known for his productions over many years at the English National Opera.¹⁴⁸ In the United States, Robert Wilson (b. 1941)

¹⁴³Millington, ‘Production’, 1127.

¹⁴⁴Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 663.

¹⁴⁵Andrew Clark, ‘Zeffirelli, Franco’, *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 ed.), 1221.

¹⁴⁶Oliver, ‘The Mystique of Opera’, 33.

¹⁴⁷Stephen Moss, ‘Patrice Chéreau: ‘It’s ok to be hated’, *The Guardian*, 25 April 2011 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/apr/25/patrice-chereau-director-interview-theatre>>, accessed 29 June 2011. A DVD box of this historic Centenary Ring’s Cycle performance has been distributed commercially by Philips Classics. See also Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 636.

¹⁴⁸Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 584-589. Pountney became ENO’s Director of Productions in 1980, directing over twenty operas including Busoni’s *Doctor Faust* and Purcell’s *The Fairy Queen*. He has directed over ten world premieres, including three by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies for which he also wrote the libretto (*The Doctor of Myddfai* (1996), *Mr Emmet Takes a Walk* (2000), and *Kommilitonen!* (2011)). He has translated many operas into English from Russian, Czech, German and Italian. He has been appointed Chief Executive and

has greatly influenced multi-media stagings, with his lit, abstract, stylized pictures, and movement often in slow motion. For Wilson, the 'central artistic vision' has design as the predominant element which controls every aspect of the performance.¹⁴⁹ His most revolutionary operatic work was *Einstein on the Beach*, discussed elsewhere in this study.

While the work of stage and lighting designers is often accomplished, in large part, before the rehearsals begin, many other decisions concerned with the production will be made in the rehearsals themselves. Preparations for mounting a play (in modern spoken drama) can last for months, for instance. Indeed, from the moment of commission, the preparation of an opera can last as much as five years.¹⁵⁰ On the whole, direction issues need to be acknowledged by the composer, since demands for changes and adaptation in staging, text, or score may still occur, for practical, or even financial, concerns until the first night (and sometimes, beyond it).

The experiences recounted above constitute a practical introduction to the eclectic, flexible, and complex universe of opera. The next chapter brings a contextualization of the most recent operatic productions in Britain through a survey of the local opera companies and their contemporary repertoires.

Artistic Director of Welsh National Opera from 1st September, 2011. 'David Pountney', IMG Artists Website < <http://www.imgartists.com/?page=artist&id=12>>, accessed 01 August 2011. See also Millington, 'Pountney, David', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 ed.), 1080-1081.

¹⁴⁹David J. Hough, 'Wilson, Robert', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 ed.), 1162-1163.

¹⁵⁰John Cox, 'Production Planning', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 ed.), 1129.

CHAPTER 2. Operas written after 1970, their composers and premieres by opera companies in Britain

This chapter presents a survey of the repertoire produced by opera companies in Britain during the period 1970-2010, which includes works composed by some of the most celebrated composers of the second half of the twentieth century, as well as some who have emerged in the twentieth-first.¹ The choice of these four decades is, in the main, practical: a time span reaching back from the present that is both sufficiently over-arching, yet can be researched and accommodated within the scope of this dissertation. But it also makes historical sense in that the early works of the most established of today's composers (e.g., Peter Maxwell Davies), as well as those recently deceased (e.g., Berio and Stockhausen) are included, in a period also chosen for its unprecedented diversity of styles and trends in the operatic field.

This investigation offers a context for the three operas to be examined in more detail in Chapter 3. It will also attempt to draw conclusions from the statistics gathered about composers, their styles and types of narratives used in their works. With regard to the composers themselves, it will consider the age at which composers have been commissioned and the stage of their career at which they have benefitted from such support. This information will also identify those opera companies that, on the one hand, welcome innovation, experimentation and risk-taking (by working with younger artists), and, on the other, those which prefer to engage with established composers (and trends).

The study begins by categorising opera companies in Great Britain: the

¹This chapter is based on and complemented by the appendices found at the end of the dissertation.

largest companies with orchestra and national funding; those companies that are active only in summer seasons; groups specialising in new opera; smaller and touring companies, others committed to young artists, and important opera schools. It ends with a brief look at some productions of contemporary opera for television.²

The information contained here was gathered from materials including programmes; journal articles and reviews; books specializing in British opera and British opera companies; much correspondence via electronic mail and interviews with professional artists in the field, either in person or via some institutional and personal websites, and the websites of opera companies, more particularly of the smaller ones.

The internet has indeed shown itself to be a practical and effective tool through which up-to-date and quite often unique data can be accessed; but it is also particularly useful for researching past operatic productions since the companies' websites are generally their chief, or even exclusive, platforms for publishing information on current, as well as future and past programmes and projects.

Information about the repertoire of the English National Opera, the Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne, and Almeida Opera, is based on their archival material, and I have benefitted enormously from the accessibility of such archives, and the generosity of the archivists.³ Finally, other statistics concerning the age and nationality of the commissioned composers and the main characteristics of the plots and libretti created were gathered from a variety of sources. The task was quite laborious given that hardly any

²See Appendix 1, Tables 3 to 8.

³I have had personal access to the archives of the English National Opera and the Royal Opera House.

statistical information was complete or totally accurate; a huge amount of information had to be laboriously checked and re-checked in the more than two years of research undertaken specifically for this chapter.

According to Mark, although many operas were indeed created in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century by, for example, Charles Villiers Stanford, Ethyl Smyth, Gustav Holst, Rutland Boughton, Frederick Delius, and Ralph Vaughan Williams, it was only after the immense success of Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* in London in 1945 that the genre seemed to present convincing possibilities to leading British composers.⁴ In fact, for composers like Britten himself, Michael Tippett, Peter Maxwell Davies, Harrison Birtwistle, Gavin Bryars, and Judith Weir, among others, the making of opera has granted them a crucial opportunity to forge or improve their compositional style, so much so that in most cases such works are central to their *oeuvre*. All of these composers are somehow indebted to either Britten or Tippett or both.⁵ Mark also comments that, despite this, it is not possible to define an English operatic tradition, given the great diversity of compositional techniques and styles of these works, which also include operas by composers such as Jonathan Harvey, Oliver Knussen and Mark-Anthony Turnage.⁶

This stylistic breadth, as well as the evolution of the genre itself during the last 40 years, is clearly illustrated amongst the productions of opera companies during this period, through their policies of commissioning and producing new works. These companies are generally committed, via their artistic directors, to develop the repertoire in new ways and discover new

⁴Mark, 'Opera in England', 209.

⁵Mark, 'Opera in England', 221.

⁶Mark, 'Opera in England', 221.

talent (often British); but at other times they seem inclined simply to exploit established artists (a less risky business), a more common strategy the larger the company.

There are currently five large opera companies in Britain, with three further companies devoted to contemporary repertoire, as well as six important seasonal companies and dozens of small and touring ones with specific profiles.⁷ All these are discussed below.

1. Permanent Opera Companies with Orchestra and National Funding

Among the five permanent large opera companies, three are situated in England: English National Opera, the Royal Opera, and Opera North; Scottish Opera and the Welsh National Opera are the national companies of Scotland and Wales, respectively.⁸

i) The Royal Opera⁹

The Royal Opera is currently the most famous and wealthy opera company in the United Kingdom; it performs operas in their original languages, and some of the most distinguished artists in the world appear in its productions. The Royal Opera House, in Covent Garden, London, is its base. Originally the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, the venue became the Royal Opera House in 1892. Between the two World Wars, it was first a furniture repository, then a

⁷A selection of operas created and staged since 1970 in Britain is presented in the Appendix 2, Tables 9-31.

⁸See Appendix 1, Table 3.

⁹The following information on the Royal Opera House is taken from n.a., 'The History of the Royal Opera House', *Royal Opera House Collections Online*, Arts Council England <<http://www.rohcollections.org.uk/ROHHistory.aspx>>, accessed 20 May 2011.

dance hall. After the Second World War, the music publishers Boosey and Hawkes acquired the lease of the building and reopened the Royal Opera House in 1946.

Besides the permanent Royal Opera Chorus, there is the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, also permanent and of full symphony orchestra size, which is shared with the Royal Ballet. A third group of musicians on salary are those from the *Jette Parker Young Artists Programme*, who receive a 2-year advanced professional training for ‘young artists’, including singers, conductors, répétiteurs, and stage directors.¹⁰

A secondary performance space with a seating capacity of over 400, below ground level within the Royal Opera House, is the Linbury Studio Theatre, completed in 1999 after an extensive refurbishment of the whole complex.¹¹ Programmes mounted in this theatre, organised separately from those in the main House itself, have perpetuated the spirit of the *Garden Venture* programme, which operated under the auspices of the ROH, 1988-1994, having started at the Donmar Warehouse Theatre, near Covent Garden, and then continued mostly at the Riverside Studios, Hammersmith. The programme was created to commission younger composers, not necessarily British, to create new operas.¹² The works were competitively selected, but critic Arthur Jacobs (in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*) judges the series as disappointing.¹³ Others might not agree: the series included early works from a number of composers like David Sawer, John Woolrich, Peter

¹⁰Information taken from n.a., The Royal Opera House website, <<http://www.roh.org.uk/workhere/jpya.aspx>>, accessed 01 June 2011.

¹¹Information taken from n.a., the London Dance website <<http://www.london.dance.com/content.asp?CategoryID=103>>, accessed 24 May 2011.

¹²See Appendix 2, Table 13.

¹³Robert D. Hume and Arthur Jacobs, ‘London: Covent Garden’, *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 1997 ed., 28.

Wiegold, Jeremy Peyton-Jones, Julian Grant, librettist Edward Kemp, etc., who later certainly became successful.¹⁴

The Linbury Theatre generally presents ‘chamber operas’ and works for children; therefore the instrumental forces used are considerably smaller. So are the stage and orchestra pit, while other elements like scenery and costumes are more modest, tailored to smaller budgets. Such productions, not taking place on the main stage, have lacked the prestige of the larger venue. Notwithstanding, the Linbury Studio Theatre has been a remarkable facility for opera composers, most of them new to the field and eager to show their works.¹⁵

The Linbury is also notable for hosting performances of experimental dance and music by outside companies; according to the Royal Opera House's website, this programme forms an active part of ROH2, the Opera House's new-work development and educational programme, which commissions and produces new full-length and short opera and dance pieces each season.¹⁶ According to its own publicity, the ROH2 programme was created 'to increase the range and diversity of the art, the artists and the audiences engaging with the Royal Opera House'.¹⁷ It provides a ‘laboratory’ for the Royal Opera House and its art forms, encouraging creativity, collaboration and experimentation, through commissions and productions of new works, as well

¹⁴Universal Edition, ‘David Sawyer’ <<http://www.universaledition.com/David-Sawer/composers-and-works/composer/632>>; John Woolrich website <<http://www.johnwoolrich.com/>>; Edward Kemp website <<http://www.edwardkemp.co.uk/page13.htm>>; Peter Wiegold website <http://www.wiegold.co.uk/php_pages/composer.php>; Julian Grant website <<http://www.juliangrant.net/>>; all accessed 22 August 2011.

¹⁵Londondance.com website, accessed 24 May 2011. See also Appendix 2, Tables 10 and 12.

¹⁶Royal Opera House website, <<http://www.roh.org.uk/roh2/>>, accessed 26 May 2011.

¹⁷ROH2 productions mostly take place in the Linbury Studio Theatre, Clore Studio Upstairs and the Paul Hamlyn Hall (all at the ROH building, in Covent Garden). See more information on ‘ROH2’, <<http://www.roh.org.uk/roh2/>>.

as a programme of festivals, artist development initiatives and special projects. Aiming to ‘seek new perspectives on contemporary opera’, the series, *Operashots*, by the ROH2 Programme, for instance, regularly presents a set of short operas (of about 45 minutes each), normally by composers from outside the operatic field, who are asked to ‘challenge some of the perceived conventions that surround the artform, and compose a piece that has resonance for contemporary society’.¹⁸ The *Operashots* in June 2010 included the short operas, *A Ring a Lamp a Thing* (Orlando Gough), *Entanglement* (Nitin Sawhney), and *Ingerland* (Jocelyn Pook).

From 2005 to 2009, *OperaGenesis*, an ROH2 programme supported by the Genesis Foundation, brought together more than 30 creative teams of emerging composers and librettists, ‘exploring new approaches to supporting the development of contemporary music theatre and build audiences for the future’.¹⁹ The emphasis of the programme was on the process of creation and the interaction between composer and librettist rather than necessarily achieving a fully-staged production of a new work.

Thus, since 1970, the Royal Opera has so far presented, on the main stage and in the Linbury Theatre, a total of 38 new operas, with 20 of these by British or British-based composers.²⁰ Ten of the latter had their world premieres on the main stage of the Royal Opera House. These have included Tippett’s *The Knot Garden* (1970) and *The Ice Break* (1977), Maxwell Davies’s *Taverner* (1972), Birtwistle’s two last full-scale works, *Gawain* (1991) and *The Minotaur* (2009), and Adès’s *The Tempest* (2004). Adès, at the

¹⁸Programme notes by Alison Duthie (Head of ROH2) and John Lloyd Davis (Head of Opera Development, ROH2), for *Operashots* production, 26 June, 2010.

¹⁹Genesis Foundation website <<http://www.genesisfoundation.org.uk/content/genesis-foundation-and-royal-opera-house-create-operagenesis>>, accessed 26 May 2011.

²⁰See Appendix 2, Tables 9 and 11.

age of 33, was the youngest composer ever to be commissioned for the ROH main stage; the average age for commissioned composers (almost all male) is 55 years, the eldest, Lorin Maazel, then 75 (though his work was mostly self-funded), followed by Harrison Birtwistle, 74.²¹

From 1970 to 2010, at least other five British composers, in general, younger in age and in their careers, have had chamber operas premiered at the Linbury Studio Theatre, mounted in association with companies like the London Sinfonietta, Opera Theatre Wales, the Opera Group, and the Genesis Foundation. Two of these, both based in London, are the only female composers ever to be commissioned by the company: Errollyn Wallen (born in Belize, 1968), with her 20 minute-opera *Another America: Earth* (2003, revived in 2005, including a BBC television broadcast); and Dominique Le Gendre (Trinidad, 1960), with her *Bird of Night* (2003).²²

Music Theatre Wales, a touring contemporary opera company based in Cardiff, UK (and to be discussed below), became the first Associate Company of the Royal Opera House, in 2002, and the company attests that, ‘in turn, we have brought chamber opera of quality and artistic rigour into the very heart of the home of grand opera’.²³

²¹Before Adès, John Tevener (b.1944) had been the youngest composer to be commissioned by the ROH, at the behest of Benjamin Britten, with his 1969 opera based on Jean Genet's *Our Lady of Flowers*. All information gathered from the Royal Opera House Archives.

²²Wallen also composed *Another America: Fire* (2004, a 45 minute-opera premiered at Sadler's Wells Theatre, London), and three chamber operas: *Four Figures with Harlequin* (1993), *Look! No Hands!* (1996), and *The Silent Twins* (2007, commissioned by the Almeida Opera). Errollyn Wallen website <<http://www.errollynwallen.com/?page=biography>>, accessed 21 August 2011. Both Warren and Le Gendre were invited by the ROH, along with seven other black artists, to write a 20-minute short for ‘A Nitro at the Opera’, a festival collaboration with Nitro, Britain's oldest black music theatre company. *Bird of Night* was judged the most successful. Alice Jones, ‘Dominique Le Gendre: Magic in the night’, *The Independent*, 09 October 2006 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/dominique-le-gendre-magic-in-the-night-419244.html>>, accessed 21 August 2011. Information also taken from the ROH Archives.

²³Music Theatre Wales website, <<http://www.musictheatrewales.org.uk/>>, accessed

A remarkable diversity is revealed in the structure of the operas produced by the Royal Opera House since 1970, as well as in their reception. For instance, Norman Lebrecht latterly criticised Tippett's *The Knot Garden* for having an 'irresolute plot and a naive dialogue', while Anthony Holden condemned Nicholas Maw's *Sophie's Choice* (2002) for its lack of 'balance, shape or structure'.²⁴ On the other hand, Anthony Bye claimed that Birtwistle's *Gawain* presents 'a special directness and a strong narrative thrust'.²⁵ Curiously, Birtwistle's last opera, 2008 *The Minotaur*, his second premiered at the main stage of the ROH, was more conventional in its narrative, which would be 'ultimately simple, a straight line'.²⁶ The opera was generally well received: Stephen Graham wrote in *MusicalCriticism.com*:

Both composition and performance . . . communicated a degree of insight and of resolved vision that is customarily absent in much new opera. The dramatic aesthetic of the work, coruscating in its ideas and compelling in its updating of the schematic characters and story of the well-known myth, was thus placed to the foreground and announced, along with the narrative, with great conviction and skill.²⁷

On the other hand, Edward Rushton's *The Shops* (2007, with a libretto by Dagny Gioulami), at the Linbury Theatre, for instance, lacked the broad emotional sweep and narrative immediacy that opera needs', in Rupert Christiansen's opinion.²⁸

26 May 2011. The company is also discussed in Caroline Leech, ed., *Welsh National Opera: Celebrating the first 60 years* (Cardiff: Graffeg, 2006) 16. See Appendix 2, Tables 25 and 26.

²⁴Norman Lebrecht, 'Michael Tippett, a composer to forget', *La Scena Musicale* (on-line music column), 22 December 2004 <<http://www.scena.org/columns/lebrecht/041222-NL-tippett.html>>; Anthony Holden, *The Guardian*, 15 Dec 2002 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2002/dec/15/features.review77>>, accessed 01 June 2011.

²⁵Anthony Bye, 'Birtwhistle's *Gawain*', *The Musical Times*. 132.1779 (May 1991), 233.

²⁶Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 230.

²⁷Stephen Graham, 'Harrison Birtwistle: *The Minotaur*', *MusicalCriticism.com*, 15 April 2008 <<http://www.musicalcriticism.com/opera/roh-minotaur-0408.shtml>>, accessed 22 August 2011.

²⁸In *The Shops*, its central character, Christoph Schmalhans, is an obsessive stamp collector, stealing prize examples from museums with the aid of his girlfriend Francesca, who distracts attention by causing scenes. His activities inevitably attract the interest of the police

ii) English National Opera (ENO)

The **English National Opera** is England's oldest continuously performing arts company.²⁹ It traces its roots back to 1931 when Lilian Baylis established the Sadler's Wells Opera Company at the newly re-opened Sadler's Wells Theatre. Baylis had been presenting opera concerts and theatre in London since 1898 and was passionate about providing audiences with the best theatre and opera at affordable prices, a belief that remains today at the heart of English National Opera. During the Second World War, the Sadler's Wells Theatre was closed and the company toured the provinces, returning to its home in 1945 for the premiere of Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*, which proved to be the most important British opera since Purcell's time.³⁰ The company has been resident at the London Coliseum in St. Martin's Lane, London, since 1968, after having moved from Sadlers Wells Theatre.³¹ In 1974, Sadlers Wells Opera was renamed English National Opera.³²

Although ENO has performed all operas in English as a basic principle since its foundation, in 2005 it introduced surtitles for all productions at the Coliseum (therefore 14 years after the 1991 ROH production of Birtwistle's *Gawain*³³). Operas can now be sung in their original languages (although most

and psychologists, and interjections from a support group of shopaholics. 'Edward Rushton: The Shops', NMC Records <<http://www.nmcrec.co.uk/recording/shops>> accessed 21 August 2011. For the review of this work by Rupert Christiansen, see 'The Shops review: Bloodless doodling from a modern geek', *The Telegraph*, 25 September 2007 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/opera/3668136/The-Shops-review-Bloodless-doodling-from-a-modern-geek.html>>, accessed 21 August 2011.

²⁹Susie Gilbert, *Opera for Everybody: The Story of English National Opera* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 43.

³⁰Boyden, *The Rough Guide*, 589-592.

³¹Robert D. Hume and Arthur Jacobs, 'London: Coliseum', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 1997 edn.

³²Gilbert, *Opera for Everybody*, 265.

³³Samuel, 'Gawain', 78. 'English operas to get surtitles', BBC News, 7 June 2005 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/4070856.stm>>, accessed 21 August 2011. The ROH adopted surtitles for all non-English-language performances in 1988. Hume and Jacobs, 'London: Covent Garden', 28.

operas still have their texts translated to English), which has opened up new possibilities for their production at ENO; some remarkable co-productions or co-commissions of British and world premieres have occurred subsequently.³⁴

Having a reputation for staging well-known operas in modern contexts, the company divides opinion between those who believe such strategy can be effective in popularizing opera and those who criticize directors who do not respect the composer's or librettist's wishes, in favour of their personal interpretations. For example, the author, critic and historian Henry Pleasants cites dozens of national and international companies which during the last decades have favoured 'fanciful, offensive, aberrational' productions, with 'no respect for the authors' creations'. He mentions particularly ENO, with its declared policy of 'adventurous' and 'innovative' approaches to opera production, 'often more spectacularly awful'.³⁵

ENO has presented an average of 21 different operas every season for the last 40 years (with the maximum of 33 in the 1977/78 season and minimum of 13 in the 2007/08, including re-staged productions and not only operatic performances). In this time, 27 new operas have been presented, including 17 (63%) world premieres of works commissioned by ENO, with or without any associated foundations, nine of them of British composers.³⁶

Amongst these 17, 13 (76%) were by English composers. These composers' average age was 47 years, Gordon Crosse being the youngest (36), and John Buller (64), the eldest. David Blake and Ian Hamilton each received two commissions in the 1970s and 1980s. Amongst foreign composers, Philip Glass has had three British premières at the Coliseum up to now.

³⁴Gilbert, *Opera for Everybody*, 557.

³⁵Henry Pleasants, *Opera in Crisis* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989) 32.

³⁶See Appendix 2, Table 14. Such information was gathered from the ENO Archives.

In terms of the use of a more traditional narrative (i.e., including a beginning, middle, or end), of operas given ENO premieres between 1970 and 2010, some were unconventional in certain aspects, like Birtwistle's 1985 *The Mask of Orpheus*. Arnold Whittall points out Peter Zinovieff's 'labyrinthine' libretto, while Robert Adlington asserts that the work's has 'a non-naturalistic and anti-narrative approach' in its manner of story-telling.³⁷ Then Malcolm Miller compares Jonathan Harvey's 1992 *Inquest of Love* to Birtwistle's *Mask* for the importance of ritual in the music's repetitive and formal schemes, here with alternations between electroacoustic and orchestral textures, like in a 'dream narrative'.³⁸

The **ENO Studio** (previously the Contemporary Opera Studio), a project devoted to the commissioning, development and performance of new operas, was created in the summer of 1989, and made an important contribution to the field, later leading to the launch of Almeida Opera, an annual festival of contemporary works, a collaboration that lasted from 1992 to 1997.³⁹ Henrietta Bredin, the programme's co-founder and artistic administrator, wrote to this author about the experience:

After a weekend [in 1989] gathering at Dartington College [of Art, Devon] of composers, writers, singers, directors, designers and various others, during which we discussed what English National Opera might ideally do to help encourage the writing of new opera. It was an amazing event, the repercussions of which still ripple on, with collaborations between people who met there, e.g. Jonathan Dove and April de Angelis who have gone on to write, among other things, *Flight* for Glyndebourne [Company Opera]. At the point at which the blueprint [for the programme launch] was devised we had not yet entered into talks with Jonathan Kent and Ian McDiarmid, the result

³⁷Arnold Whittall, 'Orpheus – and After', *The Musical Times* (1998), 55. Also, Adlington, 'Music Theatre since the 1960s', 228.

³⁸Malcolm Miller, 'Inquest of Love', *Tempo* 186 (Sep. 1993), 51.

³⁹The Contemporary Opera Studio was launched in the summer of 1989, with Henrietta Bredin as its artistic administrator and David Parry its music director. Gilbert, *Opera for Everybody*, 417-418, 525.

of which was our collaboration on Almeida Opera.⁴⁰ The shape therefore changed considerably but the ideas continued to hold good.

ENO Studio and Almeida Opera have commissioned and staged at least 10 brand-new operas, generally by much younger composers. They include Jonathan Dove's 1994 *Siren Song*, Thomas Adès's 1995 *Powder Her Face*, and *The Cenci*, 1997, by the Italian composer Giorgio Battistelli.⁴¹ They have also produced six British premieres, including Stephen Oliver's 1992 *Mario and the Magician*, and *Snatched by the Gods* (1990) and *Broken Strings* (1992), by British composer (born in India) Param Vir.⁴² ENO Studio has collaborated with other companies, too, for instance with **Tête à Tête Opera** (to be discussed below) on works like the *Six-Pack*, a co-production of six commissioned operas, in 2002.⁴³

iii) **Opera North (ON)**

Opera North was established in Leeds in 1977 as an offshoot of the ENO, of which it became independent in 1981.⁴⁴ ON presents a mostly traditional repertoire with a focus on operas that are rarely seen in Britain, including musicals and live electronic music.⁴⁵ Also, the Opera North Orchestra regularly performs and records independently. Among ON's 40 productions so far, the company has given 9 (22.5%) world premieres.⁴⁶ Such new operas

⁴⁰See Appendix 3, which includes a copy of the *Blueprint for a New Opera Studio*, elaborated in March 1989 by the English National Opera staff - Peter Jonas (General Director), David Pountney (Director of Productions), and Henrietta Bredin (Studio Director); this exclusive document was kindly offered to this author by Ms Bredin.

⁴¹From ENO archives. See also Appendix 2, tables 16 and 17.

⁴²ENO archives.

⁴³Tête à Tête website <<http://www.tete-a-tete.org.uk/history.html>>, accessed 26 May 2011.

⁴⁴Martin Dreyer, 'Leeds', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 1997 edn., 1121.

⁴⁵For instance in Mira Calix's works, *Dead Wedding* (2007), *Omnibus* (2008) and the installation *Chorus* (2009).

⁴⁶See Appendix 2, Table 18.

have almost all been by English composers, with an average age of 45, though the Canadian, Rufus Wainwright (36 years-old, and thus the youngest), is the most recent commissionee, with his 2009 *Prima Donna*. Lynne Walker reviewed the opera's world premiere at the Manchester International Festival in *The Independent* on 11 July 2009:

Musically *Prima Donna* is at best banal, at worst boring. The orchestral writing is lumpy, leaden and repetitive, so that the merest flash of inspiration – a dashing musical signature for example – is welcomed with relief as an original idea. Wainwright didn't need to pay homage to all those dead composers he adores by including so many fragments of their scores in his own opera.⁴⁷

Opera North seems to have adopted a current, increasing tendency of concert houses in general, that is, to attract audiences by 'popularizing' the supposedly traditional classical repertoire they present, apparently placing commercial interests above aesthetic policies.⁴⁸ Yet, it is worth mentioning that *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, by Jonathan Dove, produced by the ON in 2007, has been performed more than 80 times in productions in the UK, Germany and the USA, with several new productions and revivals planned. *Pinocchio* won a British Composer Award in 2008.⁴⁹

iv) **Scottish Opera**

This company, founded in 1962 and based in Glasgow, is the national opera company of Scotland, and the largest of the five national performing arts

⁴⁷This author attended the London première of *Prima Donna* at Sadler's Wells Theatre on 12 April, 2010, and got an impression that the composer of this work, a popular songwriter, might not yet be prepared for the task of creating an operatic piece.

⁴⁸New York's Metropolitan Opera House backed off from the commission of *Prima Donna*, before the Manchester International Festival agreed to produce it in collaboration with Sadler's Wells, and with the involvement of Opera North. More details of the collaboration is found in Daniel Wakin, 'Pop Singer Drops Plan to Compose for the Met', *New York Times*, 27 Aug. 2008 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/28/arts/music/28rufu.html?_r=1&ref=arts&oref=slogin>, accessed 24 May 2011.

⁴⁹Opera North website, <<http://www.operanorth.co.uk/events/adventures-of-pinocchio/>>, accessed 30 May 2011.

companies funded by the Scottish Government. With a majority of traditional opera productions, Scottish Opera has also commissioned and presented a few new operas, widely-spaced in time, prominently by Scottish composers, like Iain Hamilton's *The Catiline Conspiracy* (1974), Robin Orr's *Hermiston* (1975), Thomas Wilson's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1976), Thea Musgrave's *Mary, Queen of Scots* (1978) and James MacMillan's *Inés de Castro* (1996).⁵⁰ The Edinburgh Festival Theatre has been its principal venue since 1994. In 2008 the company introduced a new initiative, *Five:15 - Operas Made in Scotland*, as an annual research and development project created to promote the next generation of opera-makers, composers and librettists, with commissions of five new works per edition, running around 15 minutes each.⁵¹

v) **The Welsh National Opera (WNO)**

WNO is an opera company founded in Cardiff, Wales, in 1946, and consists of a professional orchestra (the Orchestra of Welsh National Opera) and a professional choir (the Chorus of Welsh National Opera).⁵² The WNO tours Wales and the United Kingdom extensively and, occasionally, the rest of the world. Annually, it gives on average one new production and two revivals of mainstream operas. The company has always provided a mix of canonic and less-well-known operas, the former including those of Alban Berg, Richard Strauss, Leoš Janáček and Benjamin Britten.⁵³

⁵⁰Michael Turnbull, 'Glasgow', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 ed.), 443.

⁵¹Opera Britannia website, 28 May 2010 <http://www.opera-britannia.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=339:five15-operas-made-in-scotlandscottish-opera-glasgow-26th-may-2010&catid=8:opera-reviews&Itemid=16>, accessed 25 May 2011. See also Appendix 1, Table 5.

⁵²Malcolm Boyd, 'Cardiff', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 ed.), 729.

⁵³Leech, ed., *Welsh National Opera*, 178.

The company's first full-length commission was *The Beach of Falesá* (1973), the first opera by Welsh composer Alun Hoddinott's (after Robert Louis Stevenson).⁵⁴ Another Welsh composer, John Metcalf, has been commissioned twice, for his second and third operas, respectively, *The Journey* (1981) and *Tornrak* (1990). More recently, WNO commissioned Maxwell Davies's *The Doctors of Myddfai* (1996) and James Macmillan's *The Sacrifice* (2007).⁵⁵ In 2005, the company celebrated its first performance at the Wales Millennium Centre, WNO's first permanent home, a performing arts centre in Cardiff Bay.⁵⁶

vi) **Kent Opera**⁵⁷

England's first regional opera company, **Kent Opera** was founded in 1969 and closed down in 1989. It was based in Ashford, and its productions were presented in several venues, mainly in the southern England. Committed to developing new audiences, as well as to bringing professional opera to centres outside London, its repertoire included operas from all periods, from Monteverdi to Tippett. Operas were performed in English, usually with new translations of the libretto.

Among performances broadcast on radio and television, the company was the subject of a series of programmes made by TVS entitled *Staging an Opera*. Channel 4 broadcast the production of King Priam in 1986 in celebration of Michael Tippett's 80th birthday. KO gave world premières of

⁵⁴Alun Hoddinott', *BBC Wales Music* <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/music/sites/alun-hoddinott/>>, Accessed 19 August 2011.

⁵⁵Leech, *Welsh National Opera*, 153.

⁵⁶Leech, *Welsh National Opera*, 17.

⁵⁷Caroline Bent, 'Kent Opera', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 ed.), 976.

Alan Ridout's *The Pardoner's Tale* (1971), Judith Weir's *The Black Spider* (1985) and *A Night at the Chinese Opera* (1987).⁵⁸

2. Seasonal Opera Companies and Festivals

Summer festivals are very common in countries with a temperate climate like Britain and most of Europe. Some companies exist only to present new productions and commissions at this time of year, attracting audiences from all over the country to their venues, which are, in many cases, historic and renowned country houses.

Below are short descriptions of seven seasonal opera companies and brief analyses of their productions. All these companies are based in England, four in London. They have all been founded during the last four decades, and have been active to the present time, except for the Almeida Opera Festival, a remarkable initiative that has contributed decisively to new opera in Britain and influenced the careers of a generation of composers who had their works commissioned and performed in its programmes until 2007, when it ceased operation.

⁵⁸For the Ridout opera, see Stour Music: Festival of Music in East Kent, <<http://www.stourmusic.org.uk/concerts-2011/the-pardoners-tale>>, accessed 25 May 2011; for *The Black Spider*, see the Chesternovello website, <[http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=243 2&State_3041=2&workId_3041=2739](http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=243%20&State_3041=2&workId_3041=2739)>, accessed 25 May 2011, and for *A Night at the Chinese Opera*, see Chesternovello website, <[http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=243 2&State_3041=2&workId_3041=2748](http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=243%20&State_3041=2&workId_3041=2748)>, accessed 25 May 2011

i) **Almeida Opera Festival & Aldeburgh-Almeida Opera**⁵⁹

From 1992 to 2007, the Almeida Theatre, in Islington, London, presented **Almeida Opera Festival**, an annual summer season of new chamber scale operas and music theatre pieces. This was a revival of the Almeida Festivals of the 1980s, during which works including Michael Finnissy's *The Undivine Comedy* (1988) and John Casken's *Golem* (1989) were premiered.⁶⁰ The Theatre held the festival in collaboration with **ENO Studio** for its first six years, and from 1998 on, Arts Council England enabled Aldeburgh Productions and Almeida Opera to work together on an opera each year (as the **Aldeburgh Almeida Opera** company); the company regularly toured nationally and internationally, establishing itself as a regular platform for contemporary opera.⁶¹

Almeida Opera has been particularly associated with the works of Jonathan Dove, Giorgio Batistelli and Thomas Adès; but the festival has also introduced audiences in the United Kingdom to composers as diverse as Elena Firsova (Russia), Kevin Volans (South Africa), Per Norgard (Denmark), Heiner Goebbels (Germany), Nils Vigeland (USA), and Guo Wenjing (China).⁶²

Composers who have their works commissioned by AO were 44 years old on average, Harrison Birtwistle being the eldest (70, when his 2004 *The Io*

⁵⁹The Almeida Theatre, together with the Genesis Foundation and the Aldeburgh Festival (founded by Benjamin Britten and now directed by Jonathan Reekie), has announced the Jerwood Opera Writing Programme, with Giorgio Batistelli as artistic director, 'designed for composers, writers and directors who want to widen horizons and equip themselves to create contemporary work combining music, theatre and text'. Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 222. More information in: Almeida Theatre website <<http://www.almeida.co.uk/about-us/archive/almeida-opera/>>, accessed 26 May 2011.

⁶⁰Robert D. Hume and Arthur Jacobs, 'London: Miscellaneous Institutions: Almeida Festival', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 1997 ed.

⁶¹Gilbert, *Opera for Everybody*, 418.

⁶²See Appendix 2, Tables 16, 17, 19 and 20.

Passion was premiered), followed closely by Alexander Goehr (69) and Per Norgard (68); the youngest composer (in fact, possibly the youngest one to be ever commissioned) was Deirdre Gribbin (born in Northern Ireland, 1967), with her 1998 *Hey Persephone!*. Since then, Gribbin has developed a successful international career.⁶³

From the above, one can conclude that the Almeida Opera has probably been the most wide-ranging contemporary opera company of its time. Also the selection of projects, with creators and producers being quite free in their search for plots and narratives, allowing them to experiment both artistically and technically, shows that the company had offered a diverse, new and most unpredictable resource of artistic expression.

ii) **The Buxton Festival**

This festival is an annual summer festival of opera, music, and literary events, held in Buxton, Derbyshire, England. The Buxton Opera House was opened in 1903.⁶⁴ The origins of the Festival date back to 1936 when an annual drama festival was held until 1942, in conjunction with the London-based Old Vic Theatre Company. The restored Buxton Opera House was the venue for the first Buxton Festival in 1979 with presentations of *Lucia de Lammermoor* (in its first ever complete performance in Britain), and Peter Maxwell Davies' *The Two Fiddlers*. Since then, the Festival has presented new productions of rarely-performed operas. The current resident orchestra at the festival is the

⁶³The Contemporary Music Centre Ireland website <<http://www.cmc.ie/composers/composer.cfm?composerID=51>>, accessed 26 May 2011.

⁶⁴David Fallows, 'Buxton', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 ed.), 662.

Northern Chamber Orchestra.⁶⁵

iii) **The Glyndebourne Festival Opera & Glyndebourne on Tour**

Glyndebourne Festival Opera, the oldest seasonal company in Britain, has been held since 1934 at Glyndebourne, an English country house (to which has been added a complete opera house) near Lewes, in East Sussex, England, where the performances start in the late afternoon, enabling Londoners to leave town after lunch, and finish in time for them to catch the last train back.⁶⁶ Particularly celebrated for its productions of Mozart operas, the GFO has expanded its repertoire with productions of Janáček, Handel, and also with the occasional commissioning of new operas.⁶⁷

In 1968, the festival established the Glyndebourne Touring Opera, renamed **Glyndebourne on Tour** in 2003, a national autumn operatic season that takes productions to Newcastle, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Oxford, for instance, after three weeks of performances at Glyndebourne itself.⁶⁸ The London Philharmonic Orchestra has been the orchestra-in-residence of the GFO. There have been 8 world premieres since 1970: from *The Rising of the Moon* (1970) by Nicholas Maw, to *Love and Other Demons* (2008) by the only non-British composer premiered at the GFO, Peter Eötvös (born in Hungary, 1944). Harrison Birtwistle has had two operas premiered at the Festival: *The Second Mrs Kong* (1994), and *The Last Supper* (2000, British premiere). The composers commissioned by GFO were 48 years-old on

⁶⁵Buxton Festival website <<http://www.buxtonfestival.co.uk/#archive>>, accessed 25 May 2011.

⁶⁶Stanley Sadie, 'Glyndebourne', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 ed.), 465. See also the Glyndebourne website <<http://glyndebourne.com/about-us>>. accessed 27 May 2011.

⁶⁷See Appendix 2, Tables 22 and 23.

⁶⁸Sadie, 'Glyndebourne', 466.

average, Birtwistle being the oldest (66 at the time of the production), once more.⁶⁹

iv) **Garsington Opera**

This is an open-air opera festival held each summer in the gardens of Garsington Manor, in the village of Garsington, near Oxford, England, moving to a new venue in Wormsley, in the Chiltern Hills, from 2011. With a programme that offers a combination of well-known operas and discoveries of little-known works, all operas at Garsington are performed in their original language with English surtitles.⁷⁰

v) **Grange Park Opera**

Founded in 1997, **Grange Park Opera** performs operas at two venues: ‘The Grange’, which seats 530, in Hampshire, and ‘Nevill Holt’, a newly built 300 seat theatre in Leicestershire, England, during June and early July every year. The 2010 season offered early-twentieth century repertoire, with works of Prokofiev, Strauss and Puccini. The orchestra was the English Chamber Orchestra. According to the GPO website, Pimlico Opera (since 1987) is its sister company.⁷¹

vi) **Opera Holland Park**

This is a summer opera company which performs under a temporary canopy in Holland Park, a public park in west central London, since 1989. The festival

⁶⁹From the Glyndebourne Festival Opera Archives.

⁷⁰Garsington Opera at Wormsley website, <<http://www.garsingtonopera.org/>>, accessed 27 May 2011. See also Appendix 2, Table 21.

⁷¹Grange Park Opera website <<http://www.grangeparkopera.co.uk/more>>, accessed 27 May 2011.

presents well-known operas, particularly from the *verismo* repertoire, along with other productions by a variety of small opera companies. The resident orchestra is the City of London Sinfonia.⁷²

vii) **Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival**

Tête à Tête Opera, founded in 1997, produces regularly its own repertoire (which will be discussed below), but also stages annually **Tête A Tête - The Opera Festival**. Since 2007, this has run for three weeks during August at the Riverside Studios, London, showcasing a wide range of performances in various states of development, providing an opportunity for rising artists to perform their works alongside established composers and performers.⁷³

Furthermore, the Festival is not limited to the more conventional stages of the Riverside Studios, as it is illustrated by its 2010 programme announcement in *Muso* magazine:

Leading stars and up-and-coming young things will rub shoulders in a programme that centres on four shows per night and pushes the boundaries of what opera means and can do in the 21st century. Innovative ways of presenting opera are to be explored in the festival's *Lite Bites* series, which stages mini operas in public spaces such as shopping centres, care homes and parks around Hammersmith, in Scottish Opera's opera for babies between the ages of 6 and 18 months, *Baby O*, and in Opera North's 'dinner party' performance of *The Lost Chord*.⁷⁴

The Festival is one of the most diverse events concerned with contemporary opera currently in London, with performances by Scottish Opera and Opera North, among several independent groups. Tête-a-Tête

⁷²Opera Holland Park website <<http://www.operahollandpark.com/>>, accessed 03 June 2011.

⁷³Tête-à-Tête Opera website <<http://www.tete-a-tete.org.uk/>> accessed 27 May 2011.

⁷⁴Muso (on-line magazine), 9 July 2010 <<http://www.musolife.com/t-te-t-te-opera-festival-announces-full-programme.html>>, accessed 28 May 2011

claims, for instance, that in 2008, 50 performances were presented over 12 days, 23 different companies and individual artists were showcased, and in all 30 world premieres, new works and works-in-progress were performed to an audience of over 2000.⁷⁵

3. Companies specializing in Contemporary Opera

Companies specialized in performing, but also in commissioning and producing new chamber operas in Britain have gained importance as never before during these last decades. Below, three of these, all mentioned above, **Music Theatre Wales, The Opera Group, and Tête à Tête Opera** are considered further.⁷⁶

i) Music Theatre Wales

This is a touring company based in Cardiff, specializing in contemporary chamber opera productions, either by commissioning brand-new works or staging the ones that have rarely or never been performed in the UK before.⁷⁷

Each MTW performance is usually preceded by an educational workshop which promotes music and theatrical skills, creativity and a basic knowledge about the language and process of opera, for its participants.⁷⁸

Since its foundation in 1988, it has performed across the United Kingdom, including many major festivals, and toured to Germany, France,

⁷⁵Tête-à-Tête Opera website <<http://www.tete-a-tete.org.uk/history.html>> accessed 28 May 2011.

⁷⁶See Appendix 1, Table 5.

⁷⁷Music Theatre Wales website <<http://www.musictheatrewales.org.uk/>>, accessed 28 May 2011.

⁷⁸British Council Arts website <<http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-music-education-mused-music-theatre-wales.htm>>, accessed 28 May 2011.

Norway, Ireland, Canada and The Netherlands. It has been broadcast on BBC radio and television and recorded on CD. The company was twice short-listed for the Prudential Award for Opera for ‘creativity, excellence, innovation and accessibility’. In November 2002, Music Theatre Wales became the first Associate Company of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London (as mentioned above), and since then its London stage has been the Linbury Studio Theatre.⁷⁹

Commissions include *The Roswell Incident* and *Flowers* by John Hardy, *Gwyneth and the Green Knight* by Lynne Plowman and *The Piano Tuner* by Nigel Osborne. The composers commissioned by the MTW so far have been 46 years-old on average. Andrew Toovey (*Ubu*, 1992), was the youngest composer (30), while Michael Berkeley (*Jane Eyre*, 2000) and Eleanor Alberga (*Letters of a Love Betrayed*, 2009), both 60 years old at the time, were the oldest. Born in Jamaica, though resident in Britain, Alberga (mentioned earlier) is also the only non-British-born composer in the list.⁸⁰ Past highlights of MTW include re-stagings of *Punch and Judy* by Birtwistle, *The Rape of Lucretia* by Britten, *The Lighthouse* and *The Martyrdom of Saint Magnus* by Maxwell Davies, and *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Philip Glass.⁸¹ Most recently, Glass' *In the Penal Colony*, commissioned by A Contemporary Theatre (Seattle), was given its first British performance by the MTW at the Linbury Theatre.⁸²

⁷⁹All MTW historic events are included on the Music Theatre Wales website <<http://www.musictheatrewales.org.uk/history.html>>, accessed 28 May 2011.

⁸⁰See Appendix 2, Table 25.

⁸¹See Appendix 2, Table 26.

⁸²Guy Dammann, ‘In the Penal Colony’, *The Guardian*, 19 Sep. 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/sep/19/in-the-penal-colony-review>>, accessed 30 May 2011.

ii) **The Opera Group**

The Opera Group specialises in commissioning and producing new operas, this having become a crucial strategy for the company in recent years, though it is also committed to re-creating rarely performed works and producing operas for children and young people. It tours two new productions every year, visiting opera houses, theatres and festivals across the United Kingdom and Europe. The company is based in the South East of England and is Creative Associate at Watford Palace Theatre, Artist in Residence at Oxford Playhouse and works regularly with Anvil Arts Basingstoke and Brighton Festival & Dome. TOG is currently resident at King's College London.⁸³

TOG has staged nine new operas so far, all by British composers, except for the last one, by Elena Langer, a Russian composer who trained at the Royal Academy of Music. These composers had an average age of 37 years at the time of their completion of the operas, which makes the group one of the youngest discussed in this study.⁸⁴

There is also an ideological approach to every new TOG creative project, when the company promotes a series of off-stage events, concomitant with the opera itself. Talks and discussions, just before or after each spectacle, concerning themes and issues raised in the opera, aim to make the audience more familiar with the work's issues. For example, for the 2010 TOG production of Elena Langer's *The Lion's Face*, which deals with Alzheimer's disease, the company worked in a two-year partnership with Professor Simon Lovestone's team at the Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London, 'to

⁸³The Opera Group website <http://www.theoperagroup.co.uk/?page_id=2>, accessed 29 May 2011.

⁸⁴The Opera Group website <http://www.theoperagroup.co.uk/?page_id=27>, accessed 29 May 2011. See also Appendix 2, Table 27.

find a way of creatively exploring the experiences of the Alzheimer's patient, the carer and the research scientist', thus justifying the company's engagement with the project (the operatic exploration of dementia).⁸⁵

Some re-stagings of chamber operas include *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* by Peter Maxwell Davies (1977), presented in 1999, Birtwistle's 1969 *Down by the Greenwood Side* (2009), and the British premiere of George Benjamin's first and only operatic work so far, *Into the Little Hill* (2006), produced by this company in 2009.⁸⁶

iii) **Tête à Tête Opera** ⁸⁷

While the Tête à Tête Festival is a remarkable platform for the work of dozens of other companies and many hundreds of artists, **Tête à Tête** 'as a year-round company, has itself produced over 34 stage operas by 29 different composers up to 2010, for audiences throughout the United Kingdom, with its series of short operas and other major works, often supported by a series of educational workshops'.⁸⁸ For example, *Six-Pack* (2002, a co-production with the ENO Studio of six commissioned operas) had an 'uninhibitedly positive' response from the audience, according to the company's website; moreover, a considerable percentage of that audience, both in London and on tour, had never been to any kind of opera performance before, and this seems to be an

⁸⁵*The Lion's Face* website <<http://thelionsface.wordpress.com/off-stage/>>, accessed 29 May 2011. This author followed the full period of stage rehearsals of *The Lion's Face*, at the Jerwood Space, in London, from 19 April, 2010 until (and including) the work's premiere at the Brighton Festival, on 20 May, 2010. See Appendix 4, 'The Lion's Face opera experience'.

⁸⁶The Opera Group website <http://www.theoperagroup.co.uk/?page_id=27>, accessed 29 May, 2011. See also Appendix 2, Table 26 and Appendix 4., no 3, 'Interview with John Fulljames, Artistic Director of TOG'.

⁸⁷See Appendix 1, Table 29, with a list of Tête à Tête commissions and productions of Contemporary Operas since 1999.

⁸⁸Tête à Tête website <<http://www.tete-a-tete.org.uk/>>, accessed 29 May 2011.

aim which is quite frequently achieved by the group.⁸⁹ Other examples, like *Shorts* (1999, an ‘evening of five commissioned operas and entr’actes’), and *Circus Tricks* (2009, performed by the company at the *TaT* Festival), received the following comment (found on the *TaT* website) from critic Anna Picard, from the *Independent on Sunday*, in August 2009:

Tête à Tête’s trademark has been lightness of touch: a genial, playful, paper-moon style where comedy is deftly spiked with tragedy and tragedy comes laced with laughter.⁹⁰

In fact, one of the most noteworthy characteristics of Tête à Tête productions is that they are generally entertaining and quite directly comical, which probably contributes to their popularity.⁹¹ The Chroma Ensemble is the associate ensemble of the Tête à Tête opera company.⁹²

4. Smaller Companies in London

There are several other opera companies which are much smaller (sometimes minimal) or of quite a flexible size.⁹³ Such groups are so adaptable to their audiences that they can even present alternative productions of the same repertoire (almost exclusively traditional) if they are required to, even being defined by themselves as groups ‘for hire’, like **Hatstand Opera** or the **English Pocket Opera**. There are approximately 18 such companies

⁸⁹Tête à Tête website <<http://www.tete-a-tete.org.uk/history.html>>, accessed 29 May 2011.

⁹⁰Tête à Tête website <<http://www.tete-a-tete.org.uk/>>, accessed 29 May 2011.

⁹¹Besides the testimony of critics, public, and artists themselves, the ‘humorous style’ cultivated by the company’s creative and managing team has been observed by this author on many occasions, as in conversations with Bill Bankes-Jones (the company’s director and the festival’s artistic director) and during performances of 18 short operas witnessed during the Tête à Tête Opera Festival in 2010.

⁹²Chroma Chamber Ensemble website <<http://www.chromaensemble.co.uk/opera/teteatete.htm>>, accessed 27 May 2011.

⁹³See Appendix 1, Table 6.

currently active in London; only two of them remain from the 1970s, however. Five were founded in the 80s, nine in the 1990s but only two in the last 10 years. More than a half are touring companies, like the **English Touring Opera**, and they commonly offer workshops about the repertoire, as well as for singing and acting, along with their performances.⁹⁴

There are also companies with a specific repertoire, like **Classical Opera**, which presents the music of Mozart and his contemporaries, and the **Early Opera Company**, which performs baroque operas, prominently those by Handel, using period instruments.

5. Smaller Companies in Britain

There are approximately 25 small opera companies outside London, from which 20 are based in England.⁹⁵ Six were founded before 1970, including **The New Opera Company Derby**, created in 1891 (which makes it the oldest opera company in the country); three remain from the 1970s, six from the 1980s, and nine (36%) from the 1990s; apparently, no such group has been created during the last decade.

6. Initiatives for Young Artists

There are at least four main opera companies which have been founded to provide opportunities for emerging singers, musicians and technical trainees in the operatic field. Known as training companies, they generally develop

⁹⁴I have identified 19 touring companies in Great Britain in 2010.

⁹⁵See Appendix 1, Table 7.

workshops and masterclasses, culminating in spectacles of fully-staged operas. Two such groups are in London, one in Leeds, and a fourth and more specifically educational one is based at Glyndebourne, as a project which assists the local community. Among them, **W11 Opera** is particularly important to composers, since it has produced new operas regularly for almost 40 years.⁹⁶ **British Youth Opera**, founded in 1987, claims to be an opera training company for young artists through an annual programme of workshops, master-classes and fully-staged operas at Sadler's Wells Peacock Theatre.⁹⁷

Since 1986, the majority of **Glyndebourne Education's** youth and community projects involve the commissioning of new works, from large-scale youth operas for the main stage, to intimate group workshops. Such initiative has constituted an important path not only for the company to reach new audiences and engage with targeted communities, but also for composers, particularly Jonathan Dove, Orlando Gough and Julian Philips.⁹⁸

Leeds Youth Opera, formed in 1971, is an opera company specifically designed to cater for young singers up to 25 years-old, based in Leeds, West Yorkshire, England. It performs twice a year, rare works as well as the standard repertoire. The UK premieres of *Satyagraha*, *The Voyage*, and *Appomattox* (2009), all by Philip Glass, were performed by LYO, as well as the staged world premiere of Oliver Rudland's *The Nightingale and the Rose* (2008).⁹⁹

⁹⁶See also Appendix 1, Table 8.

⁹⁷British Youth Opera website <<http://www.byo.org.uk/>>, accessed 29 May 2011.

⁹⁸See Glyndebourne websites <<http://glyndebourne.com/productions/>>, and <<http://glyndebourne.com/discover/learning/>>, both accessed 29 May 2011. See also Appendix 2, Table 22.

⁹⁹Leeds Youth Opera website <<http://www.leedsyouthopera.org.uk/past.htm>>.

W11 Opera was founded by four string teachers in W11 (London) with the conductor Nicholas Kraemer, when they put on Britten's '*Noye's Fludde*' in 1971, with a cast that included 100 local children. Regular commissioning began in 1972 with the aim of developing a repertoire for the 9-18 year-age group. Since then, the company has commissioned and produced almost 40 new operas. With a running time of just over one hour, each work is available for performance by schools and other music theatre groups from other communities.¹⁰⁰

Another important initiative for young artists in the operatic field is the **Aldeburgh Festival**, in rural Suffolk, England, founded in 1948 by the composer Benjamin Britten, the singer Peter Pears and the librettist Eric Crozier, to provide a home for their opera company, the English Opera Group. The festival is now operated by Aldeburgh Music, which runs artist development programmes like the Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme (for emerging professionals); Aldeburgh Residencies (a creative programme for established and emerging artists) and the Jerwood Opera Writing Programme (designed for composers, writers and directors who want to create contemporary work combining music, theatre and text, through workshops and fellowships as a support for writing a new opera).¹⁰¹ The Festival has seen the premières of several works by Britten (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1960; *Death in Venice* in 1973) as well as by Harrison Birtwistle (*Punch and Judy* in 1968, *The Io Passion* in 2004 and *The Corridor* in 2009).

accessed 29 May 2011.

¹⁰⁰See also Appendix 2, Table 30.

¹⁰¹'Artist Development', Aldeburgh Music <http://www.aldeburgh.co.uk/artist_development>, accessed 19 August 2011.

7. Opera Schools

According to their websites, the opera schools cited below stage extracts from contemporary operas as part of their training.¹⁰²

i) Based in Chapel Yard, Wandsworth (southwest London) since 2003, **The National Opera Studio** was established by the Arts Council as a link between the music schools in the United Kingdom and the six main UK opera companies (ROH, ENO, WNO, SO, ON, and Glyndebourne Festival Opera), from which comes part of its funding.¹⁰³ It is responsible for the training of approximately twelve singers each academic year, as well as three piano répétiteurs, all selected generally by representatives from each of the six companies, during the final audition panel of each year's intake. The trainees awarded a place on the course have their tuition fees fully covered by grants and scholarships.¹⁰⁴ The NOS one-year course usually includes residencies at two of the national opera companies, as well as four opera scene performances (including from contemporary operas) in London throughout the year.¹⁰⁵

ii) **The Royal College of Music's International Opera School** provides

¹⁰²Unfortunately I have not been able to ascertain this in detail, as none has responded to my questions, sent by e-mail.

¹⁰³National Opera Studio <<http://www.nationaloperastudio.org.uk/>>, accessed 29 May 2011. See also, Robert D. Hume and Arthur Jacobs, 'London: Miscellaneous Institutions: National Opera Studio', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 1997 ed. The Arts Council England is a non-departmental public body of the UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport. It is a government-funded body dedicated to promoting the performing, visual and literary arts in England, formed in 1994 when the Arts Council of Great Britain (formed in 1945) was divided into three separate bodies for England, Scotland and Wales. See Arts Council England website <<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>>, accessed 29 May, 2011.

¹⁰⁴From the NOS 2011 Prospectus, 1. According to the NOS website (www.nationaloperastudio.org.uk), the company receives from the ACE: London about 32% of the income needed, whereas the other 68% come from trusts, foundations and individual donors. A total of £350,000 is raised annually.

¹⁰⁵NOS 2011 Prospectus, 9.

training for postgraduate singers, during a two-year specialist course. Students perform in three fully staged operas each year, besides several opera scenes. The School is based in the RCM's Britten Theatre and its teaching and rehearsal spaces.¹⁰⁶ It is supported by corporate sponsors.¹⁰⁷

iii) The three annual opera productions by the **Royal Academy Opera** course includes professional conductors and visiting directors with Academy orchestras, performing the traditional, as well as contemporary and historically-aware repertoire.¹⁰⁸ The Academy also is associated with the six biggest British opera companies.¹⁰⁹ Most recently, it gave the world premiere of Peter Maxwell Davies's opera, *Kommilitonen!* (2011)¹¹⁰. Previously, it had given the second production of Judith Weir's *Night at the Chinese Opera*.

iv) **The Guildhall School Opera Course** works in collaboration with the School's Technical Theatre Department, training students in stage techniques and musical coaching for three full public productions each year and three programmes of operatic excerpts in a workshop setting. The performances

¹⁰⁶From RCM 2012/2013 Prospectus, 56.

¹⁰⁷Royal College of Music, 29 May 2011 <<http://www.rcm.ac.uk/default.aspx?pg=1645>>. See also Robert D. Hume and Arthur Jacobs, 'London: Miscellaneous Institutions: Royal College of Music (RCM)', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 1997 ed.

¹⁰⁸From the RAM 2011 Prospectus, 10-11.

¹⁰⁹As indicated on the RAM website, Sir Colin Davis, Trevor Pinnock and Sir Charles Mackerras have conducted the Academy orchestra for opera productions there. *Royal Academy of Music* <<http://www.ram.ac.uk/opera-the-course>>, accessed 29 May 2011. See also Robert D. Hume and Arthur Jacobs, 'London: Miscellaneous Institutions: Royal Academy of Music (RAM)', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 1997 ed.

¹¹⁰*Kommilitonen!* (fellow students) is a joint commission between the Royal Academy of Music and the Juilliard School in New York. It received its British première at the RAM in March, 2011, and will receive its US première at Juilliard in November, 2011. The libretto, by David Pountney, is based on the stories of James Meredith, who in 1962 became the first black student to register at the University of Mississippi, with the chronicle of the Weisse Rose, a group of Munich students executed in 1943 for protesting against Nazi atrocities, and an incident from China's cultural revolution when the children of an education minister were forced to denounce their parents. Clements, 'Kommilitonen! – review', Theguardian.co.uk, accessed 21 August 2011.

happen within the Guildhall School as well as at various venues in London and throughout England. A further group of approximately 24 singers of final year undergraduate and postgraduate students, known as Opera Associates, forms the chorus for opera productions. The GSO also runs a course for a small number of répétiteurs who also take part in the productions.¹¹¹

v) **The Royal Northern College of Music Opera**

Based in Manchester, England, and providing training in all aspects of preparation for performance, including drama and language tuition, the RNCM Opera develops a diverse repertoire, which has included from Richard Strauss' *Die Fledermaus* and Janáček's *Katya Kabanova*, to Puccini's *La Rondine* and Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, among others.¹¹² BBC Radio 3 has featured some of the school's productions.¹¹³

vi) **The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama**

Besides developing some children's outreach programmes, the RSAMD involves students in three opera productions each year. One of these productions is accompanied by the Scottish Opera Orchestra, in two major theatres in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The Emerging Artists programme offers selected Academy singers at the beginning of their careers a salaried position and wide experience with the Scottish Opera company, involving a constant

¹¹¹From the GSMD 2010/2011 Prospectus, 46-51. See also Robert D. Hume and Arthur Jacobs, 'London: Miscellaneous Institutions: Guildhall School of Music and Drama (GSMD)', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 1997 ed.

¹¹²From the RNCM 2011/12 Prospectus, 48.

¹¹³Royal Northern College of Music <<http://www.rncm.ac.uk/component/content/article/64/154.html>>, accessed 29 May 2011.

flow of its staff coaching and working with Academy singers.¹¹⁴ The RSAMD is associated with the Alexander Gibson Opera School. This, opened in 1998, is the UK's only purpose-built opera school, according to the Academy's prospectus. It houses rehearsal and coaching rooms, and a flexible performance space.¹¹⁵

8. Opera on Television¹¹⁶

In Britain, filmed opera performances have been designed for television since the 1970s. Channel 4 broadcast two of the **Glyndebourne Opera Company's** productions each year, 1998-2000, while also making many documentaries on the subject; such transmissions were popular and admired, and many were subsequently released in DVD.¹¹⁷

New operas engaged with contemporary issues, some of them written specifically for the medium, have been commissioned alongside versions and adaptations of the traditional repertoire. Mark-Anthony Turnage's 1988 *Greek*, whose 1990 BBC television version won the Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Best Broadcast (Radio or Television), is an example of a traditional myth transposed to the present moment.¹¹⁸ Jonathan Dove's and David Harsent's *When She Died* (2002) concerned the death of the Princess of

¹¹⁴From the RSAMD 2011/12 Prospectus, 17.

¹¹⁵RSAMD, 2011/12 Prospectus, 4.

¹¹⁶See Appendix 1, Table 31, for a list of some of the most interesting opera productions for television since 1970.

¹¹⁷For the Glyndebourne productions released in DVD by Opus Arte, see n.a., 'Glyndebourne', Opus Arte <http://www.opusarte.com/en/glyndebourne.html?gclid=CNGJne7n1qsCFSkntAodiiF_Mg&p=2>, accessed 12 September 2011.

¹¹⁸The Royal Philharmonic Society <<http://www.rpsmusicawards.com/undefined/?page=pastwinners/pastcreativecomm.html>>, accessed 29 May 2011. See also Appendix 2, Table 29.

Wales; it was broadcast by Channel 4 and its audience topped a million in the United Kingdom alone, though it received strong criticism from Diana's friends and supporters.¹¹⁹ (It was later staged at the Kammeroper in Vienna in March 2007).

OVERVIEW

From a survey of the repertoire produced in Britain from 1970 to 2010, we can conclude that opera seems to be a resilient genre. Further, despite all the experiments in music and theatre since the beginning of the twentieth century, many recent operas have shown a tendency to convey narrative plots in a manner that (re-)invokes traditional story telling (i.e., with a beginning, a middle, and an end). One could conjecture that one of the reasons for that tendency is that either the average British opera-audience member, or the opera companies' sponsors, are generally conservative.

The fact is that the 'cultural industry' of the last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first has reflected the always-increasing pace and immediacy of modern life. Cinema and television (with their similarities and idiosyncrasies) are most influential in establishing contemporary ways and styles of visual and dramatic narrative for the average audiences; and, despite the techniques of montage and collage that have migrated into opera, in many ways, mainstream cinema and television remain

¹¹⁹PRS for Music Foundation <<http://www.prsformusicfoundation.com/guestofthemonth/jonathandove.htm>>, accessed 29 May 2011. See also Jonathan Thompson, 'Exploitative TV opera angers friends', *The Independent*, 25 Aug, 2002 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/exploitative-tv-opera-angers-friends-640927.html>>, accessed 29 May 2011.

(by definition) conventionally direct.

The above survey tells us that, from 1970 onwards, there has been an increase in the use of more conventional libretti, more ‘functional’ than experimental or conceptual, more direct than psychological, more traditional than modern in their treatment of theatrical temporality. Analysis of reviews of operas with world premieres by the major companies (on their main stages), indicates that clear exceptions to the above trend were: at the ROH (1 in 12, or 8.3%), Tippett’s psychedelic *The Knot Garden*; at ENO (2 in 17, or 11.7%), Birtwistle’s *The Mask of Orpheus* and Gerald Barry’s *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*. Nonetheless, it is significant that both Birtwistle’s and Tippett’s later works do not indicate such characteristics in their narratives.¹²⁰ The ROH also gave the British premieres of other operas with less conventional libretti, like Stockhausen’s *Donnerstag aus Licht* (*Thursday from Light*, 1981), in 1985, and Berio’s *Un re in ascolto* (*A King Listens*, 1981-83), in 1989.¹²¹ Then, whereas Philip Glass’ and Robert Wilson’s 5-hour *Einstein on the Beach*, with its revolutionary lack of a linear plot (described elsewhere in this study), was produced in 1976, 40 years later, James MacMillan and Michael Symmons Roberts created *The Sacrifice* (2007), which presented a libretto ‘verbally crisp and narratively lucid’, according to critic Rupert Christiansen, who claimed that ‘even without surtitles it would be easy to

¹²⁰Tippett’s last opera, *New Year*, possesses a ‘renewed stream of lyricism’, according to Geraint Lewis in ‘Tippett, Sir Michael (Kemp)’, *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 1997 ed, while Samuel concludes, in her essay about Birtwistle’s last opera, *The Minotaur*, that the work is ‘ultimately a “simple” narrative, a straight line, made more intriguing by the changing focus on its characters, their emotions and motivation’. Samuel, ‘Birtwistle’s *The Minotaur*’, 230.

¹²¹For *Donnerstag aus Licht*, see Royal Opera House Collections Online, ‘Donnerstag aus Licht’ <<http://www.rohcollections.org.uk/performance.aspx?performance=12132&row=0>>, accessed 21 August 2011. For *Un Re in Ascolto*, <<http://www.rohcollections.org.uk/performance.aspx?performance=12093&row=0>>, accessed 21 August 2011.

grasp the basics'.¹²²

Should modern opera no longer be experimental, then? There are creators who assert that, since anything can in principle become an operatic subject, there is no need for a plot in opera at all.¹²³ Salzman claims that modern opera has the problem of being suffocated by its own high artistic ideals, where unity of conception has replaced content as its principal focus.¹²⁴ 'Audacious' narratives, therefore, are more commonly found in chamber operas produced by small companies keen to experiment, not so compromised by the need to pursue large audiences. (This perhaps harks back to the 1960s and the *Fires of London*, and the music-theatre works of Kagel, Maxwell Davies and Birtwistle, for instance, or even further back to the chamber works of Schoenberg and Stravinsky, *Pierrot Lunaire* and *A Soldier's Tale*.).

Indeed, chamber opera has been developing as a new, fresh genre within opera itself. Companies have shown increasing interest in commissioning chamber operas; the public has responded positively to such a trend, and big opera houses and public funding have supported these through programmes like the ENO Studio and ROH2, for instance.

Experiments like the *Tête à Tête* Festival's one-hour shows of dozens of works in progress, or Scottish Opera's initiative, *Five:15 - Operas Made in Scotland* (sets of mini-operas), are good examples of a search for an original format in quite smaller operatic spectacles. The results, in terms of how permanently such works remain in the repertoire, cannot yet be known, but it

¹²²Arved Ashby, 'Minimalist opera', 249. For *The Sacrifice*, see Rupert Christiansen, 'The Sacrifice: Just a little too slick', *The Telegraph*, 24 September 2007 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/opera/3668125/The-Sacrifice-Just-a-little-too-slick.html>>, accessed 30 September 2011.

¹²³See Appendix 4, No. 4. (Interview with composer Elena Langer.)

¹²⁴Salzman, 'Notes', 16.

is fact that the careers of several composers have been launched by their involvement in these projects. These include, for example, David Bruce (after his 2006 *Push!*, for Tête à Tête) and Jonathan Dove (after his works for the Glyndebourne Educational programme during the 1990s).¹²⁵

But larger companies work with bigger budgets and that allows them also to commission operas to be performed by full orchestra and chorus, like Birtwistle's *The Minotaur* at the Royal Opera House and MacMillan's *The Sacrifice* at Welsh National Opera. Here, British composers have had precedence, naturally, although, remarkably, the 1976 ROH production of Henze's *We Come to the River* included a cast of 111 roles covered by over 50 singers, with doubling of roles and three separate instrumental ensembles, including a percussionist who performed among the singers on stage (even though *We Come* is arguably the least successful of all Henze's stage works).¹²⁶

On the other hand, small companies usually commission chamber works to be performed by an ensemble of approximately a dozen instrumentalists, a few singers and no chorus. While this often reflects financial exigencies, it also helps define the genre. For example, George Benjamin's *Into the Little Hill*, defined as 'a lyric tale in two parts for soprano, contralto and ensemble of 15 players, is suitable for small stages, like all the chamber opera productions of The Opera Group. Similarly, *The Cumnor Affair: An Elizabethan Murder Mystery*, by Philip Cashian (for Tête à Tête

¹²⁵David Bruce website <<http://www.davidbruce.net/works/push.asp>>, accessed 30 May 2011. See also PRS for Music Foundation <<http://www.prsformusicfoundation.com/guestofthemonth/jonathandove.htm>>, accessed 30 May 2011.

¹²⁶Andrew Clements, 'Henze, Hans Werner', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 ed.), 695-697.

Opera) makes a virtue of such circumscription.¹²⁷

Once premiered, a new opera is rarely re-staged, but a number of works by composers including Harrison Birtwistle, Peter Maxwell Davies, Jonathan Dove, Thomas Adès, and Judith Weir are exceptions. Dove's *Flight*, for instance, has so far been broadcast on network television, received 13 productions in Europe, the USA and Australia, and commercially released on a CD by Chandos records.¹²⁸

Overall, it seems that opera is a genre that appeals to young composers, though they mostly need to wait until their 40s to be commissioned. Harrison Birtwistle, already 35 in 1970 when he wrote his first opera, has continued to be the most active and prolific composer in Britain in this field since then; he was the oldest commissioned composer for the Royal Opera House (both at the main stage and Linbury Studio Theatre), for the Almeida Opera Festival, and for the Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

Projects like the Almeida Opera Festival, ENO Studio, The ROH2 Garden Venture, and OperaGenesis have invigorated the genre, more specifically, chamber opera. Again, it is an alternative art-form which can perhaps survive more easily than full-scale opera, particularly within the present context of lack of funds and injurious political policies concerning the arts and culture in Britain in recent years.

The next chapter will present detailed analyses of some excerpts from specific operas produced in the context offered above.

¹²⁷Tête à Tête website <<http://www.tete-a-tete.org.uk/productions/cumnor.html>> accessed 30 May 2011.

¹²⁸Faber Music website <<http://www.fabermusic.com/Composers-Biography.aspx?ComposerId=187>>, accessed 29 May 2011.

Chapter 3. Musical and dramatic analysis of excerpts of three operas

Having looked generally, in the previous chapter, at the repertoire, this chapter considers in detail how the operatic medium works in practice: the complex and subtle interactions between words and music, orchestra and singers, and musical and theatrical issues. Three highly successful yet contrasting operas produced in London during the last 40 years (1970-2010) are Peter Maxwell Davies' chamber opera *The Lighthouse* (1979), Kaija Saariaho's *L'Amour de loin* (1999), and Harrison Birtwistle's *The Minotaur* (2008). I will first focus individually on their libretti and plots, music and the characterization of their protagonists. Then I will undertake a comparison of the operas with the intention of revealing any possible common trends amongst them.

The Lighthouse is a chamber work that has become a repertoire piece since its premiere in 1980; it has been restaged several times, including in 2001 at the Linbury Theatre.¹ *The Minotaur* is Birtwistle's most recent opera, premiered at the Royal Opera House in 2008, and shown on BBC2 television later that year.² Finally, the third opera to be studied here, *L'Amour de loin* (1999), by Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho, has one of the most successful subsequent stage histories of any opera premiered in the first decade of the twenty-first century.³ The work had its British full-stage premiere by the English National Opera in 2009.

¹Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 600-606. Also from the Royal Opera House Archives.

²From the Royal Opera House Archives.

³Pirkko Moisala, *Kaija Saariaho* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 22-23.

I. THE OPERAS

1. *The Lighthouse*

Davies has written seven operas, *Taverner* (1962-1970), *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* (1976), *The Lighthouse* (1979), *Resurrection* (1987, which includes parts for a rock band), *The Doctor of Myddfai* (1996), *Mr Emmet Takes a Walk* (2000), and *Kommilitonen!* ('Young Blood!', 2011).⁴ *The Lighthouse* was composed during a busy period for Davies, in 1979, just between his First Symphony (1973-6) and his Second (1980); Davies was then also producing works for the annual festival he had established in Orkney, including two children's operas and *The Martyrdom of Saint Magnus*.

According to Salzman and Desi, Davies's music mixes a latter-day serialism with elements taken from early music (as in *Taverner*) and various kinds of popular music (like the sea shanties in *The Lighthouse*), and, more recently, Scottish (or Orcadian) folk music.⁵ Besides being interested in remote geographical settings, the composer is also fascinated by the theme of madness (in *Eight Songs for a Mad King* [1969] and *The Lighthouse*, among

⁴According to Boyden, in *The Doctor of Myddfai* (a commission from Welsh National Opera, with a libretto by David Pountney), Davies 'encapsulated most of his life-long concerns, particularly with the use of an ancient story as a vehicle for truths about the corruption of modern politics and the stultifying power of officialdom'. Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 614. Davies's last opera, *Kommilitonen!* (Young Blood!), with a libretto by David Pountney, was premiered by the Royal Academy of Music opera department in March 2011, as a joint commission between the Royal Academy of Music and the Juilliard School in New York, where it will receive its US premiere in November 2011. See Richard Whitehouse, 'Kommilitonen! [Opera by Peter Maxwell Davies & David Pountney at Royal Academy of Music]', *classicalsource.com* <http://www.classicalsource.com/db_control/db_concert_review.php?id=9052>, accessed 22 August 2011.

⁵Salzman and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 216-217.

others). He generally avoids direct treatment of political themes (except for *Kommilitonen!*), but issues of identity and the individual in society are nearly always present in his works.

The Lighthouse, a chamber opera in one act with a prologue, its libretto by the composer, was first performed in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1980.⁶ The work lasts approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes and is by far the most popular of the composer's operas, having received over 80 different productions world-wide in its first 14 years.⁷

a) The plot and libretto

Davies says in his notes that the inspiration for the opera came from reading Craig Mair's book on the Stevenson family of Edinburgh. This can be viewed as either a ghost story or a psychological drama, its plot based on a true occurrence: on December 26, 1900, a lighthouse in the Flannan Isles (renamed as Fladda, in the opera), off Scotland, was found deserted, its beam extinguished, its three keepers mysteriously vanished. This situation is open to various interpretations; some of them were chosen freely by the composer, while changing names of places and characters.

The prologue is in a court of enquiry into the unexplained disappearance of the three keepers from a lighthouse, the three singers playing the parts of military officers, while in the main act they become the vanished keepers. These latter, having been kept together for months, have a

⁶Joe Staines, ed, 'Peter Maxwell Davies', in *The Rough Guide to Classical Music*, 339-341.

⁷Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 606.

relationship that is highly unstable. After a card game, they sing songs to reduce the tension, but this only serves to make the keepers even more confused and frightened, so each of them becomes convinced that he is being claimed by 'the Beast'. They prepare to meet its dazzling eyes, which become the lights of the relief vessel; the three men reappear as officers, met at the lighthouse only by an infestation of rats. They leave and, at the end, the last hours of *Blazes*, Sandy and Arthur begin to be replayed.

According to Paul Griffiths, the fact that the opera offers a detective mystery as well as a ghost story, both genres from popular fiction, may indicate the composer's efforts 'to create music that would be understood, in particular, by people as far removed from international cultural centres as Orkney'. The opera certainly has an 'Orkadian' air.⁸ Still, Boyden claims that, theatrically, *The Lighthouse* is Davies' most effective work: after a quite restrained beginning, the music becomes more and more expressive, building to a climax in the psychological violence and claustrophobia of the card scene.⁹ Lighting is also an essential ingredient in the general atmosphere on stage.¹⁰

Despite the naturalistic treatment of the language, and although they can be compared with the real ghostly couple in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, the ghosts in *The Lighthouse* only exist in the minds of those who see

⁸Paul Griffiths, 'The Lighthouse', *Maxopus.com* <http://www.maxopus.com/work_detail.aspx?key=286>, accessed 20 Jan. 2011.

⁹Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 615.

¹⁰The composer gives specific directions for the lighting in the introduction to the score: 'In both Prologue and the main scene, a lighthouse light shines out. The lighting is a main feature – for example, the 'triangle of lights' seen from the ship in the "sudden calm" of the Prologue is developed in the main scene to become the eyes of the Beast, and, at the climax, the lights of the ship moored by the lighthouse. All beams of light from the lighthouse itself must be a big feature, carefully timed and distinguished as directed.'

them. Sometimes we do not know if we are seeing a moment of flashback or flash-forward. Also we are not sure if we are seeing a phantasmagorical tale, a thriller, or just a descriptive reconstruction of the facts.

b. The music

Kerman claims that the music in opera can define and qualify not only specific dramatic elements, but also more general aspects, by establishing the appropriate mood.¹¹ In *The Lighthouse*, for instance, the score conjures up the sounds of sea and storm, as well as of other natural elements referred to in the text. Thus the work continues the British tradition of treating the sea as an active and crucial agent in people's lives and a musical agent in the opera, as in Britten's opera *Peter Grimes* and Smyth's *The Wreckers*, although, in the former in particular, the elemental power that surrounds the characters is depicted without sentimentality, while *The Lighthouse* derives much of its tension from the implacable rhythms of the sea placing in relief the mounting hysteria of the keepers.¹²

The Lighthouse's performing forces are:

3 singers: Sandy (and Officer 1, tenor)
 Blazes (and Officer 2, baritone)
 Arthur (and Officer 3, Voice of the cards, bass)

12 players: Flute doubling piccolo and alto flute
 Clarinet in A doubling bass Clarinet in Bb
 Horn in F
 Trumpet in C
 Trombone

¹¹Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, 17.

¹²Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 615-616. For Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers*, see Banfield, Stephen. 'Wreckers, The', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Solo strings (quartet)
Piano doubling celesta and out of tune upright Piano¹³
Guitar doubling banjo and a large percussion set¹⁴

According to Martin, the composer draws extraordinary sounds from the ensemble, the instruments being played in unusual ways, at the extremes of their register, with many glissandi and overtones, and in unusual combinations.¹⁵ Martin notes that ‘part of the opera's fascination is in its eerie sound, contrasted in its main scene with three 1900-style songs by the keepers: a bar-room ballad [Blazes], a parlour love song [Sandy], and a Protestant revival hymn [Arthur]’.

As with other of his music-theatre works, Maxwell Davies occasionally allows instruments to be protagonists: at rehearsal letter [E], in the Prologue, as mentioned above, a solo horn (which may emanate from among the audience), represents the interlocutor in the Court of Enquiry; his (wordless) questions can only be revealed by the keepers' answers (starting at [F]).¹⁶ These move from testimony into fantastical imaginings of evil during a ‘flashback’ to the lighthouse.

¹³Davies' interest in the astringent tones of out-of-tune instruments, revealing his fascination for ‘music of the absurd’, was developed during the time the composer wrote chamber pieces for the *Fires of London* ensemble, in the late 1960s. Staines, ed., ‘Peter Maxwell Davies’, in *The Rough Guide to Classical Music*, 339.

¹⁴There is a commercial recording of *The Lighthouse* (Collins Classics 14152), performed by the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Peter Maxwell Davies, with Neil Mackie (tenor), Christopher Keyte (baritone), and Ian Comboy (bass).

¹⁵Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 601. Davies wrote in the opera's programme notes: ‘The work makes extraordinary demands on the singing and acting capacities of the three protagonists, and demands extreme virtuosity from a small band. Peter Maxwell Davies, ‘Peter Maxwell Davies: The Lighthouse’, *Chester Novello* <http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=2432&State_3041=2&WorkId_3041=11071>, accessed 22 August 2011.

¹⁶The rehearsal letters show the structure (limits/subdivisions of sections) clearly in the score.

An example occurs in *The Court of Enquiry* at [M] in the prologue, while the three officers are interrogated about what they have seen at the lighthouse.¹⁷ In response to the first horn solo (posing the first question), each of the three officers gives an answer. The answers of Officers 3 and 1 are accompanied by music which conveys their outer mood quite straightforwardly, but also reveals the ‘inner storms’ of those frightened characters; the music builds a dramatic line with a long, slow increase of tension, a powerful climax, and quick relief at the end. In this the orchestration plays a pivotal role.

Andrew Clements claims that, in *The Lighthouse*, the range of expressive effects is more convincingly controlled and paced, and the musical and dramatic structure more tightly interwoven, than in *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* (1977), the composer's first chamber opera.¹⁸ Indeed, there is often a close, almost literal, relationship between textual imagery and music in this section, which can even become somewhat obvious and predictable. For instance, after a sudden calm, Officer 3 announces, ‘We have **cleared** Hell Point’, to trills and dense chords in marimba, celesta and guitar, all very softly, providing a ‘background soundscape’ of tension to this dangerous manoeuvre. ‘Uncanny, you can hear the creak of the **blackbacks' wings** ([M]+6), they loom, big as **ravens'** ([M]+12) is accompanied by short, high notes, played

¹⁷Davies affirms in the introduction to the score that ‘The setting - for the Prologue, suggestive of a court-room and, where the action moves into the incidents described, on board the ship, and to the steps up to the lighthouse door, and for the main scene, inside the lighthouse (with different levels) – should be simple and stark.’ Such assumption clearly attests the descriptive character of the narrative in the Prologue, but actually in the whole opera.

¹⁸Andrew Clements, ‘Lighthouse, The’, *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 1265.

glissando in piccolo and clarinet, and ‘through **the mist**’ (in the following bar), by harmonics on violin and viola, while a descending line, in both voice and cello, carries the words, ‘A curse is on our journey’ ([M]+18). A more complex response occurs to the mixed message of ‘This calm is more **nerve-racking** than the storm’ ([M]+18): a descending line is immediately followed by an increase of tension/movement/rhythm in the instruments into an instant climax. Officer 1’s dramatic call, ‘Look out ahead!/A light!/A triangle of lights!/Three lights, white – Three more lights, red, flashing, white, then **red!**’ ([N]+10-[O]+2) is treated thus: the instruments are placed in their highest registers, which conveys tension, an inner sensation of ominousness and affliction; the tenor (Officer 1) sings in broken, short, ascending and repetitive melodic lines, while at [O], on the word, ‘red’, all elements reach a climax, with faster rhythmic patterns (an allusion to the automatic lights of the lighthouse, present in other crucial moments on the score) being played until [P], at which point the notes are marked *lentissimo*. Finally, at ‘They've gone, lost in the mist’ [P], although the mood changes (this ‘coda’ is played at a slower tempo), a reminiscence of the ‘blackback's wings’ occurs in both piccolo and clarinet.

c) Characterization

As mentioned above, in the main act, subtitled ‘The Cry of the Beast’, when the three singers have already ‘become’ the vanished keepers, each of them sings a song. These three musical numbers constitute distinctive compositional units in the structure of the piece; they play a part in characterising the keepers

and present a wide emotional range.

Since the same singers play both keepers and officers, they have to cover a wide range as well as deliver a very precise *sprechgesang*. The vocal range of course is determined by the singer's own, but the composite characters have more than this in common. The tenor, whether Relief Officer 1, or Sandy, tends to be conciliatory; the baritone, Officer 2, or Blazes, more aggressive, especially in his dislike of the bass; and the bass, Officer 3, The Voice of the Cards, or Arthur, domineering and religious.¹⁹ This is reminiscent of the prisoners' songs in Janáček's *From the House of Dead*. As Boyden notes, 'The three men's songs bring to the surface the sense of trauma that has been lurking throughout'.²⁰

Blazes' song ([Q]-[V]), a Satanic, music-hall parody, begins with a rough ballad of street violence, accompanied by violin (fiddle), banjo (notated exclusively with chord symbols, thus indicating the improvisational character of its performance), and two animal ribs clacked in rhythm (again an improvisation). In 13 verses, Blazes cynically recounts a series of horrifying episodes of his youth, like murdering a woman for her money and allowing his father to be hanged for the crime.

Like a Victorian parlour song ('Oh my love, I dream of you, Your hair is gold, your eyes so blue'), Sandy's song ([X]-[Z]), with cello and out-of-tune upright piano, offers erotic expression, a thinly-disguised description of sexual bliss. While he (Sandy) repeats the song, as if he was lost in memory, the other

¹⁹Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 601.

²⁰Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 615.

two interject phrases from it, also expressing a sort of mental disorder; such a conjunction of the phrases, not presented in order, is disturbing, alerting the audience to the fact that the song is perhaps not exactly what it seems.²¹ The music brings an extra, subliminal set of information to the character, in conflict with what we see, and the words we hear.

Arthur's song ([B1]-[H1]), which reveals his religious guilt and violent impulses, is, according to Boyden, a hymn, warning of the 'Beast' to come.²² In eleven verses, with a typical 'Salvation Army' accompaniment of clarinet, horn, trumpet, trombone, and tambourine, the song begins with the Biblical story of the construction of the Golden Calf, and ends with Arthur's prophecy of the Calf's return (and God's alleged strategy of setting brother against brother in order to fight the Devil: 'Praise, praise the Lord').

Later in the opera, all three characters see elements and images ('ghosts') initially depicted in their songs. Indeed, these almost entirely contrasting musical numbers actually serve to resurrect in the minds of the respective characters ghosts from the past. Then, as the fog descends, each of the keepers becomes convinced that he is being claimed by the Antichrist.

As previously observed, at the end of the Prologue, the light of the lighthouse becomes automatic (with rhythmic patterns in the winds reminiscent of the automatic light of the lighthouse) because the keepers have disappeared. A similar situation occurs again at the end of the main section (offering a sort of structural symmetry), when the three men reappear as relief

²¹Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 604.

²²Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 616.

keepers, sent to replace the original keepers, they are met at the lighthouse by an infestation of rats, and leave. Since the same music returns, an infinite, cyclic repetition is implied. Such repetition serves to show how one event or action is experienced in terms of another, as happens when Blazes, Sandy and Arthur begin to play their roles over again, in their last hours.

The composer writes in the programme notes:

when the relief keepers enter the lighthouse, although they are not seen very clearly, it is possible that they are the same three we saw at the opening of the scene.

He also suggests the possibility that the whole episode is a play performed by ghosts who inhabit a place abandoned and boarded up for 80 years. Martin suggests that the opera's ambiguity is part of its appeal, allowing the audience to draw its own conclusions at the end of every performance, and therefore increasing scope for different staging and lighting as well.

The opera is still generally well received today, as Geoff Brown's comments about its last production at Buxton Festival indicate:

The Lighthouse wears its age well. By 1980 the mad clown in Maxwell Davies's music had been subdued; he'd refreshed his language with classical forms, descriptive writing, even take-home tunes. Indeed, his ear for sound pictures is so strong that Aaron Marsden [the stage director]'s black, minimalist setting stunts nothing, for the craggy rocks, wind gusts, and squawking sea birds are all in the music.²³

²³Geoff Brown, 'The Lighthouse at Buxton Festival', *The Times*, 22 July 2009 <http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/opera/article6721857.ece>, accessed 22 August 2011.

2. *L'amour de loin (Love from Afar)*

Saariaho's catalogue consists mostly of chamber works, but since the mid-90s she has turned increasingly to larger forces and broader structures, having composed, for instance, one oratorio and three operas: *L'amour de loin* (2000), *Adriana Mater* (2008), and *Emilie* (2010).²⁴

L'amour de loin lasts about two hours, and is divided into five acts and 13 scenes. The main roles are sung by a soprano, a baritone, and a mezzo-soprano who sings a male role. The composition also includes a male and a female choir, neither of which necessarily sings on stage with the soloists.²⁵ Included in the orchestra are extra percussionists and a keyboard player who produces the electronics, controlled by sound technicians.

The work was premiered at the Salzburg Festival on 15 August 2000 and the same production was given at the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, in November 2001, and in Santa Fe during the summer of 2002. Additional productions have been staged at Theater Bern, Switzerland, Darmstadt, Germany (2003), Helsinki (at the Finnish National Opera, 2004), and the Bergen International Festival in Bergen, Norway (2008).²⁶ The opera's British premiere, by the English National Opera was on 3 July, 2009, and was attended by this author. The world première of the opera was received enthusiastically, and in 2003 Saariaho was awarded the Grawemeyer Award

²⁴N.a., *Kaija Saariaho*, Home Page <<http://www.saariaho.org/>>, accessed on 22 August 2011.

²⁵Moisala, *Kaija Saariaho*, 96.

²⁶N.a., 'Kaija Saariaho: L'Amour de loin' : L'Amour de loin, *Chester Novello*, <http://www.chesternovello.com/Default.aspx?TabId=2432&State_3041=2&workId_3041=11937>, accessed 22 August 2011.

for *L'Amour de loin*, the foremost North American recognition given to a contemporary composer.²⁷

Works within Saariaho's oeuvre which directly precede the opera include *Château de l'âme* for soprano, female chorus and orchestra (1995); *Lonh* ('from afar', in Occitan, the language of medieval Provence), for soprano and electronics, based on another poem by Jaufré, *Lanquand li jorn*, whose music and poetry are quoted in the second scene of Act II of *Love from Afar*; and *Oltra mar* (1999) for orchestra and mixed chorus which links East and West, medieval poetics and the troubadour Rudel with the idea of a sea-crossing and its changes in atmosphere.²⁸

a) The plot and libretto

Sanna Iitti comments,

[T]he five-act structure of *L'amour de loin* reflects the tradition of French grand opera; the work's intimate nature, however, unites it with 20th-century French operas: Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, for example, and Olivier Messiaen's *St. François d'Assise*. The central action in these works takes place on a psychological level. *Pelléas*, like *Tristan*, deals with the theme of forbidden love, and Messiaen's Christian 'anti-opera' describes the spiritual love and the death of St. Francis.²⁹

The libretto by Amin Maalouf is based on the original stanzas of *La Vida Breve* by the twelfth-century troubador, Jaufré Rudel, Prince of Blaye (near Bordeaux, in present-day France), containing his autobiography and also the

²⁷N.a., 'Kaija Saariaho: L'Amour de loin', *Chester Novello* <http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?tabId=2432&State_3041=2&workId_3041=11937>, accessed 22 August 2011.

²⁸Moisala, *Kaija Saariaho*, 96.

²⁹Sanna Iitti, 'L'amour de loin: Kaija Saariaho's First Opera', *IAWM (The International Alliance for Women in Music) Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2002 (also published on the internet at http://www.iawm.org/articles_html/Iitti_saariaho.html, accessed 29 May 2011).

story of his distant love, Clemence, the Countess of Tripoli (today Lebanon).³⁰

Yvette Young writes that any opera libretto is like a 'feast menu' to which one needs to add imagination for its lack of colours and tonalities, and that Maalouf's text in *L'amour de loin*'s would then be a model of the genre.³¹

This is the plot: tired of the superficiality of life enjoyed by young men of his rank, Jaufré dreams of an idealised and distant love. Contrary to his expectations, a Pilgrim arrives from the Christian Kingdom of Outre-Mer, claiming that he knows of such a woman – Clémence, Countess of Tripoli. Jaufré becomes obsessed with that lady and decides to travel to meet her. Meanwhile, Clémence has heard, also from the pilgrim, of the devotion of this Prince from a faraway land. Initially suspicious, she soon is haunted by dreams of her distant lover. However Jaufré's voyage is hard and by the time he arrives in Tripoli, he is gravely ill. The lovers meet and declare their passion just before Jaufré dies in his beloved's arms.³² Clémence then rebels against Heaven, and decides to enter a convent. The last scene shows her in prayer, but her words are ambiguous and it is not clear to whom she is praying on her knees, her faraway God or her 'love from afar'.

Pirkko Moisala cites musicologist Liisamaija Hautsalo's understanding of opera as an allegory of the search for the transcendent, a longing for the divine; besides following more conventional opera traditions, *L'amour de loin*

³⁰Amin Maalouf is a French-Lebanese author based in France since 1976. As an editor of the *Jeune Afrique* magazine, he has traveled as a journalist to around sixty countries. In 1983, he began to be known as an author, with the success of novels such as *Léon l'Africain* and *Samarkand*. His book *Le Rocher de Tanios* (1993) was awarded the Prix Goncourt. From the opera programme notes.

³¹Yvette A. Guillemin Young, 'Maalouf, Amin. L'Amour de loin', *The French Review* 77.1 (October 2003): 199.

³²John Berry, from the programme booklet of *L'Amour de Loin*, the English National Opera Production (and the first UK staging), London, July 2009.

combines the troubadour tradition with the ideals of the Christian Crusades, Persian love poetry traditionally blended with mysticism, and Biblical texts, for which Hautsalo interprets the pilgrim as an angel, Jaufré's journey as the Christ's *via dolorosa*, and Clemence ('mercy' in French) as a symbol of compassion and as a gate through which Jaufré moves toward resurrection.³³

The programme notes by John Berry, for the ENO production (London, 2009), claim that the work's narrative explores themes of 'obsession and devotion, reality and illusion, the loneliness of the artist and the need of human beings to belong'.³⁴

The plot offers sets of pairs of elements: the story is about the encounter of a pair of lovers, a man and a woman who both seek their way between the mundane and the divine worlds; the man comes from the West, the woman from the East, therefore it is also about the meeting of these two different worlds, Orient and Occident; the plot moves from the land to the sea and vice-versa, with all the psychological as well as symbolical associations with both environments; finally, this is a story of inner conflicts between desire and fear.

b) The music

Kaija Saariaho is usually considered a French 'timbre' composer, whose music style emanates from 'the French spectral school,' at IRCAM in the 1970s.³⁵ In *L'Amour*, however, the composer's musical language is simplified,

³³Moisala, *Kaija Saariaho*, 97.

³⁴Berry, from the opera's programme booklet.

³⁵iitti, 'L'Amour de loin', accessed 29 May 2011.

be it either by the use of consonant harmonies throughout the score, the 'beauty' and 'intelligibility' of its melodies, or its many allusions to medieval modality and the elegiac songs of the troubadours.³⁶ But the opera continues to employ distinctive features of the composer's language, like impressionistic sound colours and spectralism, via the orchestration and electronics (in a minor role), as well as by expanded vocal and instrumental techniques.³⁷ More specifically, the work is structured on diatonic scales and layers of perfect fifths, enhanced by micro-intervals.³⁸

Iitti claims that several musical features of *L'amour* point to romantic rather than modern operatic conventions, and offers some examples in the score like the dream sequence during Jaufré's sea trip ('*Songe*'), or the prayer section at the end of the opera, both to be found in a large number of Romantic operas.³⁹ The inspiration of medieval legends links Saariaho and Wagner.⁴⁰ Indeed, two links between *Tristan* and *L'amour de loin* are the sea crossing and the theme of obsessive, unfulfilled love that ends in death.⁴¹ Furthermore, the arresting chord that is heard in the opening of *L'amour's* orchestral

³⁶Iitti, 'L'Amour de loin', accessed 29 May 2011.

³⁷Although subsequently following a different path from her French colleagues, Saariaho met and was influenced by the 'spectral music' of Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail when both were working at IRCAM (*Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique*) during the 80s. Basically, the compositional process of spectral music begins from the simulation of instrumental 'sound-spectra', whose components have been determined through computer analysis. Then, by the technique of 'instrumental synthesis', each instrument in an ensemble is treated as if it were a sine-tone in an additive synthesis computer programme. Julian Anderson and Kaija Saariaho, 'Julian Anderson Introduces the Work of Kaija Saariaho', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 133, No. 1788 (Dec. 1992), pp. 616-619.

³⁸Iitti, 'L'Amour de loin', accessed 29 May 2011.

³⁹During his sea trip, Jaufré awakens claiming to the Pilgrim that he saw Clémence while dreaming. His dream materializes on stage: Clémence appears by the seaside in a white robe gesturing to Jaufré and singing about his love that fills her mind. Iitti, 'L'Amour de loin', accessed 29 May 2011.

⁴⁰Like in another example of Saariaho's oeuvre, the 1994 violin concerto *Graal Théâtre*.

⁴¹Iitti, 'L'Amour de loin', accessed 29 May 2011.

introduction, *Traversé* (The Crossing, bb. 1-5), and recurs in different variants throughout the work, is reminiscent of the famous *Tristan*-chord.⁴² The chord in *L'amour* possesses symbolic meaning for Saariaho; she explains that it is a combination of Jaufré's and Clémence's respective chords.⁴³

The music imparts both a medieval and an Oriental atmosphere, each promoted, for example, by the perfect fourths and fifths on strings and harps accompanying the baritone's first song (Act 1, bb. 90-138). The medieval relies on original fragments of *Languan li jorn*, a famous song about memories of a distant love, by Jaufré Rudel himself, incorporated in the melodic line; the instruments (the harps, in particular) have the role of a direct impersonation of an arabic lute, or *vièle*, supposedly played by the singer (who actually mimes the playing).⁴⁴ Therefore, right after the instrumental introduction (*Traversé*, the first sea-crossing, which is very impressionistic, played by the full orchestra), Jaufré is introduced through this song, accompanied by a contrasting orchestral texture. This moment introduces some musical features that clearly establish mood, place, and time – when the ‘medieval soundscape’ is definitely forged. The same melody, though varied, is later sung in French to Clémence by the pilgrim, where he tells her that the words of the song are Jaufré's (Act 2, bb. 373-416). It is also sung twice in Occitanian by Clémence: firstly, when the Pilgrim leaves, and she remembers Jaufré's verses (Act 2, bb.

⁴²Pierre Michel, ‘Music to be Heard: On Kaija Saariaho's Oeuvre’, trans. and adapted by Steven Lindberg and Herbert Glass, Salzburger Festspiele program (2000).

⁴³Iitti, ‘L'Amour de loin’, accessed 29 May 2011.

⁴⁴On the score, at the beginning of this passage is this indication: *Un petit médiéval dans le sud-ouest de la France. Assis pour un siège, Jaufré Rudel tient dans les mains un instrument de musique, une vièle, ou un luth arabe. Il est en train de composer une chanson. Il agence des paroles, les notes.* In the opera, Saariaho uses four of the original *Languan li jorn* eight stanzas, with slight modifications. Iitti, ‘L'Amour de loin’, accessed 29 May 2011.

536-572); secondly, when Clémence is at the seashore, in Tripoli, and again recalls the troubadour's song (Act 3, bb. 426-493, here more expanded, intertwined with comments by the female chorus). The Oriental aspects are imparted by microtonality, used throughout the opera, as well as in the quite recurrent melismatic vocal lines, as in two moments in which Jaufré describes the supposed qualities of his imaginary lover (Act 1, bb. 277-297 and bb 461-472). These sustained melodies contrast with his own, constantly broken, declamation.

The orchestra employs 30 different instruments to produce colours and constantly shifts between various sound fields and thick harmonic structures. The orchestral textures are enriched by the vocal features, and, as mentioned before, an enlarged percussion section, plus electronics, besides the use of some Japanese and Renaissance timbres within the percussion set. For instance, instruments like the *o-daiko*, a drum used in kabuki theatre, is used in combination with the tambourine and the frame-drum, soon after the 'tempest' (from '*energico, gioviale*', Act 4, bb. 396-426).

The instrumentation also includes the use of expanded techniques and of some special division of sections, as when the first violin section is divided into four sub-groups for the whole *Quatrième tableau: Vers toi qui es si loin* (Act 5, bb. 711-786), during which Clémence mourns Jaufré's death; this is the last section of the opera, and the multi-divided strings here, played with the electronics and always *ppp*, produce an uncanny, 'mystical', soundscape, reflecting Clémence's inner thoughts and feelings.

In the first three acts, the characters are presented with sparse

orchestral textures: Jaufré's first appearance is accompanied solely by low strings and two harps; the Pilgrim's, mostly by strings, flutes and oboes (Act 1, bb. 320-401); to this latter are added harps and piano for Clémence's appearance in Act 2, b. 62 (since it is in a duet with the Pilgrim). The orchestral density increases along with the dramatic evolution of the theme of longing, becoming most dense in the fourth act, where it represents the sea across which Jaufré and the pilgrim travel in their journey to Tripoli.⁴⁵ At the beginning of *Deuxième tableau: Songe* ('dream'), Act 4, bb. 209-246, there is a note, '[N]ow the night is darker and the sea becomes more and more agitated'. Here (b. 209) the music begins with just the delicate sounds of the vibraphone and flutes; it achieves a climax at b.243, decreasing in intensity (but not in density) radically to *p* immediately after Jaufré's next entry (b. 247).

According to Stephen Johnson,

[In *L'amour de loin*,] some purely orchestral passages, or wordless choral passages within the orchestra, can be compared to Debussy's *Sirènes*, or *Nocturnes*: sensuous, free-floating sounds, rising and falling, emerging and retreating, yet 'moving' only as the sea moves – the sea which accompanies everything in the opera.⁴⁶

This refers more particularly to Act 4, *Troisième Tableau: Tempête* - a tempest, during the last sea crossing, bb. 440-569; it can also be compared to Debussy's *La Mer: III- Dialogue du vent et de la mer*, rehearsal number 49.

⁴⁵This growth in density through the score is pointed out in Moisala, *Kaija Saariaho*, 99.

⁴⁶Stephen Johnson, 'Hearing Ourselves: Introducing Kaija Saariaho's *L'Amour de loin*', from the programme booklet of *L'Amour de Loin*, the English National Opera Production (and the first UK staging), London, July 2009. Citing Edward Gardner's own words about the composer's style and the music of the opera, '[*L'amour de Loin*] is a piece governed by and defined by the sea'. Also from ENO programme booklet.

In the fifth act the instrumental texture gradually diminishes with the decreasing dramatic tension, to regain power with Clémence's final rage and curse, after Jaufré's death (from the note: 'Her sadness gradually gives place to anger, to revolt . . . ' [b. 522])), lasting until b. 595, when she is interrupted by the entire chorus. The last purely instrumental section (bb, 637-656) appears after a climax at b. 633 ('*Silence!*', by the chorus marked *fff*). At the very end, only the electronics occupy the sound space, vanishing 'into the air'.⁴⁷

The synopsis of the plot at the head of the score is entitled: *The 12th Century, in Aquitaine, in Tripoli, and at sea*. Thus, one can conclude that the music of *L'Amour de loin* is particularly designated to invoke the images suggested by the text.

c) Characterization

The text here also offers substantial potential for characterization, Jaufré and Clémence being self-ruling nobles whose longing for something beyond their ordinary lives guides them to transformational consequences, whereas the pilgrim is an ambiguous character, a mediator, actually an innocent messenger of death between the couple and their two worlds.

The vocal lines are generally classically diatonic or modal, and are always clearly in the foreground. Johnson points out that the vocal lines are often cued by the orchestra, which contains either the first or other crucial notes of the vocal phrases, and even offers distinctive supporting pitches

⁴⁷In the score, at the last rehearsal letter (Z5), we read, '[T]he music blends gradually into air and light'.

distinguished by colour in the instrumentation.⁴⁸

Jaufré's lines are often narrow in range and stepwise-moving, ornamented with trills, quick dynamic shifts and expressive pauses, in a manner freely inspired by the medieval troubadour style.⁴⁹ They are accompanied by clearly-delineated perfect fourths and fifths, mostly arpeggiated in the harps. (See for instance, Act 1, *Premier tableau: Jaufré Rudel*, bb. 90-138.)

Fifths in the harp also accompany Clémence's singing, which also contains plenty of ornaments built upon seconds and thirds, bright and translucent sound colours, short *glissandi*, rising scales and wide leaps within a much larger vocal range, introducing a certain Oriental mood. (See for instance, Act 2, *Premier Tableau: Clémence*, bb. 148-150.)⁵⁰ The Pilgrim, in some contrast, is frequently introduced with a rapid descending motif in the piccolo and three other flutes, as in Act 2, *Premier Tableau: Clémence*, bb. 62-68.⁵¹

Male and female choral voices are presented differently from each other. Occasionally they represent the 'voice of the people, of the crowd' (as in traditional opera, hearking back to Greek tragedy), commenting on the circumstances and guiding the main characters. Here, the male choir represents Jaufré's companions (Act 1, bb. 128-319), while the female stands for Clémence's friends from Tripoli (Act 3, bb. 459-579). As already pointed out, the choruses also contribute to the orchestral overall colour in the building

⁴⁸Johnson, 'Hearing Ourselves', ENO programme booklet.

⁴⁹Iitti, 'L'Amour de loin', accessed 29 May 2011.

⁵⁰Moisala, *Kaija Saariaho*, 98.

⁵¹Moisala, *Kaija Saariaho*, 98.

of soundscapes, like the sea and its wavelike sounds, when they can represent a ‘voice of nature, elemental or animal’.⁵² (See Act 4, from *Premier tableau: Mer indigo*, to *Deuxième tableau: Songe*, inclusive, bb. 4-369.) Finally, for Clémence's ‘spiritual transcendence’ in the last act, the choruses sing a sort of a hymn (Act 5, *Troisième tableau: J'espère encore*, bb 467-634).

While all these features in the score are very effective for the characterization of the main players, a characterizing of place and mood is still the major ingredient of the opera.

3. *The Minotaur*

Birtwistle's operas so far are *Punch and Judy* (1967, one-act chamber opera); *The Mask of Orpheus* (1984, with tape, winner of the 1987 Grawemeyer Award in Music Composition); *Yan Tan Tethera, A Mechanical Pastoral* (1986, chamber opera); *Gawain* (1990); *The Second Mrs Kong* (1984); *The Last Supper* (2000, with tape); *The Io Passion* (2004, chamber opera), and *The Minotaur* (2008).⁵³

Birtwistle's music is difficult to define because of its quite idiosyncratic sense of organic development, exuberant harmonies, intricate and multi-layered counterpoint, and rich orchestration, but Matthew Boyden, in *The Rough Guide to Opera*, describes it thus:

Despite acknowledged debts to Stravinsky and Varèse, Harrison Birtwistle's music sounds as if it has sprung into being from somewhere outside the mainstream of European music, evoking the

⁵²Johnson, ‘Hearing Ourselves’, ENO programme booklet.

⁵³N.a., ‘Composers: Birtwistle, Harrison’, *Boosey & Hawkes*, accessed 06 June 2011.

ceremonies of Greek tragedy, the ritual violence of ancient myths, the bleak and depopulated landscapes of rural England. Many of Birtwistle's compositions have the massive, rough-hewn quality of a prehistoric monument, but he can also produce music of spare lyrical beauty and, on occasion, haunting delicacy.⁵⁴

Griffiths quotes Birtwistle as describing the orchestral scores of his operas as musical dramas without voices, saying that the orchestra in *The Mask of Orpheus*, for instance, has a life of its own, besides responding to the events on stage.⁵⁵ Jonathan Cross claims that Birtwistle's work is 'theatrical' in whatever form, explaining that the composer's musical thought is inherently dramatic, with a sense of theatre that embraces his entire compositional aesthetic, thus pervading all his scores.⁵⁶ Corroborating this, Rhian Samuel affirms that Birtwistle is 'foremost a dramatic composer', who has established a musical style 'instantly recognizable and consistent from opera to opera.'⁵⁷ In fact, Birtwistle regards his experiences as Music Director at the National Theatre (1975-1983) as the 'most fulfilling of his compositional career', during which the composer has probably forged his theatrical sensibilities, with a background that includes Stanilasvsky's naturalistic 'Method Acting', Brecht's 'anti-dramaticism', Beckett's 'Theatre of the Absurd', and the cross-disciplinary Happenings that emerged in America and Europe in the 1950s.⁵⁸ Through the composer's interest in anti-narrative, stylization, formalizing and framing devices, repetition, folklore, masks and puppetry, his music is somehow connected with many of the radical twentieth-century theatre and

⁵⁴Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 609.

⁵⁵Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music and After* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 328.

⁵⁶Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle: Man, Mind, Music*, 65.

⁵⁷Samuel, 'The Music of The Minotaur', 23.

⁵⁸Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle: Man, Mind, Music*, 65-68.

drama, particularly both ‘Holy’ and ‘Rough’ Theatres.⁵⁹

Boyden asserts that Birtwistle is obsessed by matters of myth, ritual, and time, which he uses to create both works for the theatre and purely instrumental ones. Moreover, according to Salzman and Desi, the use of such well-known subjects like myths, for example, frees the composer from the narrative, allowing him to present the material ‘in a sequence of ritualistic *tableaux vivants* in the manner pioneered by Stravinsky’.⁶⁰

The composer's first chamber opera, *Punch and Judy*, reveals his predilection for non-progressive narratives (also found in *The Mask of Orpheus*), since its story is not told in sequence from the beginning. Thus, what are presented are multiple time-shifts and character mutations, as well as elisions, juxtapositions and reconstructions of numerous readings of the story or myth.⁶¹ However, it should be noted that, in the later opera *Gawain*, the use of time-shifts began to be incorporated into a narrative, anticipating the arrival of *The Minotaur* and its much more straightforward story-line. This opera, Birtwistle's seventh, received its premiere at The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, on 15 April 2008.

a) The plot and libretto

In his preface to the score, entitled ‘The Genesis of The Minotaur’, Birtwistle

⁵⁹The so-called ‘Holy Theatre’ is concerned with myth, ritual and magic, advocated by French playwright, poet, actor and theatre director, Antonin Artaud. The ‘Rough Theatre’, as called by Peter Brook, revealed an interest in immediate, non-naturalistic, non-narrative ideas and techniques, more particularly the concern for masks and puppets, very common in the theatre of the early 20th century, but also in Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and *Pulcinella*, and Shoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, for instance. Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle: Man, Mind, Music*, 66-67.

⁶⁰Salzman, and Desi, *The New Music Theater*, 217.

⁶¹Boyden, *The Rough Guide to Opera*, 610.

observes that this particular myth has been present in his creative world for a long time, as in *Earth Dances* (1985), originally conceived as a ballet, in which there is a reference to the 'death of the Minotaur' in the orchestral score; later, the ideas for an opera started to grow, much influenced by Friedrich Dürrenmatt's ballet scenario *Ballade*, with its images of a mirrored labyrinth; also influential was Picasso's *Minotauromachia*.⁶²

This is the synopsis:⁶³

The well-known myth tells the story of the beast Minotaur (Asterios), half-man, half-bull, imprisoned in the Labyrinth on the island of Crete. He was the offspring of Pasiphae, wife to King Minos, the result of her unnatural lust for the bull from the sea – sent by the god Poseidon at the request of Minos. Athens is required each year to send young men and women for sacrifice to the Minotaur. This is an act of revenge for the death of Minos's son at the hands of the Athenians. Theseus, putative son of Aegeus, king of Athens (though perhaps the son of Poseidon) offers to go to Crete on the occasion of one such sacrifice. His only intention is to slay the Minotaur and thus cancel the debt.

In the first part the innocents are prominent, with their arrival in Crete, culminating with their death at the bullring at the heart of the labyrinth:

At the start of the opera Ariadne, daughter of Minos and Pasiphae, greets the Innocents as they arrive from Athens. Among them is Theseus. She is attracted to him, but they are suspicious of each other's motives. Ariadne is desperate to escape the prison of the island - the prison of her legacy - and sees in Theseus the possibility of escape. In his dreams, the Minotaur - otherwise inarticulate - expresses the human side of his dual personality. In two symmetrical scenes, one in each half of the opera, he has visions of Ariadne, of his double, and of a shadowy figure (it is Theseus) who poses a threat to him, though he cannot understand what this is. In a bloodthirsty but ritualised scene at the centre of the work, the sacrificial victims are caught and gored by the Minotaur. Keres, female death-spirits in the form of harpies, tear the hearts from the near-dead and feed on the bloody carcasses.⁶⁴

⁶²See the preface of the opera's score.

⁶³The synopsis is taken from: n.a., *Boosey & Hawkes* 'Composers: Birtwistle, Harrison', accessed 05 June 2011.

⁶⁴N.a., 'Composers: Birtwistle, Harrison', *Boosey & Hawkes* accessed 05 June 2011.

The second part, although more varied, also reaches its climax with a slaying in the bullring, now of the Minotaur by Theseus:

Ariadne attempts to persuade Theseus to take her with him back to Athens, but he refuses. She consults the Oracle in the hope of finding a way to ensure that, if Theseus is successful in his fight with the Minotaur, he will be able to find his way back out of the Labyrinth. She believes that, by acquiring this knowledge, she will achieve the kind of bargaining power to force him to do what she wants. The Oracle, speaking through the medium of a priest, or Hierus, tells Ariadne to give Theseus a ball of twine that he can unwind as he goes through the Labyrinth and then follow back to safety. In answer to her insistent question, the Oracle also confirms to Ariadne that she and Theseus will set sail for Athens together, though this prophecy, while accurate, hints at Ariadne's downfall. The final scene of the opera concerns the fight between Theseus and the Minotaur, and the latter's death. As his life ebbs, the Minotaur acquires the power of human language: he describes the emptiness of his existence. As Ariadne and Theseus sail away, the Keres return and feed upon the body of the Minotaur, mirroring the end of the first half of the drama.⁶⁵

The opera is divided in two 'parts' (or acts). Rhian Samuel offers a table of the structure of the opera, which is given below (see Table 1).⁶⁶ The libretto's and the opera's structure were created simultaneously, therefore it is difficult to extract one from the other, as shown in the table above.

As Table 1 shows, the placement of the two scenes of violent rape and gore of the innocents at the first part, and the duel between Theseus and Asterios in same location in the second makes clear that the parts, if not symmetric, do balance each other.

⁶⁵N.a., 'Composers: Birtwistle, Harrison', *Boosey & Hawkes*, accessed 05 June 2011.

⁶⁶This table, as well as most of the following study concerning the musical structure and other features including elements of narrative in *The Minotaur*, is based on Rhian Samuel's analysis of the work. See Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 215-236, and 'The Music of *The Minotaur*', 23-29.

Table 1. The structure of Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*

PART 1	PART 2
1. Arrival of the Innocents in Crete.	8. A Proposition
<i>1st INSTRUMENTAL 'TOCCATA'</i>	<i>3rd INSTRUMENTAL 'TOCCATA'</i>
2. The Choice	9. The Minotaur Dreams (2)
3. The Labyrinth (in the maze)	10. The Oracle at Psychro, the home of the Snake Priestess, with arresting music and exotic characters.
<i>2nd INSTRUMENTAL 'TOCCATA'</i>	
4. Ariadne	11. A Blind Bargain
5. The Labyrinth (in the 'bullring'): exchange between the Minotaur and a young girl (who is raped, the first victim).	12. The Labyrinth (in the 'bullring'): exchange between the Minotaur and Theseus (a better-matched opponent, now).
6. The Minotaur Dreams (1), when the creature is able to speak (sing), revealing his human aspect. Here he confronts himself, as well as Ariadne and Theseus, in the mirror.	13. Death of the Minotaur (in the 'bullring'), a (2 nd) culmination point, with a concentration of violent actions, and a baying crowd to evoke the Roman sacrifice of Christian martyrs.
7. Death of the Innocents (in the 'bullring'), a (1 st) culmination point, with a concentration of violent actions, and a baying crowd to evoke the Roman sacrifice of Christian martyrs.	

b) The music

When asked about his experience of Birtwistle's music, Antonio Pappano (the conductor of *the Minotaur* in its first production) pointed out several of its qualities, like 'challenging to the ear, but there are great depths to the orchestral music', as well as 'wonderfully written for the voices: through-and-through operatic'.⁶⁷

A memorable feature of the opera is the inclusion of independent sections of instrumental music: three brief 'toccatas' reinforce the music's role in the opera, and contributing to the pacing: two of them (see numbers 1 and 8, in Table 1) are placed after the first scene in each part, and a third one after the

⁶⁷Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 226.

first Labyrinth scene (see Table 1, number 3), thus extending the distance between the two violent scenes. Toccata 1 is the briefest one (10 bars), and starts about 20 minutes after the beginning of the opera; it is soft, not too slow but very rhythmic, in a sort of orchestral *ostinato*, with six concomitant figurations played ten times, in blocks of instruments: (1) *legato* in the high/medium woodwinds; (2) tremolos in the violas and cellos; (3) *staccato* in the horns (in sets of six semiquavers); (4) *legato* in the low winds (in sets of five semiquavers); (5) mostly *pizzicato* in the divided violins; (6) low brasses reinforcing the divided double-bass. Parts of these rhythmic figurations, particularly in the horns, re-appear sometimes in the next scene. Toccata 2 (16 bars), is quite similar to toccata 1 in terms of orchestral texture and rhythmic *ostinato* (with a different combination of instruments, though). The intermediary Toccata (3) provides time for releasing the tension accumulated from the events in the Labyrinth, therefore supporting (and preparing) the following more calm and slow scene of the Minotaur's dream; it has 26 bars, and is much less rhythmic than the other two. These moments of purely instrumental music (when composition itself can be even more substantial, thus putting on view the composer's widely acclaimed ingenuity) serve to intensify music's potent role in this opera.⁶⁸ They were accompanied, in the first production, by video clips of a sea, in close-up and slow motion. Similar clips also appeared at the opening of the opera.

⁶⁸Samuel, 'The Music of The Minotaur', 23.

c) Characterization

Besides its clear concern with structure, the music in *The Minotaur* helps forge the characters, bestowing on them a wide range of distinctive attributes as well as many subtle nuances. The composer admits that the vocal writing in this opera is different from, and even easier than, in previous works.⁶⁹ As examples, in *The Minotaur*, the protagonist is given many recitatives ending in quite steady (not angular) lines; this contrasts with the lines full of stepwise motion in his arias.⁷⁰ From her first aria, 'The Moon's an eye that cannot blink or look away' (1, Arrival, bb. 54-97), or even in her duet with Theseus (2, The Choice, bb. 205-264), almost all of Ariadne's lines descend, like a sigh, from a high note.⁷¹

At the end of his preface to the score, the composer says that he first asked David Harsent, the librettist, to find a 'language for the characters', attesting to his own concern with characterization in *The Minotaur*.⁷² Interestingly, this attention to the three protagonists and their emotions and motivations contrasts with the focus on the notion of a re-jigged narrative in his earlier operas.⁷³

Asterios, the beast, naturally occupies the central position in the plot, although his presentation is simple and unproblematic in comparison to both Ariadne's and Theseus's.⁷⁴ His primitive behaviour, particularly during his violent, energetic actions onstage (dictated by his animalistic side), admits

⁶⁹Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 219.

⁷⁰Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 219.

⁷¹Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 219.

⁷²From the preface of the opera's score.

⁷³Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 215, 230.

⁷⁴Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 230.

such a direct characterization in the score, when the music can coherently intensify the drama of a vulnerable and troubled creature who suffers from ‘a rejection of his gender’.⁷⁵ Harsent declares that the only truly innocent person here is the Minotaur, because he was like that by nature, while Ariadne and Theseus have a corrupt pact.⁷⁶ Indeed, for Stephen Graham, morality is actually an important theme here, mentioning that the libretto suggests, right at the beginning of the opera, the image of the moon as an ‘unblinking eye looking down on us all’.⁷⁷

Nonetheless, much of the dramatic tension of the work emanates from the juxtaposition of the inner human conscience against the animal's outwardly aspect, most ostensibly in every dream of Asterios, when Theseus is presented as a reflection of himself in a mirror. Thus, as stressed repeatedly in the opera, the distance between man and animal is almost inexistent, as it is, basically, in nature itself: one is not good or bad; Evil lies in everyone.⁷⁸ This alternating focus on the inner and outer worlds, as well as the pagan ‘environment’ in the opera seemed to the composer to be a ‘genuine extension of the Orpheus idea’ (which is quite recurrent in his catalogue of works).⁷⁹

The animal aspect of the Minotaur is vocally expressed during his attempts to speak, although the only sounds he can produce are roars, or ‘basic

⁷⁵Samuel, ‘Birtwistle's The Minotaur’, 231.

⁷⁶Samuel, ‘Birtwistle's The Minotaur’, 226.

⁷⁷Stephen Graham, ‘Harrison Birtwistle: The Minotaur’, *MusicalCriticism.com*, 15 April 2008 <<http://www.musicalcriticism.com/opera/roh-minotaur-0408.shtml>>, accessed 19 May 2011.

⁷⁸The composer asserted that what really interested him about the Minotaur was his split personality. Samuel, ‘Birtwistle's The Minotaur’, 218.

⁷⁹Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle in recent years*, 152-153. Birtwistle's other works which incorporate the Orpheus myth are: *Nenia: the Death of Orpheus* (1970, for soprano and five players), the opera *Mask of Orpheus* (1986), *The Corridor* (2009, a scena for soprano, tenor and ensemble).

bull noises', as explained by the composer.⁸⁰ He presents this vocal feature from his first appearance, in Scene 5, The Labyrinth. It is through music that Asterios can finally reach realisation, for at the end, he sings like a man whilst conscious, after having only done this previously in his dreams. But his singing is often undercut by the limited range and rough contours of his lines (with many recitatives and with arias full of stepwise motion), more particularly during his dreams.

With actions rather unusual for a traditional hero, Theseus is also direct and simple, dedicated to his task of killing the Minotaur. As a character that seems to be just functional in terms of delivering the plot, like a mere tool of fate, his courage and heroism are not at all the focus of the opera: absent from most of the first part, Theseus is practically unnoticeable after having stabbed Asterios.⁸¹

Samuel claims that both the tragic Minotaur and the heroic Theseus are characters clearly fashioned by the libretto, whereas Ariadne's attributes are mostly created by the music.⁸² In fact, Ariadne is so crucial a character to the opera that she sings in every scene except the last. Graham concurs, claiming that she is 'decidedly not the meek heroine nor the scheming shrew that is women's fate in most Western art, but rather a complex and conflicted presence at the heart of the narrative'.⁸³ Samuel suggests that it is Ariadne's predicament that underpins it. Only she has a special relationship with the orchestra, having even an exclusive instrument, the saxophone, to accompany

⁸⁰Samuel, 'Birtwistle's The Minotaur', 223.

⁸¹Samuel, 'Birtwistle's The Minotaur', 231.

⁸²Samuel, 'Birtwistle's The Minotaur', 215.

⁸³Graham, 'Harrison Birtwistle: The Minotaur', accessed on 19 May 2011.

her and amplify her expressive vocal lines, and the instrument's similarities with the voice in terms of tessitura seem to have pleased the composer.⁸⁴ Concerning this, it is interesting how the ever-present saxophone interacts with the character, giving her an extra 'layer' of interpretation, and therefore another dimension. With frequent unisons between the instrument and the vocal lines, for instance, the saxophone confirms Ariadne's utterances, never contradicting them.⁸⁵ In Scene 4, Ariadne, the saxophone's staff in the score is even located right above Ariadne's. The composer admits, though, that the instrument is not her *alter ego* but an extension of her voice, despite featuring only 'when she is around'.⁸⁶ In a case similar to Ariadne's, Theseus's lines are often duplicated and extended by instruments like violas (1, bb 269-292), 3 clarinets (1, bb 298-311), and cor anglais (2, bb 85-95); such instruments, being of different colours, probably suggest that his 'speech' is less constant than hers.⁸⁷

Samuel gives various examples of such instrumental and vocal interaction in the score, as when Ariadne re-enacts the story of her mother mating with Poseidon, for which the saxophone is marked 'a bit sleazy', in the same Scene 4 (bb 1-107); or when the instrument is reduced to desperate high Gs while she describes the birth of her half-brother, following her deep final sigh of dejection, with the saxophone descending from high Ab to low F (4, 55-57); notwithstanding, when Ariadne suggests Theseus should break his promise, the instrument 'refuses' to accompany her in such amoral and

⁸⁴Samuel, 'Birtwistle's The Minotaur', 233.

⁸⁵Samuel, 'Birtwistle's The Minotaur', 233.

⁸⁶Samuel, 'Birtwistle's The Minotaur', 218, and 'The Music of The Minotaur', 24.

⁸⁷Samuel, 'The Music of The Minotaur', 28.

ruthless behaviour (Scene 8, A Proposition); also, her last and desperate cry is unaccompanied.⁸⁸

Ariadne's characterization is an example of how music can contradict what is being said or suggested in the text, thus featuring some remarkable discrepancies between score and libretto. In the latter, she would be assigned to an 'operatic damnation': she has no courage, and besides being passive she is malevolent; thus the text makes her fearful and distrustful.⁸⁹ In the former, through many beautiful and expressive vocal lines (which shows an evolution of Birtwistle's writing for the female voice), she is eloquent in her expression of loneliness and despair, but is always trustful. Through the music, she is presented as courageous and honest.⁹⁰ In fact, Samuel claims that Ariadne is the most rounded character in the opera, particularly given the dualistic treatment she has been awarded by text and music in the work. Although acting mostly as an observer, Ariadne's crucial contribution to the plot is to learn from the Oracle how to negotiate the Labyrinth.⁹¹

Graham lists the musical characteristics of *The Minotaur*, claiming they are typical of Birtwistle:

its mobile and angular motifs (continuously hocketed and varied) that are contrasted with occasional passages of sustained and hushed choruses; its reliance in the vocal writing upon a modern idiom of recitation and *Sprechgesang*; its banging percussive antiphonies (especially powerful in the ritual death scenes where two on-stage drummers play rolling fanfares on tom toms in support of the baying shouts of the chorus who long for Asterios to gladiatorially slaughter the innocents); and its colourful timbral insights (for instance the wailing alto saxophone that shadows Ariadne, or the skeletal unpitched

⁸⁸Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 233.

⁸⁹Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 233.

⁹⁰Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 233.

⁹¹Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 233.

wood glissandi of the Minotaur's death scene).⁹²

The Minotaur received good reviews of its premiere at Covent Garden, London, in April 2008:

The premiere of Harrison Birtwistle's long awaited new opera *The Minotaur*, written in collaboration with the poet David Harsent, was given on Tuesday to a packed Royal Opera House where the sense of occasion and of expectation was palpable and potent. It was a pleasure to be in attendance and to be able to savour a moment in which contemporary music could demonstrate its vitality and pertinence. Pomp and circumstance (somewhat antithetical to the earthy Birtwistle and to new music in general) were for once welcome bedfellows of contemporary opera.⁹³

When Birtwistle speaks, the world jumps to attention: his new opera for Covent Garden has come heralded with all the drums and trumpets the media can muster. And what a perfect topic for a man past his three-score-and-ten, but still at the height of his powers.⁹⁴

The Minotaur is not the only soul trapped in an inspired new opera bound by a single thread.⁹⁵

II. COMMON ELEMENTS

Having considered the main components of each opera separately, we can now extract what, if anything, these three disparate works have in common. The discussion will begin by comparing the musical materials of the three operas, and the ways in which they are manipulated. It will then identify common symbols or topics favoured by these composers. These are (i) the love triangle;

⁹²Graham, 'Harrison Birtwistle', accessed 19 May 2011.

⁹³Graham, 'Harrison Birtwistle', accessed 19 May 2011.

⁹⁴Michael Church, 'First Night: The Minotaur, Royal Opera House, London', *The Independent*, 16 April 2008 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/reviews/first-night-the-minotaur-royal-opera-house-london-809725.html>>, accessed 22 August 2011.

⁹⁵Paul Driver, 'The Minotaur at the Royal Opera House : the Sunday Times review', *The Sunday Times*, 20 April 2008 <http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/opera/article3758135.ece>, accessed 23 August 2011.

(ii) the sea; (iii) violence; (iv) madness; (v) exoticism; (vi) lack of fulfillment and (vii) death.

1. Musical materials and their manipulation

Although the three operas studied here are quite different in many respects, including size, compositional style and orchestral technique, they share a number of major musical features. For example, the way Davies's music in *The Lighthouse* responds to the text in evoking landscapes, facts, characters, actions, and emotions can be compared to Saariaho's impressionistic score, which also refers to aspects of 'the 12th Century, Aquitaine, Tripoli, and at sea'. Word-painting and sound-metaphor occur only occasionally in *The Minotaur*; for example, the function of the toccatas in this opera relates more to pacing and mood than to the sea images projected onstage (the creation of the designer, not the composer, though inspired by the work's theme).

Another feature also held in common by the first two operas, but rejected in the third, is referential music. In *The Lighthouse*, as described earlier, three 1900-style songs appear; in *L'Amour*, fragments of a famous medieval song by Jaufré Rudel are added to the vocal melodies, while features of Oriental music are also exploited; *The Minotaur*, though, offers no trace of referential music.

Finally, although musical characterization is indeed a common concern of the three composers compared here, Birtwistle's dualistic development of Ariadne's character through music is found neither in *The Lighthouse* nor in

L'amour; in both, the music mostly supports the characterization stipulated by the libretto.

2. Topics and Symbols

A comparison of these works reveals some interesting (and curious) preoccupations in their scores and librettos. For instance, a number of symbols appear in all three operas, some of which can be traced from operas earlier in the twentieth century, if not from further back in music history.

i) The love triangle

In each of the three works, there are three main singing roles (although in *The Lighthouse* each singer plays two characters). This seems to follow, to a greater or lesser extent, the trend of some of the major works of the early twentieth century, not just operas but ballets too: Wagner's *Tristan*, Debussy's *Pelléas*, Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* and Berg's *Wozzeck* all present a love-triangle as the basis of the plot. (On the other hand, one can hardly characterize *Peter Grimes*, Britten's most-acclaimed opera from later in the century, in this way.) All three operas under consideration, though by different means, exploit this notion. One could say that in *The Lighthouse* the relationship between Blazes, Sandy and Arthur is not characterized by either sexual attraction or platonic love, but, regardless, their troubled relationship (worsened by their deep isolation) develops dramatically in an ambiguous triangulation that invites speculation and interpretation. Blazes is an

aggressive man; Sandy (either a male or female name) is more delicate, conventionally feminine in his behaviour (thus an ambivalent character); Arthur is an ambiguous man, in a clear conflict with his own religiosity. Indeed, ambiguity is one of the most noteworthy features in *The Lighthouse's* plot; underlining this, a homosexual relationship between Blazes and Sandy was proffered in a German production in Gelsenkirchen, 1984.⁹⁶ In *L'amour de loin*, Jaufré is a young man, determined to find a reason for his life; Clémence, the female, is the most important character in the opera, for her evolution in the drama towards a state of revelation; the Pilgrim, the androgynous character (a female singer playing a male role), is therefore naturally ambiguous, here an innocent messenger. In *The Minotaur*, Theseus is a violent, determined man; Ariadne, the female, is also the most important character in the opera, for her musical treatment; Asterios, being half man, half animal, is therefore naturally ambiguous, here, the innocent victim of his condition.

(ii) The Sea

The sea is probably the most powerful symbol in the three operas. In the first production of *The Minotaur*, it was even presented visually, by video images in slow motion (and close-up) of high sea waves projected on stage during the orchestral interludes, a strong reminiscence of Britten's 'Four Sea Interludes' from *Peter Grimes*. And indeed, at the end of both operas, the stage directions

⁹⁶ Martin, *Twentieth Century Opera*, 606.

require that a 'black-sailed boat' be shown on the sea's horizon.⁹⁷ In *L'amour de loin*'s first production (Salzburg, 2000), there was literally water all over the stage floor, like a pool, to represent the sea, as we can see its recording in the commercial DVD of the opera.⁹⁸ In the ENO production (London Coliseum, 2009), all sorts of visual representations of the sea were used, with a predominance over other staging aspects.

In the three works under consideration, the sea is used to accentuate the characters' feeling of isolation and impotence towards the imponderable: the lighthouse is situated in a faraway island, and so is the labyrinth; the lovers in *L'amour* are separated by a huge sea, which in fact all characters have to cross once in a while, often passing through a dangerous storm, in a clear symbolic allusion to a challenging stage in their lives, a rite of passage. And Ariadne begins *The Minotaur* with a lament about her isolation on sea-surrounded Crete. Again, this symbol harks back to *Tristan*, if not to *Pelléas*, though in the latter opera, it is water itself that is the powerful symbol.

(iii) Violence

This comparison also serves to highlight the major difference with regard to the themes of these operas: the treatment of violence. *The Minotaur* stands out for this; the scenes of rape (in particular the rape of the young female victim)

⁹⁷As discussed in Chapter 2, in the first production, this requirement at the end of the opera was ignored. See Samuel, 'Birtwistle's *The Minotaur*', 235.

⁹⁸The *Deutsche Grammophon* released a DVD (2005) of the second production (first American production, 2002) of the Opera, with Diane Upshaw (Clémence), Gerald Finley (Jaufré), and Monica Groop (The Pilgrim), Esa-Pekka Salonen (conducting the Finnish National Orchestra), and Peter Sellars (Stage Director).

and killing, vividly enacted, are amongst the most brutal in any opera.⁹⁹ In *The Lighthouse*, violence is incipient, never spelled out on stage; and violence is nowhere a theme in *L'amour*. Perhaps the conclusion that may be drawn from this is that, despite the violent age in which we live, in the world of opera, the success of a work does not depend on the degree of spelled-out violence it contains.

(iv) Madness

The lack of control by the protagonists over their own behaviour and feelings is another feature of these works. Besides desperation, common to all the isolated keepers in the claustrophobic lighthouse, Arthur expresses his inner conflicts with anger and contradictory religious discourses; Jaufré is consumed by both fear and desire; Asterios is driven to madness and vicious rage by his inexorable duality.

Madness of course is the main theme of Berg's *Wozzeck*, probably one of the most influential operas of the early twentieth century, but the theme harks back to Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532) and the many settings of this work by, for instance, Vivaldi and Handel.¹⁰⁰ Another famous example is that of the heroine in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835). As Dr Neil Brenner points out, 'Initially madness equalled beauty and freedom [;] it then

⁹⁹So it is particularly ironic that the director of the premiere felt the need to play down the sexual scenes (discussed in Ch.2).

¹⁰⁰For Ariosto, see Tim Carter, 'Ariosto, Ludovico', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 1992 edn.), 191-192; for Vivaldi's *Orlando Furioso*, see Eric Cross, 'Orlando', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 1992 edn.), 756, and for Handel's *Orlando*, see Anthony Hicks, 'Orlando', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 1992 edn.), 756-758.

[by the time of *Wozzeck*] metamorphosed into a living hell.¹⁰¹

(v) The Dream

The notion of the dream may be linked to madness in that neither concerns rational consciousness. It is present in the three operas studied here: in *The Lighthouse*, the whole opera itself is a sort of a dream, in terms that reality is treated in a vague manner, when the sequence of facts, mostly told through the memories and impressions of the characters, is naturally overshadowed by the characters' inner conflicts, intensifying the mystery and suspense that pervades this musical drama; in *L'amour de loin*, dream is the actual generator of the whole plot, since both lovers firstly dream of a different life and place, and then, of each other, before Jaufré's eventual unfortunate journey across the sea; in *The Minotaur*, Asterios's dreams, probably the main contribution of the opera's creators to the original myth, comprise one of the most remarkable dramatic issues in the opera, which is the collision of the two opposite 'natures' of the protagonist. The dream is found in earlier twentieth-century operas too, notably Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Like Britten's libretto, many have their roots much further back, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when classical literature (from Greece and Rome) was much in vogue, with its references to the mythical and fantastical narratives (like Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for example). Since the presentation of a dream can effectively divert from the plot, or at least delay its development, it often

¹⁰¹Neil Brenner, letter to the editor ('Madness in Opera'), *Psychiatric Bulletin*, 14 (1990), 563-564, in <<http://pb.rcpsych.org/content/14/9/563.1.full.pdf>>, accessed 12 October 2011.

proves a useful timing strategy for the opera-composer.

(vi) Exoticism

The exotic is an important element in each of these operas, presented via a Classical myth (in *The Minotaur*), a Medieval *troubadoursque* legend (in *L'amour de loin*) and the grotesque (the ghostly, dark mystery tale in *The Lighthouse*).

(vii) Lack of fulfilment

A pervading feeling of lack of fulfilment is common to all three operas: the inexplicable disappearance of the three keepers of the lighthouse gives a high dose of mystery and inconclusiveness to the story, which opens to different interpretations; the fact that Jaufré dies just after meeting his beloved Clémence makes their desire forever insatiable; and the deep sense of inadequacy and revolt of Asterios, for his double nature as a half-man, half-bull creature, is unresolved at his death.

(viii) Death

Also common throughout the traditional operatic repertoire, Death is the dramatic conclusive feature here. Yet at the same time it is inconclusive, as we see from the above discussion. Maxwell Davies underlines this with the musical reference to a cyclical story. Birtwistle does so via the visual reference to the black-sailed boat, implying that the story of Ariadne and Theseus continues even though the Minotaur has expired. Saariaho's opera is

inconclusive due to the inexorable impossibility of the protagonists ever to consummate their love and union.

The topics and symbols discussed above may be grouped together: madness, dreams and exoticism, it could be argued, reflect the basic aesthetic of the stage: a removal from everyday life into fantasy. The sea is a powerful sexual symbol and also a part of the English psyche, as it is for any island-dwelling nation (and perhaps it is no coincidence that both *The Lighthouse* and *The Minotaur* have island settings). Violence and death, and here, ironically, death's indecisiveness, as well as a lack of fulfilment, could be seen as part of a particularly modern malaise; the death of our very planet, while others are discovered, has become a modern preoccupation.

These elements occur in all of these enormously successful operas. This is not to say that their inclusion is a necessary ingredient for success, only that such markers, inherited from successful nineteenth and early-twentieth century operas (if not from earlier works) have not been rejected by modern opera composers. But they do not simply reflect our inheritance: in the bringing together of *all* these factors, from exoticism, to dreams and madness, to isolation and inconclusivity, we may assert that these operas relate not just to the past but also resonate strongly with a contemporary audience.

Epilogue. The experience of creating and staging a new chamber opera in London: a brief report

This study has offered me opportunities to experience contemporary opera in many ways: I have been able to obtain a quite comprehensive understanding of the current situation in the operatic field in Britain; I have been able to attend dozens of new-opera productions and more than one hundred concerts in London, mostly of contemporary music; finally, my own opera, *The Moonflower*, was staged, in August 2011, at Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival at the Riverside Studios, London. Below is an account of the genesis of the opera, which I hope will reveal some of the ways in which my own composing has benefited from my researches over the past four years and also what I have learned from the staging of this opera.

I. PRODUCTION OF THE OPERA

1. Preliminaries

The plan to write an opera score was part of the research proposal submitted at the beginning of my degree course. My PhD research into contemporary opera is connected to that for my Master's Degree which concerned the relationship between music and theatre.¹ For the PhD course, I had initially planned to create just one operatic scene and attempt to get it performed. Later, however, I decided to write a complete chamber opera, hoping to have it either fully

¹MA, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, 2002. With the title 'Music and Scene', this study culminated in the creation and performance of a 'proto-opera', *Noite (Night)*, on 22 July, 2002, in Rio de Janeiro. MA, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, 2002.

performed/staged or performed in a concert version during my course.

I started consideration of this work by looking for a theme. Some composers look for an already-created one, in a novel or short story, for instance, but I choose to begin with a theme of my own creation, and then to look for a writer who would expand this into a libretto. This theme would bind together Brazil and the United Kingdom, and would treat a contemporary subject which would be interesting and captivating to British audiences; to them this project would be primarily addressed, if it indeed could be produced in London during my stay. Nevertheless, it should be inspiring to me in the first place, since, as the composer, I ought to be prepared to commit much of my time and creative energy to it for the months ahead. In fact, I have observed during my research how often composers dealing with an opera need to be fully dedicated to the task, and how this can be so challenging that many composers rarely, if ever, consider creating an opera.

With all this in mind, I imagined an opera that would convey stories and images of the Amazon rainforest. Even though I wished to eschew any sort of exoticism that might only reinforce the overtly stereotyped image of Brazilian people and culture, I liked the idea of including in my opera aspects of my cultural inheritance. Therefore I decided that the plot should incorporate some indigenous myths that, although familiar to Brazilians in general, would probably be unknown to foreign audiences.

My first concern was that my opera should involve a considerable amount of action, or at least that the human drama unfolded in it would be sufficiently powerful to keep the audience emotionally absorbed until the end. My observation of recent operas produced in Britain had allowed me to

conclude that the more involving the plot, the more successful the opera, though of course there are exceptions to this.

I began my search in 2009. Fortunately I soon encountered again Margaret Mee's remarkable life story, which I had come across previously as a member of the Botanic Garden of Rio de Janeiro, with which she had a strong connection. Mrs Margaret Mee (1909-1988) was a British botanical artist and conservationist who lived in Brazil for the last 32 years of her life, travelling 14 times into the Amazon rainforest in order to draw and paint its flora. Her *Amazon Collection* of paintings is deposited in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in London. There, since 1996, the Margaret Mee Fellowship Programme, working closely with the *Fundação Botânica Margaret Mee* in Rio, provides scholarships for Brazilian botanical students and plant illustrators to study in the United Kingdom or conduct field research in Brazil.² Such a link between both countries could not be more emblematical, nor more in compliance with my project itself.

By reading Mee's diaries, I learned that, only after 24 years of exploration and painting (during her very last expedition, in 1988), was she finally able to draw *Selenicereus wittii* (*Cactaceae*), or the 'Moonflower', which only blooms at night.³ Telling her story would allow me to include elements of local culture, abundant in folk characters, myths and tales. With this discovery, I had also found a proper title for the work.

But I ventured further into the remit of the librettist: the opera lacked a

²N.a., 'Tropical America: Botany and conservation at Kew', *Kew Royal Botanic Gardens* <<http://www.kew.org/science/tropamerica/Meebackground.htm>>, accessed 27 September 2011.

³Margaret Mee, *Margaret Mee's Amazon: the diaries of an artist explorer* (London: Antique Collectors' Club, 2004).

Brazilian counterpart for the 'heroine', so I chose an icon of the country's recent history, Chico Mendes (1944-1988), a rubber tapper, trade union leader and environmentalist, and decided that the plot should interweave his story with Margaret Mee's. This included his struggle to defend the rights of the people of the forest against cattle ranching, deforestation and road paving in the Amazon, and ultimately, his murder.⁴ Thus, matters national and international, social and anthropological, political and ecological, combined and presented in a poetic language, could be included in the thematic material of *The Moonflower*. Regarding the protagonists, the plot could highlight the discrepancies between the points of view of Margaret (a foreigner and a well-educated woman) and Chico (a native man). These could contrast with their common feelings of concern and love towards the rainforest and its people. I further decided that, in the opera, these two personalities would meet each other, though in an after-life, a sort of mystical and phantasmagorical environment, amongst the ghosts of the forest, and tell us their memories through some related folk tales. Both should find the Moonflower in the end.

Such a broad and elevated range of subjects needed also to reach to the very personal. The relationship between the two protagonists could not really satisfy this requirement entirely. So I considered that the librettist should introduce some minor characters in the folk-tale component of the plot from early on in the opera for this purpose. So, while the two protagonists talk to each other about their memories and the feelings provoked by them, the characters in the folk-tale, like 'avatars' of our 'heroes', would live analogous

⁴See a documentary about Chico Mendes at: N.a., 'Rubber Jungle: the documentary film', <<http://www.chicomendes.com/>>, last accessed 27 September 2011.

stories. The tales would thus serve as allegories of those same memories.

This juxtaposition of plot and sub-plot would inevitably affect the structure of the work. Indeed, structure is a very important concern for me. I could say that this interest of mine accords with questions of form found in Birtwistle's music, for instance, *The Minotaur*, as described in Chapter 3.

The image, or 'quintessence' of the Moonflower itself dictated the musical language of the opera. Besides offering a *leitmotif* for the text, its fragility and delicacy inspired a score of transparent, fluid music, of different timbres and colours, dissonance and strength, checked by softness and quietness. In creating such a mood, my choices fell more in line with Saariaho's work and the Impressionist tradition, than say, Birtwistle's or Davies's.

I decided that each character should have an instrument of his/her own as a 'devoted accompanist'. This compositional procedure may have been much inspired by Ariadne's accompanying saxophone, in *The Minotaur*. However, in *The Moonflower*, the accompanying instruments would rather provide each character with a specific 'sound ambience', thus contributing to timbral characterization; the instruments' idiomatic features (employed, to a certain extent, in the spirit of Brazilian folk genres and styles) would also help define the personalities of the characters in the plot. Then, armed with many ideas, I started my search for a librettist.

2. Working with the libretto

Czech Eva Daničková was recommended to me as librettist for *The Moonflower* by the Italian singer Maya Sapone, who had agreed to play the

main role in my opera since its conception.⁵ Daničková had worked as the dramaturge in *Barrocata*, a music theatre piece by the Vocal Motions-Elastic Theatre company, who performed at the Tête à Tête festival in 2010, and in which Sapone had participated. I already knew and appreciated this company's work. Also, I had seen two of Daničková's previous works as a theatre director; these served as good references, for their accuracy in the treatment of the theme on which the plays were based, as well as the ease with which actors could project these lines. However, she had no experience of opera and its means and no knowledge of music. I could offer her no payment for the job except the rare opportunity of writing an opera libretto, and she accepted the challenge.

In February 2010, I introduced my ideas comprehensively to Daničková. I also suggested to her some books on the subject that I had found, including Mrs Mee's *Diaries*, Andrew Revkin's study of Chico Mendes and Tim Morrison's of Margaret Mee.⁶ I also gave her books on opera theory and librettos of modern operas in English as examples. These included Peter Zinovieff's libretto for Birtwistle's *The Mask of Orpheus* (1986), Weir's *Blond Eckbert* (music and libretto, 1994), and Glyn Maxwell's text for Elena Langer's *The Lion's Face* (2010). Thus I hoped to make her familiar with some basic concepts, as, for instance, how the libretto should leave enough room for the music, how musical elements could dictate the final size, shape, and

⁵For Daničková see n.a., 'Artistic Director', Boii Theatre website <<http://www.boiitheatre.com/abouteva.aspx>>, accessed 29 September 2011; For Maya Sapone see n.a., Maya Sapone website <<http://www.mayasapone.co.uk/>>, accessed 29 September 2011.

⁶Andrew Revkin, *The burning season: the murder of Chico Mendes and the fight for the Amazon rain forest* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004) and Tony Morrison, *Margaret Mee in Search of Flowers of the Amazon Forests: Diaries of an English Artist Reveal the Beauty of the Vanishing Rainforest* (Suffolk: Nonesuch Expeditions, 1989).

meaning of the text, and ultimately, how the text might be shaped by the music, and vice-versa, all for the sake of the musical drama. I thought that working in collaboration with someone who had no experience in the matter would indeed be challenging; however, it could also prove an exciting opportunity for both of us to learn and create. We agreed that a first draft of the libretto should be ready in no later than six months, so that the opera could be completed within one year.

For the next four months we met several times to discuss the plot. We agreed that Margaret and Chico would have spoken roles (analogous to the actor's role in *The Lion's Face*), which would situate them in a different 'dimension' within the opera: this would make even more explicit their attachment to a separate world, in opposition to the world of mysticism and imagination brought by the folk-tales, in which all the other characters would be singers. For that purpose, I imagined that both Margaret and Chico might even have a particular position on the stage, at a different level, possibly on a shared platform; and the chorus, which would represent a collective voice (as in ancient Greek tragedy, though here a group of singers as opposed to a single actor) sometimes as ghosts and, at other times, people of the forest, would have a relevant presence in the score.⁷

After four months, the librettist had clearly studied the subject, but still showed some difficulty in producing a text. Thus, in June 2010, I made a plan for the musical structure to be used as a guideline for her to start developing

⁷See Appendix 4 - The Lion's Face opera experience.

her own ideas.⁸ According to that plan, the work would be divided into three acts, each preceded by an instrumental interlude, with an increase of dramatic tension and musical density. The librettist then selected three folk-tales to be included in the text, permeating the protagonists' stories. The libretto was also required to follow this plan, which was thus a sort of pre-structure (or 'pre-score') for both music and text.

I offered Daníčková other guidelines as well, like how to insert within the proposed structure interactions between the characters (with arias and duets, for instance), and how the chorus should intertwine with the protagonists' speeches, offering comments and reactions to them. The sentences should be rather short and sparse (as in the examples of librettos that I had offered her); orchestral interludes would function as 'instrumental comments' on particular passages in the story, which should therefore offer space for such music to be included. Although I was obviously working in extremely different proportions, I admit Birtwistle's interludes in *The Minotaur* were inspirational here. So, the first drafts of the libretto eventually appeared.

Undoubtedly, the most important (and fundamental) contribution of Eva Daníčková to the plot at that point was the character of Lua (Moon, in Portuguese) as the main role, written for Maya Sapone. This would be the 'mystical' element of connection between spiritual and physical worlds as prescribed in the plan for the musical structure.

A first, complete version of the libretto, which contained really good

⁸See Appendix 5 with the first plot's plan and structure in details, over which the first version of the libretto was written.

poetry, was presented to me in October 2010. It introduced an indigenous tale, *The Origin of the Amazon*, which relates how the world's widest river originated from the cry of a single tree, after it had been cut by a man, jealous of his beloved fiancée; that tree had previously been an enchanted young man from the forest, with whom the young girl had fallen in love. A second folk-tale, called *The Great Fortune*, recounts how Severino, a poor rubber tapper, becomes rich after answering three questions from Yawareté, the jaguar; however, Mata-Quatro, an outlaw from the neighbourhood, envious of Severino, sets fire to the forest, provoking the anger of the jaguar, who withdraws all the benefits it (she) had given Severino.⁹ A third tale, *The Homecoming*, was explicitly related to Chico Mendes's own story: Severino returns to his now devastated land to meet Maria, his wife; they talk about a death threat he had received. Severino is then murdered; his friends gather at his funeral.

Despite the quality of the text, it proved too extensive for this chamber opera and I judged it needed radical cuts: besides the exclusion of whole sections of words and dialogue, I requested elimination of the first folk-tale. The second and third, already connected to each other, could then be joined as the one and only tale in the opera. Some characters, including Maria, should be excluded from the plot. This would allow me to reduce the opera to two acts from the previously envisaged three. Mostly, I suggested these changes for the sake of fluency and directness of dramatic action. Given all the arrangements we had previously agreed, I expected that the librettist would

⁹All the names in the folk-tales were chosen by me and the librettist, regarding that they would be easily pronounceable for English speakers.

acquiesce to my requests. However, her response was to reject them and leave the collaboration immediately.

My belief is, what makes opera so distinct a theatrical spectacle is that it is basically a music-form, in which the dramatic elements on the stage cannot be fully understood (nor justified) without a reasonable comprehension of the musical universe in which they are immersed. In sum, the music in opera, most of the time, is the predominant medium. Although this concept may not be endorsed without reservation by many modern multimedia artists, it is still crucial that the whole creative team in an operatic project should understand music's impact on the other media. All in all, I learned from this experience that, ideally, no collaborative work in opera can happen unless all the people involved clearly agree this condition.

But, for better or worse, the new situation pertained; so I was forced to make the changes in the first half/act of the text myself; I composed the music for this during January and February 2011. Structurally, the first tale was cut out, but Lua's first aria was preserved, now as the prologue of the opera; some of the chorus's lines were reduced and merged; some spoken text was also cut and repositioned, so that the chorus could intervene more often; many words were cut out, but none of the others was altered.

Musically, it was time to define the primary elements of the composition. For instance, I created a 'theme', or a *leitmotif* for the Moonflower, on strings, which I kept for the whole score; Lua's first aria also presented elements which infiltrate her themes throughout the opera, like the first semitone interval introduced by the flute. Basically, the composition of the whole of Act One remained intact in its final version. (These musical

features are explained in more detail later in this chapter.)

The first act complete, I submitted the project to the Tête à Tête festival and to Brazilian Embassy. In May, I got confirmation of both financial support from the Embassy and participation in the festival. *The Moonflower* opera project, which I had been nurturing for more than a year, now became a reality, not just a dream. On hearing this news, the librettist relented and provided me with the final version of the text (with the substantial modifications I had previously asked for, plus new, required, changes) on 3 July, 2011, 16 months after our first conversation.¹⁰ The first act/part was not altered, but some word substitutions were made in the spoken text to make it more idiomatic. However, the structure of the second act was radically modified, by the creation of new verses for Yara and Yawareté, for example. (A plot synopsis is given later in this chapter). But the greatest addition to this second part (more particularly from the first folk-tale on) was the introduction of more clear-cut breaks between one scene and the next. This encouraged me to structure this section via strongly articulated musical numbers, therefore contrasting with the flow of the first act.

I now had less than four weeks to complete the whole second half of the music and to produce the full score and parts, all before the rehearsals. Given that 35 minutes of music had already been written, and the August festival slot was only 70 minutes long, the delivery (via music) of the remaining text in the second act needed to be very direct and to the point. However, that the second half of the opera should be much more rapid and

¹⁰See Appendix 6 with the opera's libretto.

dynamic than the first was a positive requirement; it was one that I had actually intended since the primary stages of the project. Also, the music in the second act, much more than in the first, followed the structure of the libretto. Of course, all this conveniently facilitated the compositional process, given that the deadline to complete the score was looming.

3. The workshop of the opera at City University¹¹

I set up a public workshop of the first act of *The Moonflower* on 24 June 2011 at City University. Amongst my reasons was so that, through the workshop, the librettist (now co-writing the text with Maja Milatović-Ovadia, the stage director), could evaluate the second half/act of the opera, making changes to optimize timing and pace, as well as to develop some of the characters. In sum, the overall concern was about how to deliver the story properly.

Andrew Morley, whom I had contracted to conduct my opera one year earlier, conducted the workshop performance, and bass singer Dionysios Kyropoulos played Severino at the occasion.¹² All the singers were found somehow, directly or not, via my own contacts. Partial rehearsals occurred on 15 and 22 June; full rehearsals were scheduled for 22 (evening) and 24 June (morning and afternoon), with the performance on the 24 June, starting at 7.00 pm. For this, there was a good audience in City University's Performance Space, which included Mr and Mrs Michael Daly (CMG, Hon. Secretary,

¹¹See the event's announcement at: 'The Moonflower', City University website <<http://www.city.ac.uk/events/2011/jun/the-moonflower>>, accessed 22 September 2011.

¹²For Dionysios Kyropoulos, see www.kyropoulos.com; for Andrew Morley, see N.a., 'Conductors', European Youth Music Week <<http://www.eymw.org/conductors.php>>, accessed 28 September 2011. See also Appendix 7, with the workshop programme notes, with all credits.

Margaret Mee Fellowship Programme, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew), Margaret Mee's close friends.¹³ The reception was good, and the response from the cast was also positive; particularly for those who had never participated in an opera project before, mainly the actors and the librettist herself, that evening performance seemed to be a sort of a 'revelation'. Thus I felt that my efforts towards it had been worthwhile.

4. The Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival

(i) Preliminaries

I attended 18 productions at the Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival, in August 2010. Amongst many other insights I obtained from that experience (as well as from the preceding survey of opera-companies), was that I should conceive a proposal for an opera and promote this for possible performance at this festival in the following year. My being a composer still in the early stages of my career and practically unknown to the London mainstream, I considered the TaT Festival a good platform for my chamber opera, and ultimately, my music. The festival's policy of putting forward works-in-progress without prejudice seemed particularly apt.

I met Bill Bankes-Jones, the Artistic Director of the Tête à Tête festival, on 2 February 2011, and presented him with *The Moonflower* project, which at that point comprised the synopsis, with some pictures, the libretto, still in its long, inadequate version (with the rambling second act), and the

¹³N.a., 'Tropical America: botanic and conservation at Kew', Kew Royal Botanic Gardens <<http://www.kew.org/science/tropamerica/Meeprogramme.htm>>, accessed 28 September 2011.

finished full score of the first act.¹⁴ I left the foyer of the National Theatre, where we met, with quite a positive feeling. It was not until 11 May, though, that I got the confirmation that the opera would indeed be included in the festival, with performances on 18 and 19 August. As a participant, I would need to supply the cast and players, and every other artistic element of the production (and the finances involved!); notwithstanding, the festival offered the lighting designer, filming and photography. Indeed, the video of the opera subsequently became available on the festival's website.¹⁵ Other contributions from the Tête à Tête Festival were the performing space, festival management, box office, front of house, all marketing and press promotion and 50% of the net box office receipts.¹⁶

(ii) Preparation

I first met Andrew Morley during his conducting for *Barrocata*, by Vocal Motions-Elastic Theatre, at TaT Festival, in 2010. Later on, I attended his performance as the conductor of St Paul's Sinfonia, and was impressed by his artistic personality and competence.¹⁷ Maja Milatović-Ovadia is an experienced stage director from Serbia. She was recommended as director of *The Moonflower* by Daničková; so was Croatian Berislav Juraič, as producer. Neither had any experience of opera, and were not at all literate in music.¹⁸

¹⁴N.a., 'Client details: Bill Bankes-Jones – Director', Performing Arts <http://www.performing-arts.co.uk/clients_detail.php?client=78>, accessed 28 September 2011.

¹⁵See the video of the opera's second performance at 'The Moonflower', Tête à Tête website <<http://www.tete-a-tete.org.uk/the-moonflower/>>, accessed 22 September 2011.

¹⁶See also Appendix 8, with detailed technical information provided by TaT Festival.

¹⁷For St Paul's Sinfonia, see N.a., 'St Paul's Sinfonia: music south of the river', St Paul's Sinfonia website <<http://www.stpaulssinfonia.com/index.html>>, accessed 01 October 2011.

¹⁸For Maja Milatović-Ovadia's profile see n.a., 'Directors', Young Vic website

This was a serious concern for me, so I offered them any help they might need; while they were keen to be on view at the prestigious Riverside Studios, this lack of operatic experience was risky for the project (in fact, after some difficulties, Juraič quit a few days before the premiere).

The rehearsals were scheduled to begin after 1 August. Below is a concise description of those I attended, the musical ones, in particular. All occurred at City University; the support of my institution was crucial.

REHEARSAL DIARY

1 and 2 August. Musical rehearsals for all singers, individually, including the vocal quartet (with only three of them, though), directed by the composer. Maya Sapone, with five arias in the opera, had started to rehearse her part with Andrew Morley at Trinity College two weeks before. We met in the practice rooms of City University, along with Oliver Brignall ('Mata-Quatro', tenor) and Simon Lobelson ('Severino', bass). Lobelson then suggested some changes of octave in his part when particularly low pitches were involved (a request more typical of a baritone than a bass); I did so, and added a few other changes to accommodate these.¹⁹ Sapone and I discussed the musical features of her five arias, as well as the connections between them, in terms of an increase of range and change in mood, which reflected the development of the

<<http://directors.youngvic.org/index.php?pid=25&did=459>>, accessed 01 October 2011. For Berislav Juraič's profile see n.a., 'Berislav Juraič', Staje Jobs Pro website <<http://www.stagejobspro.com/uk/view.php?uid=269838>>, accessed 01 October 2011.

¹⁹See the short biographies of the whole cast at n.a., 'The Moonflower: creative team, Boii Theatre website <<http://www.boitheatre.com/MoonflowerCreativeAndCast.aspx>>, accessed 29 September 2011.

character of Lua herself. In fact, I conceived Lua's nature, musically, as primarily sweet, feminine, and quite sensuous: an essence that never changes throughout the plot. But as I worked on it, it became more and more ambiguous, as the character anxiously reacts to the events on the stage, to the point of madness (aria 3) and revolt (aria 4). The last aria brings back her initial qualities: resignation and condescension towards human fate. As with both the Maxwell Davies and Birtwistle works discussed above, the circle thus closes, ready to open again in a new cycle. Lua's developing characterization is probably the aspect of the music which most diverges from the libretto, in the manner of Ariadne's musical characterization in *The Minotaur*. Yet this feature was ignored in the staging, as explained below.

3, 4, and 5 August. These sessions were run by stage-director Ovadia, and were devoted to the preparation of the actors, Laura Harling (Margaret) and Braz Henrique (Chico), and their speaking parts, as well as of Maya Sapone.

8 August: This was the first music rehearsal, with conductor Andrew Morley and Andrew Tait, a répétiteur from Trinity College, a colleague of both Morley and Sapone. During Maya's first aria, the conductor asked me whether its timing could be more pliable. I agreed, adding that such treatment should permeate the score, particularly the sung parts, therefore the tempi indicated should be more suggestive than prescriptive. During Simon Lobelson's rehearsal, for example, we discussed his pace, which should be faster than indicated, in a sense that his singing, accompanied by the guitar, should always 'move forward', sometimes less fluidly, sometimes more energetically. This of course is possible because of the sole accompanist, who anyway, on

this occasion, was a virtuoso guitarist (Fabrício Mattos).²⁰ Concerning the delicacy of the score (with relatively few *fortes* notated in it, for instance), I requested considerable accuracy with respect to every expressive indication, and, furthermore, that all contrasting elements should be strongly emphasised. Morley was well aware of that, and I was indeed glad that he was so professional and reliable. Oliver Brignall, the tenor, still felt a bit insecure with his part, particularly with the nuances of dynamics and endings of phrases.

9 August. Maja (Ovadia) worked with Yara (Rhiannon Llewellyn, who had until this point been committed to another job) and the actors.

10 August. Andy (Morley) dedicated two hours to the vocal quartet (the chorus), now complete, in a quite productive rehearsal. We discussed the role of the chorus, as first, ghosts, then, the people of the forest, and the contrast with which these collective characters should be represented musically/vocally. While they learned their parts, I suggested they should intensify word-articulation to the maximum, for intelligibility. In fact, that simple commitment made them even sing more in tune than before. (Actually, that was a technique whose efficiency I have had the chance to prove many times with my own choirs.)

14 August. We got permission for a full-day rehearsal at the Royal Academy of Music, thanks to Georgia Knower (Yawareté), who joined the team for the first time. Georgia showed real professionalism, having learned her part thoroughly. With Andy at the piano, we could finally hear the whole score in

²⁰N.a., 'Fabrício Mattos: Guitar' <<http://www.fabriciomattos.com/>>, accessed 29 September 2011.

the first run-through of the opera, with no stops. There was a strange feeling in all of us. I, in particular, despite so incipient a performance, could already see some changes that should be made to increase the dramatic tension up to the climatic point (Severino's death). Trying the music out with staging (even though still very rudimentary) was indeed a useful experience.

15 August. In the morning, the director worked with the whole cast on movement, broadly outlining gestures, since the aim was give the performers an overall, mechanical view of their positions and interactions on the stage, with no music played. In the afternoon, Andy worked with each singer separately. Then, the ensemble worked specifically on issues of tempo and dynamics, since it was now time to improve the musical interpretation in its detail.

16 and 17 August. The only two rehearsals with the full orchestra and the whole cast occurred at the Performance Space, City University, between 16:30 and 19:30 pm on these two days, and were very productive. The main discussion during the rehearsal still concerned timing: how fast should a certain instrumental passage be? Should the tempo marks on the score be strictly adhered to, or should movement be more free, particularly in the case of the interludes? For the orchestral accompaniment for the singers, for instance, how far should the tempo be determined by the singer's own interpretation? Working with the actors, how much, and when, should the practicalities of the staging be allowed to affect the musical pace? Opera conducting, I discerned, is particularly complicated, differing in many respects from instrumental conducting. Many pauses as well as alterations in tempo marks were added to the score during the rehearsals. Nonetheless, another

question still remained: should I keep all those changes, or leave these points open for the next conductor/interpreter to work with freely? I opted for the latter alternative.

(iii) The performance, expectations, and reception

Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival claims to welcome, as part of its manifesto, initiatives of many sorts, works-in-progress as well as fully-fledged productions. Every year, there is an average of three or four consecutive performances per evening, from Thursday to Sunday, during three weeks in August; each opera is normally performed twice, on consecutive days. The works are presented at Riverside Studios, London, in three stages: Studio 3 (c.120 seats), Studio 2 (split in two, 100 and 150 seats), and in the foyer. *The Moonflower* was performed in Studio 3, while four other sets of works were also presented on the same evenings: *The City Weeps* (two short pieces, Alejandro Viñao's *Baghdad Monologue*, and Andrew Lovett's *Lonely Sits in the City*, treating political issues surrounding the Iraq War); Catherine Kontz's *Larvae* (a free event); and two pieces for soprano and ensemble 'based on natural forces': David Bruce's *The North Wind was a Woman*, and Marcus Barcham-Stevens's *Dhyana*. Also presented were Daniel Saleeb's *Yellow*, 'an interdisciplinary work based on mental strain'; and Ezra Axelrod's *Wanderlust*, 'a musical journey through the composer's music'.²¹

Thursday, 18 August, 2011. On the day of the first performance at the festival, we had a whole afternoon of dress-rehearsal at Riverside Studios, in

²¹From TaT Festival Programme Notes. See also n.a., Festival 2011, *Tête à Tête* website <<http://www.tete-a-tete.org.uk/archive/festival-2011/>>, accessed 29 September 2011.

Hammersmith, London. The entire creative team could finally have the first impression of what the spectacle would be. As shown above, I had seen just a few of the stage director's sessions with the actors during the previous two weeks. Also, I had not been able to attend the stage rehearsal with the light and visual designer and the acrobat (who would 'personify' the Moonflower, as probably the most notable theatrical feature of this production), etc., since it had coincided with the music rehearsal at City University the previous day. Thus, the resultant amalgam of the arts put together on that stage was totally new to me, as it was to all of us. Certainly, this was not ideal, particularly for me as the composer, but these were the conditions that obtained, according to the budget we had. As a matter of fact, for better or worse, conditions for the *Moonflower* reflected those of the rest of the opera festival, as well as its spirit: it was the ultimate space for trying ideas out, right there, on the operatic arena, in front of a friendly and receptive audience. All in all, it was somehow clear to me that everyone involved in the project had done their best for it, whatever had been their actual personal interest and capacity.

Much publicity had been given to *The Moonflower*. In the two weeks prior to the performance, there were three interviews on radio (BBC London, BBC4, and Hammersmith Community Radio), one major interview online at *Canal Londres* (a Brazilian website, directed to the Brazilian community in London), notes in *Time Out Magazine* and notices on at least a dozen websites specializing in art and entertainment in London. Moreover, during the festival, Tête à Tête kept *The Moonflower* page on their website permanently updated, by posting the links to the most important interviews and articles about the

opera in the press.²² As a result, both performances, on 18 and 19 August, were sold out.

The show was supposed to commence at 7:00 pm, but a strong summer rain had been falling since 6:30 pm, with major delays in the Tube, while around 20 people in the foyer waited for spare tickets. The performance eventually started at 7:16, at Studio 3, with all its 130 seats occupied (10 seats had been added to the original 120).

Considering the participants' brief preparation, the performance went quite well, with the singers and orchestra comfortable and confident in their roles. In fact, the musical performance was probably the most professional aspect of the production. Nevertheless the performance cannot be analysed or judged by the music alone. Whilst the costumes were quite satisfactory, it was clear that the sets and lighting had been strongly limited by the budget (although one would hope the respective designers would be able to rise above this to some extent).

The stage direction introduced some memorable elements, particularly the long blue veil in Yara's costume (representing the river, by which she 'attracts' and 'captures' Margaret), and the acrobat's contribution as an intriguing representation of the Moonflower. All in all, the stage director's options for simplicity and economy ultimately accorded with the lack of time for preparation and the resources at her disposal. Still, there was a discordance between Lua's musical characterization and her visual and acting aspects, as mentioned above. Such incongruity could have had the function of reinforcing

²²For BBC radios interviews, as well as Canal Londres interview, see n.a., 'The Moonflower', *Tête à Tête* website, accessed 22 September 2011.

the character's ambiguity, but this was not the case: it rather made Lua's characterization too much like that of Yara and Yawareté. They are indeed quite similarly characterised in the libretto; but the stage director did not acknowledge in the production how the music intensified their differences.

The two actors were very competent and expressive and responded well to the musical stimuli; their interaction with the orchestra, more difficult to be achieved in speech than song, of course, was crucial for the unity of the spectacle. The conductor/musical director contributed immensely to their preparation in this regard.

Despite the manifesto of Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival, that it aims to include initiatives of many sorts, works-in-progress as well as fully-fledged productions, it seems that, for critics in general, any work performed in public should have achieved its final stage of production. Since this was not the case for not only *The Moonflower*, but the other shows presented alongside it, critic George Hall claimed to be dissatisfied with what he saw.²³ Furthermore, although they seemed to have truly enjoyed the music, I noticed that most of the audience did not get a thorough understanding of the story. The fact is that, as mentioned earlier, the public was offered only a cursory, vague synopsis in a loose leaflet inside the general Festival booklet, while some audience members were not given the leaflet at all. The synopsis was actually projected overhead before the opera began — but was out of focus. Thus the significance of some characters and even aspects of the plot was lost on the audience (including, perhaps, Mr Hall) before the opera began. Despite these

²³George Hall, 'Tête à Tête Festival – a review', *The Guardian*, 19 August 2011 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/aug/19/tete-a-tete-festival-review>>, accessed 22 September 2011.

drawbacks, as the video testifies, the musical presentation of the work reached a very high standard and a number of dramatic effects seemed to work spectacularly. In sum, given the financial limitations and the other strictures mentioned above, I felt that this ambitious production, with 16 performers on the stage and a chamber orchestra of 12, was remarkably successful.

(iv) The relationship between the composer and the stage director

Having no money to pay for a professional librettist was my first obstacle as the composer of *The Moonflower*, since this actually defined most of the issues I had to face during the process of creating and staging it, in both professional and personal levels. However, as said earlier, the whole experience has been validated by the opera's performance at the festival, and by the very many good responses to it from the audience and cast.

Eva Daničková brought in her own theatre company, the Boii Theatre, to produce *The Moonflower* for the festival, along with director Maja Milatović-Ovadia and producer Berislav Juraič, as mentioned above.²⁴ Daničková's unfamiliarity with opera and operatic performance might have been disastrous to the project without the invaluable help of Maya Sapone in casting the singers and Andrew Morley's professionalism during the rehearsals and performance. My close communication with both of them was crucial throughout the process.

All the issues informed above have been of great value to me and to the professionals with whom I shared the responsibility of making *The*

²⁴See N.a., 'The Moonflower', Boii Theatre <<http://www.boiitheatre.com/MoonFlower.aspx>>, accessed 23 September 2011.

Moonflower opera happen. In the end, it was indeed a *sui generis* experience for everyone involved, the quality of the music and musicians becoming the central point of the event. Particularly for me, as probably the first Brazilian composer to have an original chamber opera performed in London, it was a moving accomplishment; as an artist, it was rather a step further in my apprenticeship.

II. THE OPERA ITSELF

The present chapter is intended to show the relationship between my research, presented in the previous chapters, and my practice as represented by *The Moonflower*. Therefore, below, I offer a survey of the work's main components, beginning with discussions of its libretto and structure, and then its musical materials. Further illustrating this study, there is a video recording of the opera's second performance at the festival in a DVD included in the Portfolio, as well as at <http://www.tete-a-tete.org.uk/the-moonflower/>.

1. Synopsis

Below is a synopsis of *The Moonflower* opera's libretto.

ACT 1

PROLOGUE 1

Lua, a mystical personage who links the forest's spiritual world with mankind, is trapped in a cage. She sings about her predicament, being bound to the Earth against her will, with the Moonflower her only salvation.

1st Dramatic Tableau: MEMORIES

Margaret and Chico's restless souls meet in the afterlife. They decide to open the door to the memories, hopes and fears that will not let them rest. The Chorus of Ghosts is also present, singing to the Moonflower.

2nd Dramatic Tableau: THE FLOWER SEEKER

Margaret relives the memory of looking for the Moonflower in the deep flooded forest. Yara, the Amazonian siren, attempts to seduce Margaret into the waters. Margaret, fooled by Yara, thinks the Moonflower is by the other bank of the river, and starts crossing it.

3rd Dramatic Tableau: PHANTOM TREES

The Ghosts return, this time with more urgency. Margaret and Chico remember how the forest had changed through their lives and they remember the people of the forest who had to change too.

THE TALE OF THE GREAT FORTUNE (1st Part)

Severino, a hungry young rubber tapper, encounters Yawareté, the mystical jaguar. Yawareté promises to help him find fortune, if he passes her test. Severino gets lucky and agrees on a secret deal with Yawareté: his trees will always produce enough rubber for Severino to live comfortably. But a dark cloud spoils the day, the feared Mata-Quatro gets jealous of Severino's luck, and then starts slashing the trees so hard that they die crying. Yawareté's and Yara's fury is unleashed and Severino loses his good fortune and is banished from the forest. Angry Mata-Quatro sets the trees on fire.

[Interval, not mandatory]

ACT 2

PROLOGUE 2

As the trees burn, Lua's words are full of fire and fury. She tries to warn people that they will have nothing left and if the trees die, people will die with them. No one listens and Lua starts to lose her mind.

4th Dramatic Tableau: : THE POWER OF COMMUNITIES

For the first time, Chico gives us the chilling account of how things were when he was trying to save the forest and its people. Yara joins him, while he goes through the painful memory of looking back on the day of his own murder. The Chorus of the People of the Forest sings a song of grief. Margaret tells us about her dream of the Moonflower.

THE TALE OF THE GREAT FORTUNE (2nd Part)

Lua predicts Severino's death. The shadow swallows her and she disappears in a total eclipse. Mata-Quatro ambushes and murders Severino. Everyone gathers at Severino's funeral. The Soul of Chico and the Soul of Margaret also join, as does the Soul of Severino. The funeral turns into a rally of strength and togetherness.

EPILOGUE

Margaret and Chico hold a dim light, looking for the Moonflower. Finally, the moment comes when the bud opens and the Moonflower shows her beauty to the world. Margaret draws her. Lua sings a song of awakening and hope.

2. Large-scale structure

As Table 2 (below) indicates, there is a symmetry between the acts in terms of numbers of sections, a symmetry inspired by that of the *Minotaur*. However, unlike in that opera, there is a strong contrast between their pace and duration.

Following Prologue 1 (Lua's first aria), Act 1 is rather slow in pace.

Table 2. The structure of *The Moonflower* (N.B.: DT = dramatic tableau)

ACT 1	ACT 2
PROLOGUE 1	PROLOGUE 2
DT1: MEMORIES (the ghosts of the forest intervene)	DT4: Chico accounts of his fight and death.
DT2: THE FLOWER SEEKER (Yara intervenes)	THE TALE OF THE GREAT FORTUNE (2 nd Part): Severino's murder
DT3: Margaret and Chico give testimonies of the changes in the forest	THE FUNERAL: the people of the forest sing together.
THE TALE OF THE GREAT FORTUNE (1 st Part): Severino's good luck (Yawareté's quiz and further reward); Mata-Quatro violently slashes the trees; Yawareté's and Yara's course; the forest is set fire.	EPILOGUE The Moonflower opens her bud; Margaret draws it.

The three dramatic tableaux belong to the 'spiritual' environment in which the two souls interact and are given a similar orchestration and pace; as in DT4, in Act 2, interventions by the chorus, offer a complete contrast of timbre and rhythm.

When the chorus represents the goss of the forest, it frequently sings in block-chords, always with the electronic organ doubling the vocal lines. When it represents the people of the forest (as in Act 2, DT4, 'The power of communities', it sings mostly in unison/octaves (as an illusion to the union and bond of the people), with no specific accompanying instrument. This accords with Saariaho's use of male and female choruses with different

characteristics, either when they represent the ‘voice of the people’, giving comments and guidance, or when they personify a ‘voice of nature’, colouring the music; still, the people of the forest's chant during Severino's funeral resembles the ‘hymn’ sung by the choruses for Clémence's ‘spiritual transcendence’ in the last act of *L'Amour de loin*, as seen in Chapter 4.

As in Maxwell Davies' *Lighthouse*, word-painting is frequently used, particularly during Margaret's description, in ‘Journey 14’ (DT2), of the sounds of the darkness playing games with her mind (bb. 201-210). Yara's utterances are depicted differently as well, more rhythmically, with the addition of percussion instruments and percussive articulations by the strings and electronic organ (the glissandi on the strings here attempt to convey the ‘confusion’ that such creatures of the forest provoke in Margaret's mind).

For both ‘tales of the great fortune’, the audience moves to a different world. Musically, this world is introduced by the guitar; its sound underlines the break in the narrative and the introduction of a parenthesis or diversion. Such brusque interruption in the story could reflect Asterios's dreams in *The Minotaur*, or even the songs by the lighthouse's keepers in *The Lighthouse*. This could seem a larger-scale version of the ‘juxtaposition’ technique used for the chorus interruptions in the dramatic tableaux; dramatically, however, it is different, for the chorus comments directly on the action, whereas the ‘tales’ (as with both operas cited above) act as metaphors, parallel in their development to the main plot.

In the first tale, the radical change in colour and mood prepares the audience for the singing characters, who appear here for the first time. Elements of folk tunes and genres from Brazil, unconventional scales in the

melodies, exotic rhythms on the ensemble, along with dissonant harmonies (to be discussed in detail later), all contribute to the tales' separate musical universe. These referential ingredients, of course, also accords with Maxwell Davies's use of the three tunes in *The Lighthouse*. In contrast, however, in *The Moonflower*, the references are more integrated into the general language of this section of the work, and are not 'framed' in the same way.

3. Musical materials

Below are discussed the principal materials of the opera, including the basic cell, *leitmotifs* and referential materials. This is not, of course, an exhaustive list.

i) The basic cell

The basic melodic cell which is present literally or varied (transposed, inverted or augmented) in almost every motive throughout the score is the semitone, C-B, that first appears in the Prologue 1 (Flute, b. 3). Its contour can be recognised in almost all Lua's melodies and accompaniments, particularly in all of her arias (see Exx. 1a and b).

It can also be seen in almost all the lines of the chorus. However the basic interval of a semitone is sometimes extended, augmented into a whole tone interval, as in Yara's melody (see Ex. 2) or inverted to the interval of a seventh (major/minor), clearly present in Severino's melodies (see Ex. 3).

The semitone generates instrumental features as well, particularly in leitmotifs, as shown below.

Ex. 1. Use of the basic cell in Lua's arias

(a) Prologue 1, bb. 11-16

[Lua] *(molto espressivo: sighing, moaning)*

Aah aah aah aah aah

Bound to the Earth Still and yet spin-ning

(b) Prologue 2, bb.788-792

[Lua]

Rubato, $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 92$

Aah Things are ge-tting hot

Ex. 2. Yara's melody (Act 1, DT2, bb. 192-197)

[Yara] *mf*

Fol-low me, lost soul I've got what you want What you're loo-king for

You will be in awe, You will be in awe!

Ex. 3. Severino, The Tale of the Great Fortune - Part 1, bb. 378-385

[Severino]

My hands are emp - ty My sto - mach ho - llow My head is a - ching Dreams I can't fo - llow

ii) Leitmotifs

Leitmotifs are used extensively in this work. Besides the above-mentioned textures and timbres associated with particular characters (which, functioning

as leitmotifs themselves, sometimes announce, or remind us of, them), there are three basic leitmotifs in *The Moonflower*:

The Moonflower leitmotif is almost always divided amongst the strings, and appears, entirely or in parts, at bb. 23-25, 32-33, 38-42, 756-759 (vib), 955-958, 1174-1178, for instance. Sometimes it is developed, becoming a legato melody (see Exx. 4a, b, and c, below).

Ex. 4. The 'Moonflower motif'

(a) complete, at bb. 1168-1171 (violin 1)



(b) developed, in all instruments, in unison/octaves, bb. 993-1000



(c) developed, in woodwind and chorus', when the flower 'blooms', bb. 1220-1232)



The 'Mystery' leitmotif is a gesture in strings, also based on the Moonflower theme and generated by the basic, semitone cell. It occurs, for instance, at bb.

104-105, 127-128, 238-240, 247-250, 269-270, 816-817. An example is given in Ex. 5a, while a more developed version, found at bb. 1179-1184 is given in Ex. 5b.

Ex. 5. The ‘Mystery’ leitmotif

(a) DT1, bb. 105-110

Violin I
104 vib. non vib. 6 (mes.) vib. non vib.
mf *p* *mf* *p* *pp* *ppp*

(b) more developed version, Epilogue, bb. 1179-1184

Violin I
pp *mf* *pp*

The ‘Evil forces’ leitmotif represents bad feelings or fear and is a variation of the ‘Mystery’ theme. It is mostly played by the bass clarinet (bb. 372-376), sometimes by guitar and *pizz.* Strings (bb. 379-381), and strengthened by the low strings (bb. 419-423, see Ex. 6a); it is varied in bb. 755-759 (bass clarinet, cello and double-bass; see Ex. 6b).

Ex.6. The ‘Evil forces’ leitmotif

(a) strengthened by the low strings, bb. 419-423

Bass Clarinet
fz.
pp *sfz* *fp* *p* *sfz* *p* *fp* *ppp*

(b) varied, bb. 755-759



These leitmotifs are used for themselves and are also exploited in other materials. For instance, Mata-Quatro's first song (bb. 615-634), its piano accompaniment, as well as Mata-Quatro slashing the trees (bb. 655-687), are all based on the 'Mystery' *leitmotif*. (See Ex. 7)

Ex. 7. Mata-Quatro's solo, bb. 621-628

iii) Principal referential materials

These, as mentioned above, mostly emanate from Brazil, and are found in the 'tale' sections of the opera. For instance, in Severino's aria ('My hands are empty') the guitar evokes the sonority of Brazilian folk genres, particularly of the '*moda de viola*', for instance; here, one of its characteristics is that the instrument often reinforces the singer's melody (see Ex. 8).²⁵ Therefore, it is

²⁵ '*Moda*' (or its diminutive '*modinha*'), a kind of song, is a genre agreed to be one of the main roots of Brazilian popular music (along with the *lundu*), with a clear influence of European bourgeoisie (as a *musique de salon*). Firstly documented in the eighteenth century, its origins look back on the seventeenth-century Portuguese couplets and *romanzas* (or songs, descendent from the Middle Ages), accompanied by the Portuguese-made guitar (*viola*, then '*moda de viola*'). Basically, the *modinhas* 'are duets in parallel thirds and/or sixths and duple metre, with a syllabic rhythmic construction and pervasive use of syncopated rhythm,

possible to conclude that Severino's singing somehow resembles Jaufré's, in terms of the former's roots in ancient European songs, accompanied by the guitar (substituted by the harps, in *L'Amour de loin*).

Ex. 8. Severino's aria, bb. 402-404

The musical score for Ex. 8 consists of two staves. The top staff is for the guitar (Gtr.) and the bottom staff is for the voice (Severino). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The guitar accompaniment features a series of chords and triplets, with the word "dolce" written above the first triplet. The vocal line is in a lower register and includes the lyrics "No - va Vi - da", "No - va", and "Vi - da". The vocal line also includes the word "dolce" written below the first note.

The guitar, the most popular and traditional instrument in Brazil, reinforces the 'Brazilian-ness' of some of Severino's lines, particularly when it is built in thirds (as in Ex. 8, above). '*Nova Vida*' ('New Life') was the name Chico Mendes himself actually gave to his community of fellow workers. Severino, like Chico, is from Xapuri, a small village in Acre State, in the heart of the Amazon rainforest. Thirds are also used in the melodies when Severino refers to other specific local elements, like his profession (*seringueiro*, [rubber-tapper]) and the name of Maria, his wife. (See Exx. 9a and b below.)

Yara's melodies derive from the narrow range melody and repeated notes of indigenous chants, an example of which is given below (see Ex.10a). These ingredients are used in Yara's music in many places in the opera, for instance, at bb. 192-199, 214-221, 241-246 (see Ex.10b below). The scales in both Exx. 10a and b are hexatonic.

accompanied mainly by the guitar'. During the process of its evolution, it was reduced to a solo-and-accompaniment form, and was cultivated in both the art and popular spheres. Rafael José de Menezes Bastos, 'Brazil', in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, V. 3: Caribbean and Latin America, J. Shepherd, D. Horn, D. Lang, ed. (London, New York: Continuum Ed., 2005), 214-216.

Ex. 9. Use of thirds as a referential technique

(a) The Tale of the Great Fortune - Part 1, bb. 388-393

Severino

I trod the path of my fa - thers Their wis - dom, the se - rin - guei - ro's art... In - grained in my mind

(b) The Tale of the Great Fortune - Part 1, bb. 395-400

Severino

I dream of Ma - ri - a, my fu - ture wife... I dream of our new home I dream of our new life

Ex. 10. The (first) derivation of Yara's melodies

a) *Nozaniná*, an original *tupi-guarani* (indigenous) song.²⁶

No - za - ni - ná o - rê ku - á, ku - á Ka - zá e - tê, e - tê No -
za - ni - ná o - rê ku - á, ku - á No - za - ni - ná te - ra hau - ra ha - u

b) Yara's melody, based on the above (DT2, bb. 214-221). The (synthetic) scale used here includes the major 3rd and the lowered 6th and 7th.

Yara *mf*

Make your way O - ver here Come, don't wait
Come, come, come and see, Come here and see!

Yara's 'Xapuri' song, in particular, includes of the use of scales and modes from folk music, here, from the North/Northeast of Brazil, such as the

²⁶*Nozaniná* is a song which celebrates the preparation of a special corn-made food, by the indigenous people. Villa-Lobos used this tune in his *Choros no. 3*.

Cantiga de Cego (Blind's man Song'. The Xapuri song appears at bb. 847-858, 871-878, 907-915. Example 14 offers the second of these appearances. (See Exx. 11 a and b).

Ex. 11. The derivation of Yara's 'Xapuri' song

a) *Cantiga de cego* (Blind man's song), North-Eastern Brazilian traditional tune²⁷

Musical score for 'Cantiga de cego' in 4/4 time. The melody is written on a single staff with lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: Se - nhor, me dê u'a es - mo - la___ Pe - la luz que me a - lu - mi - a___ Por - que es - se___ po - bre ce - go___ Não en - xer - ga a luz do di - a___ Por di - a___

b) Yara's 'Xapuri' song (DT4, bb. 871-878)

Musical score for Yara's 'Xapuri' song in 4/4 time. The melody is written on a single staff with lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: Xa - pu - ri, Xa - pu - ri my home Xa - pu - ri be - fore___ the storm No - va Vi - da gone___ Smell of bur - ning___ strong___

The celebration of the People of the Forest (originally intended to be complemented with a dance number) shows a rhythm derived from the *baião*, a folk dance emanating from the Northeast of Brazil, but now performed throughout the country (see Ex. 12).

Ex. 12. Dance: the People of the Forest (bb. 596-603)

Musical score for 'Dance: the People of the Forest' in 4/4 time. The score is for guitar, voice, and cello/bass. It features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents. The dynamics are marked *p* and *mf*. The lyrics 'e' are written at the end of the piece.

4. Musical characterization

Musical characterization is, in the first instance, achieved by giving each character a particular accompanimental colour. For instance, the basic accompaniment in Lua's arias is provided by flute, harpsichord and double-bass, in a manner that emulates traditional recitatives; the flute introduces counterpoint, like a 'shadow', to the vocal line (similarly to Ariadne's saxophone in *The Minotaur*), sometimes reinforcing the melody, sometimes 'avoiding' it; both the harpsichord and double-bass provide mostly a harmonic underpinning (see Ex.13).

Ex. 13. Lua's opening song with alto flute. Prologue 1, bb. 17-23

The musical score for Ex. 13 consists of two systems. The first system shows the Alto Flute part (top staff) and the vocal line (bottom staff) with lyrics: "Bound to the Earth Still and yet spin-ning My". The second system shows the Alto Flute part (top staff) and the vocal line (bottom staff) with lyrics: "star fixed in the sky My beau - ti - ful pri - son". The Alto Flute part features trills and triplets. The vocal line includes dynamic markings 'f' and 'mf'.

Yawareté, the jaguar, has a very rhythmic, dissonant, and 'mysterious' accompaniment on pizzicato strings, for its (her) duet with Severino (see Ex. 14). However, Severino has probably the most distinguishable accompaniment, since it is provided almost exclusively by the guitar (bb. 378-538), as explained above (see Ex. 8). In contrast, Mata-Quatro is chiefly accompanied by the piano, as seen in Ex.15. This example also brings an

excerpt from the conflictive duet of Severino and Mata-Quatro, showing their lines along with their respective accompanying instruments (in a manner that reinforces the characters' antagonism) .

But the vocal lines of the singers are also differentiated in a number of ways. For instance, in its (her) duet with Severino, Yawareté's lines are built mostly of different and alternate pitch-sets, which produces an unconventional 'modality' (see Ex.16).

Ex. 14. Yawareté's melody and accompaniment (bb. 424-428)

Musical score for Ex. 14, showing Yawareté's melody and accompaniment. The score is in 4/4 time, marked *Più mosso*, $\text{♩} = 100$. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score includes the following parts:

- Yawareté**: Vocal line starting at measure 418. The melody is marked *mf* and includes a triplet. The lyrics are: "I like... like your passion".
- Vln. 1**: Violin 1 part, marked *pp* and *pizz.*
- Vln. 2**: Violin 2 part, marked *pp* and *pizz.*
- Vla.**: Viola part, marked *pp*.
- Vc.**: Violoncello part, marked *pp*.
- Cb.**: Contrabasso part, marked *pp*.

Ex.15. Excerpt from the duet of Severino and Mata-Quatro (bb. 646-648).

Musical score for Ex. 15, showing an excerpt from the duet of Severino and Mata-Quatro. The score is in 4/4 time. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score includes the following parts:

- Guitar**: Accompaniment part, marked *mf*.
- Piano**: Accompaniment part, marked *p*.
- Tenor Solo**: Vocal line, marked *mf* and *f*. The lyrics are: "Be-longs to me!".
- Bass Solo**: Vocal line, marked *mf* and *f*. The lyrics are: "All I e - ver wan - ted".

Ex. 16. Yaraweté's aria (bb. 484-491)

Yaraweté *mf*

The Moon is my wit - ness, the Moon is my wit - ness These in - di -
 vi - du - als Don't care for for - give - ness Where is 'Flor - da Lu - a?

On the other hand, Severino's melodies are often more 'freely built', which makes the melodic sections in thirds, described above (Exx. 9a and b), more evident (see Ex.17).

Ex. 17. Severino's vocal line, built over a non-specific scale (bb. 461-470)

Severino *mf*

In the mind of the pow-er - ful Un - der a mask they call pro - gress - In the
 hands of the cow - ards - Who don't know, who don't know - the fo - rest -

Then, as mentioned above, Mata-Quatro's lines are all based on the 'Mystery' leitmotif. (See Ex. 7 above).

Lua's musical character is probably the richest in the work, given its nuances and changes of mood. The major elements of Lua's characterization are her typically sinuous lines, as a reference to her attributes of sensuality and seductiveness, as previously mentioned (see Exx. 1 and 2 above).

5. Perspectives

It seems that great interest in *The Moonflower* may have already been incited in Brazil, and I am now considering the possibilities of having it produced there. Indeed, as stated in my PhD Research Project, one specific goal of this research is to contribute to the development of the operatic genre in my country, in both academic and artistic environments. Therefore I hope to use the knowledge I have obtained during the four years of my studies in London, as well as from the experience of *The Moonflower* project, to present opera as an attractive art-form, but also as an entertainment for Brazilian people in general. I believe that opera, and more particularly chamber opera, has the potential to be very well received there, thus helping to fill the gap between our contemporary classical music and popular culture.

Finally, it is a pleasure to include some feedback about *The Moonflower* opera experience, from some of its principals:

In *The Moonflower* the power of Mario's music flows like the Amazon river, gently revealing and unfolding its secrets and intensity in the subtle details of its mystical journey, as well as surprising you with full on romantic turbulence and sudden 'white water' rapids. My role Lua was one of the most challenging and intriguing characters I've ever performed! Maya Sapone (Lua).

The Moonflower was surprisingly rewarding considering we put it all together in such a short time period. I was fascinated by the musical and dramatic characterizations and the way this came out in the casting particularly. Andrew Morley, the conductor.

The Moonflower was an exceptional experience and atmospherically, allowed me to be in a situation, which is very much at the forefront of today's environmental issues. The music had a wonderful relationship with the text; the motifs inspired me to explore and portray Yawareté, the mystical jaguar who was an absolute pleasure to sing. Georgia Knower (Yawareté).

APPENDIX 1: Opera Companies in Britain

Table 3 - Permanent Companies with orchestra and National Funds

Name	Home	Year of Formation
The English National Opera	London Coliseum, St. Martin's Lane, London	1974, after Vic-Wells (1908) and Sadlers Wells (1944)
Opera North	Leeds Grand Theatre, Leeds, England	1977, as English National Opera North
The Royal Opera	Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London	1946, as the Covent Garden Opera Company
Scottish Opera	Theatre Royal, Glasgow	1962
Welsh National Opera	Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff, Wales	1946

Table 4 – Principal Seasonal Companies

Name	Home	Year of Formation
Almeida Opera (currently inactive)	Almeida Theatre, Islington, London	1992 - 2007
Buxton Festival	Buxton Opera House, Buxton, England (some new operas in the repertoire, also from other companies)	1979
Garsington Opera	The gardens of Garsington Manor, in the village of Garsington, near Oxford, England.	1990
Glyndebourne Festival Opera	A 700-year old country house and opera house near Lewes, East Sussex, England	1934
Grange Park Opera	Northington Grange estate, Hampshire, England (Summer); Pimlico Opera, London (Autumn)	1997
Opera Holland Park	Holland Park, in west central London	1989
Tête à Tête Opera Festival	Riverside Studios, Hammersmith, London	1999

Table 5 – Projects and Companies specialized in Contemporary Opera

Name	Home	Year of Formation
Music Theatre Wales	Linbury Studio Theatre, Royal Opera House (an associate company since 2002), London	1988
Five:15 Operas Made in Scotland (Scottish Opera's Initiative)	Theatre Royal, Glasgow	2008
The Opera Group	Young Vic Theatre, London	2000
Tête à Tête	Riverside Studios, Hammersmith, London	1997

Table 6 - Small Companies in London

Name	Home	Year of Formation
British Youth Opera	London South Bank University (and sponsor), London	1987
Carl Rosa Opera Limited	Shoreditch, London	1998
The Classical Opera Company	Touring (Mozart and his contemporaries)	1997
Early Opera Company	Touring (Baroque operas, period instruments)	
English Pocket Opera	Touring (Operas in English, small ensembles)	1993
English Touring Opera	Touring	2003, after Opera80 (1980s)
Hampstead Garden Opera	Upstairs at The Gatehouse, Highgate Village, Camden	1990
Hatstand Opera	Touring	1996
Imperial Productions	Barons Court Theatre, Hoxton Hall and The Cockpit Theatre, London	1979
Modern Music Theatre Troupe	Touring (based in Leicester, England)	1980s(?)
Opera A La Carte	Touring (and workshops, for a traditional repertoire)	1993
Opera Integra	Touring (amateur and aspiring professional)	1995
Opera Interludes and London Festival Opera	Touring (small, 'intimate' performances)	1995
Pegasus Opera Company	Touring (based in Brixton, London; multicultural, multi-racial cast)	1992
University College Opera	The UCL Bloomsbury	
W11 Opera	Touring (cast of 9 to 18 year olds, at W11 London schools and other communities)	1971

Table 7 – Small Companies in Britain:

Name	Home	Year of Formation
AAC presents Opera for All	Brent, England	1991
Bampton Classical Opera	Bampton, Oxfordshire, England	1993
Bel Canto Opera	Cheltenham, England	1989
Birmingham Opera Company	Birmingham, England	1987, as City of Birmingham Touring Opera
Candlelight Opera	Touring (based in Windsor, England)	
Castleward Opera	Strangford Lough, Northern Ireland	1985
The New Opera Company Derby	Derby, England (amateur company, Operettas and Musicals)	1891
Fife Opera	Adam Smith Theatre, Kirkcaldy, Scotland (amateur society)	1985
First Act Opera International	Touring (based in Suffolk, England)	1990
Kennet Opera	Newbury, Berkshire	1993
Kentish Opera	Touring (based in Kent, England)	1953
Leeds Youth Opera	Carriageworks Theatre, Leeds, England	1971
London Opera Players	Touring (based in Surrey, England; performances with full or chamber orchestra, quintet or piano)	1950
Longborough Festival Opera	Opera House in Longborough, Gloucestershire, England	1991, as Banks Fee Opera
Marlow Amateur Operatic Society	Shelly Theatre, Marlow, Buckinghamshire, England	1920
Medway Opera	Chatham, Kent, England	1974
Naked Opera	Touring (based in Glasgow, Scotland)	
Opera Della Luna	Oxford, England (Operettas and musicals)	1994
Opera on a Shoestring	Touring (based in Glasgow, Scotland)	
Opera South	Haslemere, Surrey, England (operas in English)	1984, as Opera Omnibus
Peterborough Opera	Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, England (operas in English)	1969
Surrey Opera	Harlequin Theatre, Redhill, Croydon, Surrey, England	1970
Swansea City Opera	Touring (based in Swansea, Wales)	1989
White Horse Opera	Devizes, Wiltshire, England	1990
York Opera	York, England (amateur company)	1966

Table 8 - Opera Companies for young artists

Name	Home	Year of Formation
British Youth Opera	London South Bank University (and sponsor), London	1987
Glyndebourne Education Project	A 700-year old country house and opera house near Lewes, East Sussex, England	1986
Leeds Youth Opera	Carriageworks Theatre, Leeds, England	1971
W11 Opera	Touring (cast of 9 to 18 year olds, at W11 London schools and other communities)	1971

APPENDIX 2: Premieres given by the main opera companies in Britain, from 1970 to 2010¹

Table 9 - World Premieres by The Royal Opera, at the Main Stage:

Date	Title	Composer
1970	<i>Victory</i>	Richard Rodney Bennett (England, 1936)
1970	<i>The Knot Garden</i> (and 1983, in a reduced version)	Michael Tippett (England, 1905-1998)
1972	<i>Taverner</i>	Peter Maxwell Davies (England, 1934)
1976	<i>We Come to the River</i>	Hans Werner Henze (Germany, 1926)
1977	<i>The Ice Break</i>	Michael Tippett (1905-1998)
1979	<i>Thérèse</i>	John Tavener (England, 1944)
1991	<i>Gaiwan</i>	Harrison Birtwistle (England, 1934)
1995	<i>Arianna</i>	Alexander Goehr (Germany/England, 1932)
2002	<i>Sophie's Choice</i>	Nicholas Maw (England, 1935 - 2009)
2004	<i>The Tempest</i>	Thomas Adès (England, 1971)
2005	<i>1984</i>	Lorin Maazel (Jewish-American, 1930)
2008	<i>The Minotaur</i>	Harrison Birtwistle (England, 1934)

Table 10 - World Premieres at the Linbury Studio Theatre:

Date	Title	Composer
2001	<i>Flying High</i>	Graham Preskett (England, 1950s)
2002	<i>Babette's Feast</i>	John Browne (Ireland/England, 1960s)
2003	<i>Another America: Earth</i>	Errollyn Wallen (Belize/England, 1968)
2004	<i>The Piano Tuner</i>	Nigel Osborne (England, 1948)
2006	<i>Gentle Giant</i>	Stephen McNeff (Ireland, Wales)
2006	<i>Bird of the Night</i>	Dominique Le Gendre (Trinidad, 1960)
2006	<i>The Assassin Tree</i>	Stuart Macrae (Scotland, 1976)
2007	<i>The Shops</i> (2006)	Edward Rushton (England, 1972)
2008	<i>For You</i>	Michael Berkeley (1948)

¹The information depicted in this appendix was collected either in programme notes and reviews from the archival material of The English National Opera and The Royal Opera House, through references offered by some professionals like Clare Colvin (ENO), Gabrielle St John-Mcalister (Royal Opera House), Julia Aries (Glyndebourne), Catriona Chatterley (Music Theatre Wales), and Henrietta Bredin (ENO Studio and Almeida Opera), some interviews, in books, or in the internet.

Table 11 - Other notable ROH productions, at the Main Stage:

Date	Title	Composer	Premiere
1973	<i>Owen Wingrave</i>	Benjamin Britten (England, 1913-1976)	After BBC TV (1971)
1973	<i>Death in Venice</i>	Benjamin Britten	London premiere
1985	<i>Donnerstag aus Licht</i> (1981)	Stockhausen (Germany, 1928-2007)	British premiere
1987	<i>The King Goes Forth to France</i> (1984)	Aulis Sallinen (Finland, 1935)	British premiere
1989	<i>Un Re in Ascolto</i> (1984)	Luciano Berio (Italy, 1925-2003)	British premiere
2000	<i>Mary Seacole</i>	Richard Chew (England)	London (2nd)
2000	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	Michael Berkeley (England, 1948)	London premiere
2006	<i>House of the Gods</i>	Lynne Plowman (Wales, 1969)	London premiere
2008	<i>Monkey - Journey to the West</i> (2007)	Damon Albarn (England, 1968)	London premiere

Table 12 - Other notable productions, at the Linbury Studio Theatre:

Date	Title	Composer	Premiere
2001	<i>The Lighthouse</i> (1980)	Peter Maxwell-Davies (England, 1934)	
2005	<i>Orphée</i> (1993)	Philip Glass (USA, 1937)	British premiere
2005	<i>Julie</i>	Philippe Boesmans (b. 1936, Belgium)	British premiere
2008	<i>Powder Her Face</i> (1995)	Thomas Adès	London (2nd)
2009	<i>Parthenogenesis</i> (2000)	James MacMilan (Scotland, 1959)	London premiere
2009	<i>Into The Little Hill</i> (2006)	George Benjamin (England, 1960)	British premiere
2009	<i>Down By The Greenwood Side</i> (1969)	Harrison Birtwistle	
2009	<i>The Enchanted Pig</i> (2006)	Jonathan Dove (England, 1959)	

Table 13 - Some of the new operas produced by the Royal Opera House Garden Venture Project:

Date	Title	Composer
1989	<i>Last Tango on the North Circular</i>	Peter Wiegold (England, 1949)
1989	<i>The Uranium Miners Radio Orchestra Play Scenes from Salome's Revenge</i>	Andrew Poppy (England, 1954)
1991	<i>Out of Season</i>	Julian Grant (England, 1960)
1991	<i>A Queen Has Her Portrait Painted</i>	Agustin Fernández (Bolivia, 1958)
1991	<i>Panic</i>	David Sawer (England, 1961)
1991	<i>Emily</i>	Corin Buckeridge (England, 1960s)
1992	<i>Hunger</i>	Alwynne Pritchard (Scotland, 1968)
1993	<i>Travels In The Arctic Circle</i>	Geoff Westley (England, 1949)

Table 14 - World Premieres by The English National Opera:

Date	Title	Composer
1973/74	<i>The Story of Vasco</i>	Gordon Crosse (England, 1937)
1976/77	<i>The Royal Hunt of the Sun</i> (and in 1978/79 season)	Iain Hamilton (Scotland, 1922)
1977/78	<i>Toussaint,</i>	David Blake (England, 1936)
1980/81	<i>Anna Karenina</i>	Iain Hamilton
1985/86	<i>The Mask of Orpheus</i>	Harrison Birtwistle (England, 1934)
1988/89	<i>The Plumber's Gift</i>	David Blake
1989/90	<i>Clarissa</i> (1976)	Robin Holloway (England, 1943)
1990/91	<i>Timon of Athens</i>	Stephen Oliver (England, 1950-1992)
1991/92	<i>Bakxai</i> (The Bacchae)	John Buller (England, 1927-2004)
1992/93	<i>Inquest of Love</i>	Jonathan Harvey (England, 1939)
1993/94	<i>Blond Eckbert</i>	Judith Weir (England/Scotland, 1954)
1997/98	<i>Doctor Ox's Experiment</i>	Gavin Bryars (England, 1943)
1999/2000	<i>The Silver Tassie</i>	Mark-Anthony Turnage (England, 1960)
2000/01	<i>From Morning to Midnight</i>	David Sawer (England, 1961)
2000/01	<i>The Palace in the Sky</i> (a community opera)	Jonathan Dove (England, 1959)
2000/01	<i>A Better Place</i>	Martin Butler (England, 1960)
2005/06	<i>The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant</i>	Gerald Barry (Ireland, 1952)

Table 15 - Other ENO notable productions:

Date	Title	Composer	Premiere
1973/74	<i>The Devils of Loudon</i>	Penderecki (Poland, 1933)	English premiere
1984/85	<i>Akhmaten</i>	Philip Glass (USA, 1937)	British premiere
1988/89	<i>Making of the Representative for Planet 8</i>	Philip Glass (USA, 1937)	British premiere
1988/89	<i>Lear</i> (1975)	Aribert Reimann (Germany, 1936)	British premiere
1994/95	<i>Life with an Idiot</i>	Alfred Schnittke (Russia, 1934-1998)	British premiere
2000/01	<i>Il Prigionero</i> (The Prisoner)	Luigi Dallapiccola	
2002/03	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	Poul Ruders (Denmark, 1949)	British premiere
2006/07	<i>Satyagraha</i>	Philip Glass (USA, 1937)	British premiere (and in 2010)
2007/08	<i>Lost Highway</i>	Olga Neuwirth (Austria, 1968)	British premiere
2008/09	<i>Doctor Atomic</i>	John Adams (USA, 1947)	British premiere
2009/10	<i>L'Amour de Loin</i>	Kaija Saariaho (Finland, 1952)	British premiere

Table 16 - World Premieres by ENO Studio in association with Almeida Opera:

Date	Title	Composer
1992	<i>Terrible Mouth</i>	Nigel Osborne (England, 1948)
1992	<i>False Love / True Love</i>	Nils Vigeland (USA, 1950)
1993	<i>The Man with the Wind at his Heels</i>	Kevin Volans (South Africa, 1949)
1993	<i>A Family Affair</i>	Julian Grant (England, 1960)
1994	<i>The Nightingale and the Rose</i>	Elena Firsova (Russia, 1950)
1994	<i>Siren Song</i>	Jonathan Dove (England, 1959)
1995	<i>Powder Her Face</i>	Thomas Adès (England, 1971)
1995	<i>East and West</i>	Ian McQueen (Scotland, 1950s)
1996	<i>Or The Hapless Landing</i>	Heiner Goebbels (Germany, 1952)
1997	<i>The Cenci</i>	Giorgio Battistelli (Italy, 1953)

Table 17 - British Premieres by ENO Studio in association with Almeida Opera:

Date	Title	Composer
1992	<i>Mario And The Magician</i>	Stephen Oliver (England, 1950-1992)
1993	<i>Judith And Holofernes</i>	David Lang (USA, 1957)
1993	<i>The Line Of Terror</i>	Ian McQueen (Scotland, 1950s)
1995	<i>Experimentum Mundi</i>	Giorgio Battistelli (Italy, 1953)
1996	<i>Snatched by the Gods and Broken Strings</i>	Param Vir (India/England, 1952)
1997	<i>The Juniper Tree</i>	Roderick Watkins (England, 1964)

Table 18 - World premieres by Opera North:

Date	Title	Composer
1983	<i>Rebecca</i>	Wilfred Josephs (England, 1927-1997)
1991	<i>Caritas</i>	Robert Saxton (England, 1953)
1993	<i>Baa, Baa, Black Sheep</i>	Michael Berkeley (England, 1948)
1994	<i>Playing Away</i>	Benedict Mason (England, 1954)
1998	<i>The Nightingale's to Blame</i>	Simon Holt (England, 1958)
2007	<i>The Adventures of Pinocchio</i>	Jonathan Dove (England, 1959)
2009	<i>Swanhunter</i>	Jonathan Dove
2009	<i>Skin Deep</i>	David Sawer (England, 1961)
2009	<i>Prima Donna</i>	Rufus Wainwright (Canada/USA, 1973)

Table 19 - The Almeida Opera World Premieres:

Date	Title	Composer
1990	<i>The Intelligence Park</i>	Gerald Barry (1952)
1992	<i>Terrible Mouth</i>	Nigel Osborne (England, 1948)
1992	<i>False Love / True Love</i>	Nils Vigeland (USA, 1950)
1993	<i>The Man With the Wind at his Heels</i>	Kevin Volans (South Africa, 1949)
1993	<i>A Family Affair</i>	Julian Grant (England, 1960)
1994	<i>The Nightingale and the Rose</i>	Elena Firsova (Russia, 1950)
1994	<i>Siren Song</i>	Jonathan Dove (England, 1959)
1995	<i>Powder Her Face</i>	Thomas Adès (England, 1971)
1995	<i>East and West</i>	Ian McQueen (Scotland, 1950s)
1996	<i>Or The Hapless Landing</i>	Heiner Goebbels (Germany, 1952)
1997	<i>The Cenci</i>	Giorgio Battistelli (Italy, 1953)
1998	<i>Hey Persephone!</i>	Deirdre Gribbin (Northern Ireland, 1967)
1998	<i>Night Banquet and Wolf Cub Village</i>	Guo Wenjing (China, 1956)
1999	<i>Tobias and the Angel</i>	Jonathan Dove (England, 1959)
2000	<i>Ion</i>	Param Vir (India/England, 1952)
2000	<i>Earth and the Great Weather</i>	John Luther Adams (USA, 1953)
2000	<i>Nuit des Hommes</i>	Per Norgard (Denmark, 1932)
2001	<i>Kantan and Damask Drum (1989)</i>	Alexander Goehr (Germany/England, 1932)
2001	<i>God's Liar</i>	John Casken (England, 1949)
2002	<i>The Young Man with the Carnation</i>	Edward Rushton (England, 1972)
2002	<i>The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit (1991)</i>	Gerald Barry (Ireland, 1952)
2002	<i>The Embalmer</i>	Giorgio Battistelli (Italy, 1953)
2003	<i>Who Put Bella In The Wych Elm</i>	Simon Holt (England, 1958)
2003	<i>The Girl of Sand</i>	Elena Langer (Russia, 1974?)
2004	<i>The Io Passion</i>	Harrison Birtwistle (England, 1934)
2004	<i>Man and Boy: Dada</i>	Michael Nyman (England, 1944)
2005	<i>The Cricket Recovers</i>	Richard Ayres (England, 1965)
2006	<i>The Original Chinese Conjuror</i>	Raymond Yiu (Hong Kong, 1973)
2007	<i>The Silent Twins</i>	Errollyn Wallen (Belize, 1968)

Table 20 - The Almeida Opera British Premieres:

Date	Title	Composer
1992	<i>Mario And The Magician</i>	Stephen Oliver (England, 1950-1992)
1993	<i>Judith And Holofernes</i>	David Lang (USA, 1957)
1993	<i>The Line Of Terror</i>	Ian McQueen (Scotland, 1950s)
1995	<i>Experimentum Mundi</i>	Giorgio Battistelli (Italy, 1953)
1996	<i>Snatched by the Gods and Broken Strings</i>	Param Vir (India/England, 1952)
1997	<i>The Juniper Tree</i>	Roderick Watkins (England, 1964)

Table 21 - British premieres of little known operas, by the Garsington Opera:

Title	Composer	Premieres
<i>L'incoronazione di Dario</i> (1716)	Vivaldi	British Premiere
<i>Die ägyptische Helena</i>	Richard Strauss	British Premiere
<i>La gazzetta</i> and <i>L'equivoco stravagante</i>	Rossini	British Premiere
<i>La vera costanza</i>	Haydn	1st. British Production
<i>Die Liebe der Danae</i>	Richard Strauss	1st. British Production
<i>Šárka</i>	Janáček	1st. British Production
<i>Cherevichki</i>	Tchaikovsky	1st. British Production

Table 22 - World Premieres by the Glyndebourne Festival Opera

Date	Title	Composer
1970	<i>The Rising of the Moon</i>	Nicholas Maw (England, 1935-2009)
1984	<i>Where The Wild Things Are</i>	Oliver Knussen (Scotland, 1952)
1984	<i>Higglety Pigglety Pop!</i>	Oliver Knussen
1987	<i>The Electrification Of The Soviet Union</i>	Nigel Osborne (England, 1948)
1994	<i>The Second Mrs Kong</i>	Harrison Birtwistle (England, 1934)
1998	<i>Flight</i>	Jonathan Dove
2000	<i>The Last Supper</i>	Harrison Birtwistle
2008	<i>Love and Other Demons</i>	Peter Eötvös (Hungary, 1944)

Table 23 - Other relevant productions by Glyndebourne and Glyndebourne Touring Opera

Date	Title	Composer	Premiere
1972	<i>Il Ritorno d'Ulisse</i>	Monteverdi	British Premiere
1973	<i>The Visit of the Old Lady</i>	Von Einem	English Premiere
1974	<i>Intermezzo</i>	Richard Strauss	English Premiere
1986	<i>Porgy and Bess</i>	George Gershwin	1st British Production
1990	<i>New Year</i>	Michael Tippett	European Premiere
1993	<i>Cornet Christoph Rilke's Song of Love and Death</i>	Siegfried Matthus (Germany, 1934)	British Premiere
2006	<i>Betrothal in a Monastery</i>	Prokofiev (Russia, 1891-1953)	1st British Production

Table 24 - Glyndebourne Education's youth and community projects:

Date	Title	Composer
1990	<i>Hastings Spring</i>	Jonathan Dove
1993	<i>Dream Dragons</i>	Jonathan Dove
1995	<i>In Search of Angels</i>	Jonathan Dove
1997	<i>Misper</i>	John Lunn
2000	<i>Zoë</i>	John Lunn
2001	<i>Airheads</i>	Ian McCrae
2002	<i>Firework</i>	Will Todd
2003	<i>Ancestor in the Chalk</i>	Orlando Gough
2005	<i>Strange Nature</i>	Katherine Gillham
2005	<i>Cinderella</i>	Alison Fenner
2005	<i>Tangier tattoo</i>	John Lunn
2006	<i>Still Water</i> (inspired by Britten's <i>Turn of the Screw</i>)	James Redwood
2006	<i>School 4 Lovers – a 'Hip H'Opera'</i> (a reworking of Mozart's <i>Così fan tutte</i>)	Arrangements by Jonathan Gill and Charlie Parker
2007	<i>Auditorium</i>	Ed Hughes
2007	<i>Ghosts/Followers</i>	Julian Philips
2007	<i>Two Truths</i>	James Redwood
2009	<i>The Yellow Sofa</i>	Julian Philips
2009	<i>On the Rim of the World</i>	Orlando Gough

Table 25 - New works commissions by Music Theatre Wales:

Date	Title	Composer
1992	<i>Ubu</i>	Andrew Toovey (England, 1962) (Libr.: Michael Finnissy)
1994	<i>Flowers</i>	John Hardy (England/Wales)
1996	<i>In the House of Crossed Desires</i>	John Woolrich (England, 1954)
1997	<i>The Roswell Incident</i>	John Hardy
2000	<i>Jane Eire</i>	Michael Berkeley (England, 1948)
2002	<i>Gwyneth and the Green Knight</i>	Lynne Plowman (Wales, 1969)
2002	<i>The Electrification of the Soviet Union</i> (new version)	Nigel Osbourne (England, 1948)
2003	<i>Ion</i>	Param Vir (India/England, 1952)
2004	<i>The Piano Turner</i>	Nigel Osbourne
2006	<i>House of the Gods</i>	Lynne Plowman (Wales, 1969)
2008	<i>For You</i>	Michael Berkeley
2009	<i>Crime Fiction</i>	Huw Watkins (Wales, 1976)
2009	<i>Letters of a Love Betrayed</i>	Eleanor Alberga (Jamaica, 1949)

Table 26 - Re-stagings by Music Theatre Wales:

Title	Composer
<i>The Martyrdom of St Magnus</i>	Peter Maxwell Davies
<i>8 Songs for a Mad King</i>	Peter Maxwell Davies
<i>The Lighthouse</i>	Peter Maxwell Davies
<i>The Fall of the House of Usher</i>	Philip Glass
<i>The Four Note Opera</i>	Tom Johnson
<i>The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat</i>	Michael Nyman
<i>Julie</i>	Philippe Boesmans
<i>Pierrot Lunaire</i>	Arnold Schoenberg
<i>Punch and Judy</i>	Harrison Birtwistle
<i>The Rape of Lucretia</i>	Benjamin Britten
<i>The Knot Garden</i>	Michael Tippett

Table 27 - The Opera Group World Premieres:

Date	Title	Composer
2002	<i>The Young Man With The Carnation</i>	Edward Rushton (England, 1972)
2004	<i>Birds. Barks. Bones</i>	Edward Rushton
2005	<i>The Birds</i>	Ed Hughes (England, 1968)
2006	<i>The Enchanted Pig</i> (2006, re-staged in 2009)	Jonathan Dove (England, 1959)
2007	<i>The Singing Shop : Out of the Ordinary</i>	David Bruce (USA/Britain, 1970)
2007	<i>The Singing Shop: All that Money can Buy</i>	Laura Bowler (England)
2007	<i>The Shops</i> (2006),	Edward Rushton (England, 1972)
2008	<i>Varjak Paw</i>	Julian Philips (Wales, 1969)
2010	<i>The Lion's Face</i>	Elena Langer (Russia, 1974?)

Table 28 - Other important productions by The Opera Group:

Date	Title	Composer
1999	<i>The Martyrdom of St Magnus</i> (1977)	Peter Maxwell Davies
2006	<i>Really?</i>	Judith Weir
2006	<i>Small Tales, Tall Tales</i>	Kenneth Hesketh
2006	<i>Blond Eckbert</i>	Judith Weir
2009	<i>Into The Little Hill</i> (2006)	George Benjamin
2009	<i>Down By The Greenwood Side</i> (1969)	Harrison Birtwistle

Table 29 - Tête-à-Tête commissions and productions of Contemporary Operas:

Date	Title
1999/2001	<i>Shorts</i> , or an evening of five commissioned operas and entr'actes
2002	<i>Six-Pack</i> , a co-production with the ENO Studio of six commissioned operas, supported by a series of educational work, at the Bridewell Theatre, London, then on a national tour.
2005	<i>A Shetland Odyssey</i> , an opera commissioned and workshopped with the librettist, composer, company and the knitters from Shetland. The process has resulted in a London run and national tour in 2006 as <i>Odysseus Unwound</i> .
2006	<i>Push!</i> , winner of the 2nd Genesis Opera Project, the work was composed by David Bruce (USA/Britain, 1970), with a libretto by Anna Reynolds and focused on 6 women's stories of giving births.
2007	<i>Blind Date</i> , commissions of 6 operas from 6 teams of composers and librettists to present 6 short pieces over one evening.
2008	<i>The Cumnor Affair: An Elizabethan Murder Mystery</i> , the first opera by composer Philip Cashian (England, 1963) and novelist Ian Pears.
2007/2008/ 2009/2010	Tête A Tête Opera Festival

Table 30 - Music Theatre commissioned and premiered by the W11 Opera:

Date	Title	Composer
1971	<i>Noye's Fludde</i>	Benjamin Britten
1972	<i>The Pied Piper</i>	Christopher Bowers Broadbent
1973	<i>Bel and the Dragon</i>	John Gardner
1974	<i>The Winter Star</i>	Malcolm Williamson
1975	<i>Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat</i>	Andrew L. Webber, Tim Rice
1976	<i>Like This, Like That</i>	Timothy Kraemer
1977	<i>The Adventures of Jonah</i>	Timothy Kraemer
1978	<i>The Girl and the Unicorn</i>	Stephen Oliver
1979	<i>Dreamtime</i>	Daryl Runswick
1980	<i>Mak the Sheep Stealer</i>	Herbert Chappell
1981	<i>Wenceslas</i>	Timothy Kraemer
1982	<i>Birthday (revived 1998)</i>	George Fenton
1983	<i>Rainbow Planet</i>	Christopher Gunning
1984	<i>The Adventures of Jonah</i>	Timothy Kraemer
1985	<i>Bel and the Dragon</i>	John Gardner
1986	<i>The Tin Knight</i>	Francis Shaw
1987	<i>Ulysses and the Wooden Horse</i>	Timothy Kraemer
1988	<i>The Return of Odysseus</i>	David Bedford
1989	<i>Koppelberg</i>	Steve Gray
1990	<i>Double Trouble</i>	Louisa Lasdun
1991	<i>A Time of Miracles</i>	Richard Harvey
1992	<i>Listen to the Earth</i>	Steve Gray
1993	<i>Traveller's Tale</i>	Michael Kamen,
1994	<i>Antiphony (revived 2005)</i>	Graham Preskett
1995	<i>The Dancing Princesses</i>	Bill Connor
1996	<i>Ulysses and the Wooden Horse</i>	Timothy Kraemer
1997	<i>Eloise</i>	Karl Jenkins
1999	<i>Rip</i>	Colin Towns
2000	<i>Deep Waters</i>	Cecilia McDowall
2001	<i>Flying High</i>	Graham Preskett
2002	<i>Stormlight</i>	David Knotts
2003	<i>Game Over</i>	Guy Dagul
2004	<i>All in the Mind</i>	Edward Lambert
2006	<i>Chincha-Chancha Cooroo</i>	Bernard Hughes
2007	<i>Shadowtracks</i>	Julian Grant
2008	<i>The Song of Rhiannon</i>	Mark Bowden
2009	<i>The Whale Savers</i>	Martin Ward

Table 31 - Some notable examples of operas that have been commissioned by or adapted to television:

	Title
1971	<i>Owen Wingrave</i> , by Britten's (BBC)
1976	<i>Murder, The Magician</i> , by Alun Hoddinott (HTV)
1979	<i>The Raja's Diamond</i> , by Alun Hoddinott (BBC)
1980	<i>A Christmas Carol</i> , by Norman Kay (HTV)
1988	<i>Greek</i> , by Mark-Anthony Turnage (BBC, 1990)
1991	<i>New Year</i> , by Michael Tippett (BBC)
1994	<i>King of Hearts</i> , by Orlando Gough (C4)
1994	<i>The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit</i> , by Gerald Barry (C4)
1994	<i>Good Friday, 1663</i> , by Mike and Kate Westbrook (C4)
	<i>The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat</i> , by Michael Nyman (C4 / ICA)
	<i>Armida</i> , by Judith Weir
	<i>Man on the Moon</i> , by Jonathan Dove
2002	<i>When She Died</i> , by Jonathan Dove and David Harsent (C4)
	<i>Powder Her Face</i> , by Thomas Adès (C4, in a primetime slot on Christmas Day)
	<i>The Death of Klinghoffer</i> , by John Adams and Alice Goodman, directed by Penny Woolcock's - Prix Italia and a cinema release, considered one of the classics of opera on film.

APPENDIX 3 – The ENO Studio Blueprint

BLUEPRINT FOR A NEW OPERA STUDIO

English National Opera, March 1989²

INTRODUCTION

ENO believes that the continuing creation of new operas is vital to the health of our musical and theatrical life. We have therefore embarked on an annual commissioning scheme, presenting a new work each season. The scheme begins this year with the premiere of *The Plumber's Gift* by David Blake, with a libretto by John Birtwistle, and there are already six more works in the pipeline.

The Coliseum is an extremely large theatre and therefore an expensive and unwieldy venue in which to experiment. Furthermore, the flow of new operas is so much more sporadic than it was in the 19th century that there is an urgent need to create an environment in which the theory and practice of operatic writing for the 20th century can be explored and developed. Britain has outstanding resources of musical and dramatic talent: they must be given the room, time and resource to evolve and explore the future of opera.

RESEARCH

ENO decided that its first step must be to research the needs and wishes of the creators themselves. This was done by means of a residential forum at Dartington College for 60 writers and composers (funded by Channel 4).

A unique gathering of creative people, the weekend formed the subject of a Channel 4 programme in the *Signals* series, transmitted on 1 March 1989. The main purpose of the weekend was for these artists to define the Studio in terms

²This blueprint was kindly offered to me by Ms Henrietta Bredin, studio director of ENO Studio.

of their own needs: the plans and projects detailed below closely follow the lessons learnt at Dartington.

THE STUDIO

ENO is to create a new Opera Studio to answer these needs. Its aims are:

- To bring together Britain's best writers and composers
- To explore all aspects of the fusion of music and theatre
- To create a seminal repertoire of small-scale work
- To build an audience for new opera
- To explore and develop the writing of opera for television and audio-visual media

MEMBERSHIP

The Studio is primarily a resource for writers and composers. It will be constituted by a membership open to any writer, composer or practitioner in the fields of music and drama.

Members of the Studio will be eligible to participate in all the projects and benefit from the resources made available, though clearly individual projects can only accommodate a certain number of people.

The members of the Studio will be strongly represented on the Steering and each project will be led by teams comprising Studio members. These duties will be rotated to preserve access to all members.

All members of the Studio will automatically be members of its reading panel. The need for serious but constructive and sympathetic criticism from peers is clearly felt and such criticism would be invaluable in assisting the Steering Group to make its decisions.

PRACTICE 1

The Studio will not initially be a building. It will be a series of projects designed to cater for the different needs felt by composers and writers. The South Bank has already promised to provide space for some Studio projects and has offered to commission one of these.

Studio work may be divided simply into two types:

- Projects designed to produce results

- Projects designed to allow experiment for its own sake

STUDIO COMMISSIONS

The Studio will commission annually a group of projects (probably three) which will be scheduled for completion and performance at a specific date. The commissions will be for small-scale works. They will differ from 'straightforward' commissions in their method of preparation. Each project will have a full team of interpreters involved from the start: i.e. conductor, director, designer and, where possible, singers. The Studio will create opportunities for these projects to be examined at four stages:

- Planning

- First read-through, or performances of individual scenes

- First rehearsal period

- Final rehearsal period

In this way all members of the Studio will benefit from the lessons illustrated by each project and the projects themselves will be given the benefit of sympathetic and constructive criticism. The interpreters are thereby involved in the process of creation.

ENO COMMISSIONS

These glimpses of work-in-progress would be further enriched by passing the

ENO main-house commissions through the same process. The ability to follow a large number of projects through their various stages provides an invaluable insight into the problems and possibilities of opera, as well as reducing the isolation in which such large projects are conceived.

By means of its commissions the Studio will create a repertoire of small-scale works which will be marketed for festivals and tours to spread the work of the Studio and to build an audience. There is already an established link with the Munich Biennale, which is doing similar work.

TELEVISION OPERAS

At the Dartington weekend, the presence and influence of television was clearly important. It included a performance of *The Mathematics of a Kiss* by Orlando Gough, John Lunn and Anthony Minghella, specially commissioned for television by ENO and Channel 4.

The Studio will be committed to the idea of opera specifically written for television, and to the development of new audiences through the use of television.

The Studio will provide opportunities for training writers and composers in the techniques of writing for television. It will seek to involve television in developing public awareness of the work of its writers and composers. It will seek commissions from television companies for operas written specifically for television to develop this repertoire, and through this, expand awareness of new writing and composition. *The Mathematics of a Kiss* itself revealed the possibilities of the 10-minute television opera or opera commercial, a form ideally suited to give a wide range of writers and composers an opportunity to explore and develop this medium.

PRACTICE 2

The Studio will establish different projects to stimulate experiment and debate about the writing of opera.

IMPROVISATION

The Studio will provide space and performers over six weekends in the year for carefully structured experiments in the possibilities of improvisation.

INSTANT OPERAS

The Studio has as one of its fundamental aims to stimulate contact and understanding between writers and composers. This is the function of its Instant Opera projects. Members of the Studio will be free to apply for places on these projects, which will proceed by matching writers and composers and providing them with the facilities to develop over a residential fortnight instant short operas or fragments of potentially larger works.

This project would proceed in four stages:

- 1) An initial 2-day session in which its teams plan their projects
- 2) A gap for initial writing
- 3) A subsequent 2-day session to establish progress
- 4) A slightly longer gap to allow for the writing of some music followed by a final residential week during which the short work or fragment is brought to a rough performance level, rehearsed and performed. During this week a separate stream of composers and writers would be accommodated who wished simply to work with one another on developing speculative projects.

A RESOURCE FOR CREATORS

The Studio will need to reserve resources that can be made available for

experimental projects which arise from its members. The nature of these projects cannot of course be readily imagined in advance, but it is vital that the Studio is flexible enough in its make-up to be able to respond to the needs of writers and composers.

ACCESS TO OPERA – ENO’S ROLE AS A RESOURCE FOR THE STUDIO

ENO recognises the need to give writers and composers access to its rehearsals to stimulate their response to the form of opera and to encourage the feeling that they belong in what often appears to be a museum of past glories.

ENO will therefore open its dress rehearsals to Studio members. It will open all its stage rehearsals for each production to a restricted number of Studio members. It will allow one Studio member per production to observe the full course of production rehearsals from beginning to end. It will seek the resource to offer a small bursary for this process: not many writers or composers can afford to spend this time for nothing, but it is an invaluable insight into the function of opera.

Whenever Studio members indicate the desire and capability of working for a period in the opera house, as a pianist, for instance, or in any other practical capacity, ENO will attempt to accommodate them. There is no substitute for learning on the job.

ENO will attempt, wherever possible, to answer requests for ‘random resources’ – a composer may wish to ‘borrow’ a pianist, a singer, space, for a limited period.

WORDS MEET MUSIC

MUSIC MEETS WORDS

This is the essence of opera. The Studio is the first enterprise of its kind to

begin from the position that the development of the librettist is as important as the development of the composer. But the fact is that composers and writers don't normally move in the same circles, don't naturally encounter one another.

Many writers and composers requested:

- That the Studio establish a resources room: a friendly environment in which access is provided to books, tapes, videos of new writing of all genres.
- That the Studio establish a means for informing writers and composers about new developments and projects in each other's fields.
- That the Studio establish a form of database to help collaborators to find one another. This would automatically be created from the information gathered in the process of joining the Studio.

STRUCTURE

The Studio will be set up by ENO. Any experimental projects needs firm guidance, but the Studio must above all remain responsive to the needs of creators: it seeks to unleash the art of the future, not dictate it. The high level of participation of the Studio membership in the structure of the Studio reflects this philosophy.

FUNDING

ENO is seeking private funding for the Studio. The Studio provides diverse opportunities for the participation and support of funding bodies:

Income: the Studio needs a substantial annual income guaranteed for at least three years to allow for considered, consistent development.

Commissions Funds can also be channelled towards specific projects, allowing a sponsor to identify with the creation of a particular work.

Artists Funds can be channelled towards specific artists – giving bursaries or attendance on Studio projects, for observerships and attachments to ENO.

Capital: The Studio requires capital funds to invest in electronic, video and computer equipment, the equipping of a resources room etc. This is a real investment in the artistic future.

We believe that a constant blood-supply of new work is vital to the artistic health of English National Opera and opera as an art-form. The unprecedented gathering of composers and writers at Dartington College in January of this year proved that there is no shortage of talent on which to draw. As a result of that gathering we now know what the creators themselves would like us to do to enable them to write new operas and have devised the above plan of action. What we need now is oxygen – a breath of life in the form of substantial funding – that will make it possible for us to unleash the opera of the future.

Peter Jonas	David Pountney	Henrietta Bredin
General Director	Director of Productions	Studio Director

March 1989

How exciting and innovative to bring all us writers and composers together! How is it possible that this has never happened before? With the worlds of television, music and theatre (and, please, also painters, designers, choreographers – even architects!) united, it might be possible to whisk opera out of the history books and into the year 2000 and beyond. I look forward to ENO's future with great excitement. George Benjamin, composer.

I think your draft proposal is unusually well formulated; the emphasis on practice, in the sense of both practical studio work and prolonged rehearsal, seems to me quite right. Nick Dear, playwright.

The production of new operas in Britain should be encouraged with the utmost energy. I think that the project you propose is the best solution to this question and I support it with all my heart. Gyorgy Ligeti, composer.

I am heartened by your idea that practice makes perfect; it seems vital that composers, while aiming at the highest standards, are not put under 'first night masterpiece' pressures all the time, and practical theatre experience in an organised atmosphere will help enormously to make them feel that they can, and do, belong in the theatre. Robert Saxton, composer.

I am wholeheartedly behind the enterprise and have for a long time been frustrated by the segregation of the worlds of theatre, music and poetry, though I have done what I can to keep them in touch with each other. I think my own work has not been fully appreciated because of these nervous segregations. Anything you can do to break them down has my full support. In any case, blessings on the enterprise. It's important not just to opera but to theatre. Tony Harrison, poet, translator, dramatist

This is radically a lively, novel, imaginative and right-thinking idea which deserves the support of all who think opera at all important. Stephen Oliver, composer

APPENDIX 4 - *The Lion's Face* opera experience

This appendix outlines the experience of attending the rehearsals and premiere of the chamber opera *The Lion's Face*, a brand new production commissioned by The Opera Group, with music by Elena Langer and libretto by Glyn Maxwell.

i) The opera

The Lion's Face is scored for a speaking actor, four singers, boys' voices and a 12-piece ensemble.³ The opera premiered at the Brighton Festival on 20 May 2010, then toured the UK through the summer. The title refers to the supposedly leonine expression of many dementia sufferers. Set in a retirement home, it centres on Mr D (the speech role), whose increasing loss of awareness and memory is painfully charted by those around him. He no longer recognises his dutiful wife or his sons, and gives meaningless answers to his doctor's questions. But he does strike up an oblique relationship with a sulky teenage girl, the daughter of his carer, who is loafing about for the day because her school is closed, and also who is ultimately the only person he acknowledges.

Working in partnership with Professor Simon Lovestone's team at the Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London, The Opera Group has developed the opera during two years to find a way of creatively exploring the experiences of the Alzheimer's patient, the carer and the research scientist. The project also included a series of off-stage events where scientists, artists, audiences could exchange ideas and discuss the opera and latest research into Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

Some opinions and reviews about the opera:

Opera seems to be the ideal art-form in which to explore a retreat into an inner world in which the patient's ability to communicate with the

³N.a., 'The Lion's Face, The OperaGroup website <<http://thelionsface.wordpress.com/>>, accessed 30 May 2011. Also from the opera's score and programme notes for the first performance.

world diminishes. Artistic director John Fulljames.⁴

Elena Langer's score mimics a world of mental chaos. Spare and quirky, sometimes sharply abrasive, sometimes sweetly melancholy, it moves through jerks in pace and shards of melody which appear to be on the verge of cohering into harmonic sense only to disconnect and disengage. Rupert Christiansen, critic.⁵

To emphasise his apartness, Mr D speaks his lines while those around him sing. It's a neat device, but would pack more punch if the need for anyone to sing was shown more convincingly by Langer's music. Her vocal lines are mostly routine arioso, while the ensemble writing is most effective when thinned to a single line – a teetering piano solo, perhaps, or a thrummed cello. The music remains a decorative backdrop, and never gives dramatic shape to what is a modest, sincere piece of theatre. Andrew Clements, critic.⁶

Cast: Mr D: Dave Hill; Mrs D: Elizabeth Sikora; Caregiver: Rachel Hynes; Caregiver's Daughter: Fflur Wyn; Clinician: Benedict Nelson; Boy: Harry Bradford; Cover Boy: Jonathan Bircumshaw.

Creative: Director: John Fulljames; Conductor: Nicholas Collon; Designer: Alex Lowde; LX Designer: Jon Clark; Sound Designer: Fergus O'Hare; Projection Designer: Ian Galloway; Production Photographer: Alastair Muir.

The Production team was constituted by: a Production Manager, a Company Stage Manager, a Deputy Stage Manager, a Costume Supervisor, a Technical Stage Manager, a Tour Lighting, an AV Technician, a Wardrobe Manager, and a Chaperone.

⁴'The lion's Face', Welcome Collection website <<http://www.wellcomecollection.org/whats-on/the-identity-project/events-nationwide/the-lions-face.aspx>>, accessed 30 May 2011.

⁵Rupert Christiansen, 'The lion's Face, review', *The Telegraph*, 25 May 2010 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/glyndebourne/7764144/The-Lions-Face-review.html>>, accessed 30 May 2010.

⁶Andrew Clements, 'The Lion's Face', *The Guardian*, 25 May 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/may/25/the-lions-face-review>>, accessed 30 May 2010.

ii) The rehearsals

I had my first talk with John Fulljames, the artistic director of The Opera Group, on 12 May, 2009, at the Young Vic Theatre, London. As I told him about my research on contemporary opera, he offered me the opportunity to attend the rehearsals of TOG next production, *The Lion's Face*.

Almost a year had passed when John invited me to participate of the 'Meet and Greet' event, the first meeting of the entire creative team along with the cast, at the Jerwood Space, on 19 April, 2010. From that day (only interrupted by my trip to New York for a world premiere of a piece of mine) I was involved with the rehearsals as an observer almost in a daily basis, until the work's premiere at the Brighton Festival, on 20 May, 2010. At the Jerwood Space I witnessed the process of staging the opera, scene by scene, for which schedules had been meticulously planned by the Director and his assistants.

With the presence of the stage director, conductor, pianist and performers, the first rehearsals generally started with a description of some structural elements, like the internal musical shape and place of the scene in question within the whole spectacle itself. Besides the reflections on meanings for interpretation based on the text, there was a thorough search for elements in the score like clues and indications for dynamics, for instance, all that could help the singers with their performances, but more particularly the actor in his single speech role; the conductor had a crucial task at those moments of issues in synchronizing the singing lines with the spoken text.

Besides giving interpretative suggestions for the text, as normal, trying to take the most from every line of the text so as to make it really expressive, Fulljames also gave some musical information whenever necessary, revealing his, though basic, useful musical knowledge. Often, rhythm and mood were the issues mostly approached, as well as how the spoken text was intertwined with the orchestra; even the pianist was sometimes called for to contribute with explanations.

A detailed map of the actions onstage was made, as if it was another 'parallel score' of the opera, in which all marks and changes of movements

was constantly registered by Lucy Bradley, the deputy stage manager. In many occasions the scene was performed with no music at all, just for the interpreters to work with their movements, as well as emotions and intentions. At a certain point I accompanied the cast for a studio section, when a sound recording was made as part of a film trailer, of which the scenes were recorded some days afterwards.

Just to illustrate how a staging issue interfered in the way the music should be performed, in a particular scene the conductor suggested some slight alterations in the score, like a *ritardando* mark in a point where a singer needed more time for a proper dramatic response. Other small changes in the score were made by the composer, mainly in the vocal lines, so as to make them a bit less broken in some of its 8ve leaps, as requested by the singers themselves, for example.

My experiences of working with theatre had made me quite familiar with some staging techniques and processes, yet it was worth seeing how the music determinates new paths and unique issues for the process of staging and premiering a contemporary opera, specially by TOG company, with its so peculiar approach to the matter. Thus, such knowledge has been highly contributory for my research.

iii) Interview with John Fulljames, artistic director of TOG, on May 14, 2010

John studied at Christ's College, Cambridge and was a fellow on the Clore Leadership Programme. He is artistic director of The Opera Group where his recent productions include *Into the Little Hill*, *Street Scene*, *Blond Eckbert*, *The Nose* and the world premieres of *Varjak Paw*, *The Shops* and *The Birds*. Other recent productions include *The Excursions of Mr Broucek*, *Romeo et Juliette*, *Saul and Hansel & Gretel* (Opera North), *Gianni Schicchi*, *Florentine Tragedy* and *Mavra* (Greek National Opera), *Snegurochka* and *Susannah* (Wexford Festival), *Tobias and the Angel* (Young Vic/ETO) and *Nabucco*

(Opera Holland Park).⁷

MF: How does your musical knowledge help or influence you to set dramatic issues to the score? In other words, how does music interfere in your conception of the dramaturgy?

JF: I think it's all about the music. You can read the text and the text can tell you, I suppose, what the basic narrative is, but all the emotional arcs, who the characters are, how much time there is, and therefore what stories you can tell, all of it has to come through the music. The challenge with new opera or new work is that, even when somebody is musically literate and can read a vocal score, it's very difficult to imagine the orchestral soundscape. I'm sure next week [after some musical rehearsals with the orchestra] we will make some changes to the production, because the music will feel very different, when we have all heard the orchestra.

MF: So is dramaturgy dictated absolutely by the music?

JF: No, it's a 'marriage' of music and text, and from that perspective, being able to be part of the conversation between Lena (the composer) and Glyn (the librettist) since they started talking about the piece, means, I think, that I understand the dramaturgy which is in Lena's head when she was writing; but also that I have been able to influence that with some thoughts about how we might stage it, and with some of my concerns about the 'format', if you like. So, with my experiences as a director I've been able to contribute towards their writing process.

MF: Do you normally discuss the dramatic aspects with the librettist and/or with the composer? During which stage of the creative process?

JF: Yes, with both together, since the very beginning. We had a conversation

⁷For this and more information about Fulljames see Rupert Christiansen, 'John Fulljames: opera's secret', *The Telegraph*, 26 October 2011 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturecritics/rupertchristiansen/4512266/John-Fulljames-operas-secret.html>>, accessed 26 October 2011.

before they knew what the piece would become. For Elena there was a very clear idea, no question, but it was before that idea was fully formed. I think that is the key.

MF: Do you anytime search for staging ideas in the score, for instance? Moreover, do you suggest musical ideas for the score, after having thought of any respective staging elements?

JF: In my mind, if a composer wants to have a particular idea, then it's helpful to have that conversation; or it's helpful to give a sense of what it might be, but not what it necessarily will be. Because I think that when you write a score you are not writing it for a particular staging, and that's really important. But it's important to understand some of the possibilities or some of the limitations, like how long does it take to people to get on and off the stage, what are the logistics of having a space on stage, which is one space or many spaces, one room or many rooms, that sort of thing.

MF: Do you think being *The Lion's Face* a commission facilitated this collaboration?

JF: Of course, yes, and that's the joy of making a new work, isn't it? And the join up of making a new work and a new production, when the two things can marry more closely than if you are making a production of an existing piece.

MF: How often do you manage to suggest alterations in the libretto or in the music so as to adapt both to the staging, in terms of pacing and theatrical temporality? Actually, how much can the stage director interfere into the pace of an operatic spectacle?

JF: That depends very much on who the creators are, and what their attitude to the process is. I think some composers and librettists see that rehearsal process is the final part of their writing process; for other composers, when they close the score, a year before the first rehearsal, that score, in their vision, is the one

to be performed. So, I think that's about tailoring the right process not only to the right artists, but also to the right project.

MF: What if you needed a different, a slower pace, or even just some seconds more for a movement to take place onstage, for instance, what would you do as a stage director?

JF: In a way I think that, if I need a minute more of music, or three minutes for a dance, then I need to have set that earlier, in those early dramaturgical conversations; we need to be in clear how we are handling the scene changes, where the time was or wasn't. And I think that, concerning smaller amounts of time, although music is clearly notated, in a very detailed writing, it also gives you a huge amount of freedom; you know, there are a huge number of choices available while performing a score. So, in a lot of places it will be taking a lot more time than Elena originally previewed in the score, sometimes it will be taking less, but that's all within the parameters of the notation she has written.

MF: What do you think is the most important aspect that differentiates an opera from a play?

JF: Music. The story-telling is happening through the music. It's not the music that is accompanying the story, but the music really tells the story.

MF: Comparing your experience of directing a spoken play, do you feel there are limits for the stage director to interfere either in the shape or pace of an opera?

JF: That's interesting. I would say the whole process of staging an opera isn't about a director; I think it's about a director *and* a conductor, and that relationship, that partnership is absolutely the key. So, all of these questions about pacing, about narrative and the marriage between narrative and music, you can only get them working on the stage in an opera, if you're working very very closely with the conductor, and together you are working out the marriage of music and drama, of text and action.

MF: Do you feel comfortable about all this with the team you chose to work with?

JF: Yes. For me, opera is all about collaboration; that's the nature of the art-form. It's a collaborative art-form because it has so many elements. So, I think the challenge is to facilitate that collaboration, but also to make sure that the different elements are coherent. They support each other, not by necessarily doing the same thing - they don't 'duplicate', but they cohere.

MF: What about the traditional opera composer's role as the main dramatist, now in the contemporary opera context, but more particularly in the works produced by The Opera Group?

JF: I think it depends on the artists involved. I am very happy to subscribe to the idea that, without question, opera is a musical art-form, and therefore the primary author, the primary artist is the composer. The extent to which that individual wishes to engage in a collaborative group process, wishes to understand how either the film, the performance, or the direction of design might impact on the music, that's about the individual artist. For instance, the only way we would have a work with George Benjamin would be by asking him what he would like to write, and he would write it. But with Elena we had a very very long workshop process – which relates very much to the serious research she did into dementia; with Luke Bedford, next year, it's somewhere between Elena and George Benjamin; with *The Enchanted Pig*, which is more of a musical, we sang-through a complete score, and then Jonathan Dove went away and did more writing.⁸

MF: This means that you need to be a bit concerned while choosing the team with which you are going to work.

⁸In 2009, The Opera Group did not make any commission, but staged Benjamin's *Into the Little Hill* (2006), at the Linbury Theatre; Dove's *The Enchanted Pig* (2006), was premiered by TOG in 2006, and re-staged in 2009, also at the Linbury Theatre; *Seven Angels*, by composer Luke Bedford and librettist Glyn Maxwell, re-imagining Milton's epic creation myth *Paradise Lost* for an age of environmental decay, will be premiered by TOG in 2011.

JF: Undoubtedly the team is very important, but also the choice is totally dependent on the project.

iv) Interview with Elena Langer, Composer, on 8 June, 2010

Elena Langer was born in Moscow and is based in London since 1999. She studied composition with Yuri Vorontsov at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, and completed her degrees first at the Royal College of Music (MMus), and then at the Royal Academy of Music (PhD).⁹ Elena has studied with Julian Anderson, Simon Bainbridge, Gerard McBurney and taken lessons with Sofia Gubaidulina, Dmitri Smirnov, Jo Kondo, and Jonathan Harvey. In 2002/03 she was a composer-in-residency with the Almeida Theatre, London. The composer has written compositions in diverse genres, including opera and multimedia, orchestral, chamber and choral works and has received commissions and performances from many international ensembles, festivals and organisations such as The Royal Opera House's ROH2, Zurich Opera (Switzerland), the Almeida Opera Festival (UK), Carnegie Hall, The Britten and Strauss Festival in Aldeburgh (UK), etc. Some of her works have been commercially recorded on the Black Box Label (UK), Quartz Music (UK), Usk (UK) and Universal Music Russia, and some broadcast on BBC Radio 3, BBC World Service, Radio Echo of Moscow and Dutch Radio.

MF: When did you discover you had a voice, and that this voice had so much to say on the operatic stage?

EL: I think it has gradually evolved. I think it's still evolving. I got into opera by accident, in fact, because I saw an advertisement at the SPNM (Society for the Promotion of New Music) Newspaper: they needed a composer-in-residency, so I applied. Prior to that, I didn't have any particular interest about

⁹N.a., 'Biography', Elena Langer website <<http://www.elenalanger.com/biography.php>>, accessed 30 May 2011.

staging and opera, but I was listening to new music and trying to understand how it works. The Almeida [Almeida Theatre, London] experience was great: I kept 2 years being there, seeing operas and rehearsals during the festival. Every summer they commissioned and played many sorts of contemporary opera; it's a shame it's not running any more.

MF: What is Opera to you? How important it was for your artistic improvement, and ultimately for your career?

EL: For me, opera is more about synthesis of visual image, movement, voice, poetry, and music. Over the last few years it has been much more exciting to work with other people and to create something that has other elements other than music.

MF: What should a composer bring to the creation of an opera?

EL: I think the main idea, the subject should come from the composer. It takes, even physically, so much longer for the composer to write, that you should be absolutely in love with the subject, so that you can dedicate two or three years of your life to this particular subject; it's not the case with the singers, musicians, directors - they have a short-term relationship with the work.

MF: In such a collaborative work of art, what is the opera composer's role in the creative process nowadays? Could you comment a little about your experience with The Opera Group, during the creative process of *The Lion's Face*, in particular?

EL: It depends very much on the company you are working for. When a part of *The Lion's Face* was done at the Zurich Opera House, for instance, they didn't want me to come to the rehearsals at all; when I said I would come to the one before the dress rehearsal, they got surprised and asked me why I needed to come, since they had the score, the libretto, and already knew what I

wanted... So, it was not collaborative at all. They presented a result that was coherent, beautiful, not exactly what I had imagined, but there's still no guarantee that it wouldn't be better if there had been a real collaboration.

MF: Do you think this is due to a more traditional way of preparing, of producing an opera?

EL: Yes, because ZOH is a large institution which deals mostly with classical operas in general, and contemporary operas may be a bit annoying to them. The Opera Group is specialized in new operas and new ideas, I've known John [Fulljames] for a number of years and we know how we both work.

MF: I think John is particularly open, by letting people give their suggestions during the rehearsals.

EL: Yes, but at the same time he has his own vision and plan.

MF: What sort of collaboration there has been between you and John during the creative process of *The Lion's Face*?

EL: John could sometimes suggest cuts or even different settings for the text; he could give me some musical ideas as well: since the opera has its sort of 'postcard-structure', based on a sequence of scenes, John noticed that many scenes were finishing with a diminuendo; so, he pointed out that this issue could work musically well within a scene, but it could not always be effective for the whole structure of the work. Such musical observation was really helpful, as an opinion from 'the outside'.

MF: How do you conceive your music in terms of its theatricality, or in other words, how dramatic elements take part in your concert music?

EL: In my concert pieces I try to use the same principle as in opera. Every note has to have a reason to be there. In a dramatic work it's easier because there you have the text, the development of the story.

MF: How much do you think of music as a proper means for telling stories, even when there is no verbal element in it? In other words, do you think the music by itself can tell the story?

EL: I don't think music needs to tell a story. In *The Lion's Face*, the music creates a sort of atmosphere and a weird reality for the main character [Mr D, the Alzheimer patient], that's all it does, it doesn't tell the story.

MF: Has your music changed from the moment you have started writing operas, or thinking it 'operatically'?

EL: Yes, it has. When you write a dramatic work you kind of imagine what each character does with his body, his voice, how he moves, and you have all these 'people' in your mind, and you imagine how they might interact with each other – it doesn't have to be like it is in reality, since it's not our job, it's the director's job, but I do have this 'imaginary staging' in my mind. When I orchestrate, for instance, I never do a previous short piano score, but I write straight into a full score, because with instruments, just like with the characters, I imagine what each one does and how each one contributes to the overall sound.

MF: How much Russian is your music? Do you think your native culture has given and still gives you some unique expressive resources that you use to convey the drama in your operas?

EL: Yes, in the way I'm interested in folklore: I have a collection of CDs of all kinds of traditional music, not only Russian, but also Georgian, Armenian, Jewish, Azerbaijani; for my recent songs I used either traditional texts, instruments, or even a whole ensemble like the Pokrovsky Folk Ensemble, which works with voice productions differently from the usual operatic technique, for instance.

MF: Do you think being a woman composer makes any difference or even

determines the way you create music? Moreover, do you think you can conceive the drama through music in a particular way other than a male composer would or could normally do?

EL: No. Without knowing music, I wouldn't be able to determine, just by listening to both Berio's and Saariaho's music, which one would be from a male or a female composer, for example. Stravinsky's music is very 'male', but not Berio's, in its sensitiveness and transparency.

MF: How much the extra-musical elements such as the meanings, thoughts and feelings suggested in the text give you the basis for you to build the music? How much do you rely on the words set in the libretto to create the music?

EL: In *The Lion's Face*, for example, it depended on the character: when I was writing the music for the scientist I completely relied exclusively on his words; either with the daughter or the wife, I had some preconceived ideas, so it was a matter of fitting their words to my musical thoughts.

MF: Do you usually have a previous thematic or characteristic musical conception of a scene? How much is the overall structure of the work defined by exclusively musical concerns?

EL: For *The Lion's Face*, differently from the usual way composers and librettists work, Glyn [Maxwell] and I previously chose which scene we would work on, one at a time; after he had written the poem/scene, the music was set to it, but not necessarily in the chronological order of the opera. So, this sort of 'fragmentary' way of working should match the nature of the Alzheimer disease, in which there's no continuity in the perception of the world by the character, but just 'moments after moments'. Other example, for the scene of the mirror, when Mr D. doesn't recognise himself in it, I had a plan of setting the five string instruments mirroring the five woodwind ones, with the piano and keyboards in the middle, all previously to Glyn's words; the mood for the

scene when Mr D. first gets lost was conceived before the text as well; I've also changed the orders of some of Glyn's poems exclusively for musical or dramatic reasons, for instance.

MF: While setting the music, do you make use of any other extra-textual stimulus such as imagining either the scene or other visual aspects on the stage, for instance?

EL: Yes, I do. Even the initial idea of this piece about an old man with Alzheimer came from a very simple visual image, when I just imagined an old man sitting on a chair on a dark stage; from that tiny, obvious idea, things gradually developed.

MF: I see this feeling of loneliness throughout the whole opera; so, can I conclude that the music was mostly inspired by this sort of an image of 'isolation'?

EL: Yes.

MF: Do you normally work with a previous stimulus like that?

EL: Not always. Sometimes it's just a musical material. But it's rarely just an interval; an interval by itself cannot inspire me...

MF: Do you and John usually discuss about ideas for the staging during the creative process?

EL: Yes, John, as I said, is quite open to ideas, so I fell free to say anything about the staging design, although it's not my field.

MF: Does he also give opinions about the music, while you were writing the score?

EL: No, no, he doesn't interfere, and he wasn't around while I was writing. Just when I finished it I played it through to him, then we talked about it. Actually, he specifically asked me to put in the score as many notes for the staging as I wanted; then we agreed that he could either ignore or use some of them. So, if I strongly felt that somewhere there should be a 'red colour', for instance, I should write it down.

MF: Could you please give some examples of different musical choices or treatments for some scenes in *The Lion's Face* that were chiefly determined by factors like textual structures, dramaturgical elements or visual and theatrical devices, each one isolated or in combination?

EL: In a scene where Mrs D. sings and Mr D. speaks, I wanted to create a sort of an 'organized chaos', when they simultaneously tell the same story, the singer singing, the actor speaking; so I imagined there should be a multilayered texture, where there are many things happening at the ensemble and different things happening with the voices, one sung, the other spoken. In some scenes I sought mostly contrast, just by using my musicality: like when considering a scene very 'high', so the next scene should have a low bass, some low strings, a low piano, and low winds, for example; these are some 'timbral' decisions. Sometimes I would just write a piece of chamber music, and I would live it entirely up to John (the stage director) to decide what is happening there. For example, there's a little part (in the opera) where a string trio plays along with the piano, and he staged it as a birthday party! Being the music very depressing, and all those funny hats and the cake, I thought it was very imaginative a decision! So, sometimes it's fun to just leave it, sometimes you describe precisely what you want, sometimes you just try the music and say 'ok, it shall fit somehow' - then the director decides what to do, and somebody else may decide something totally different...

MF: What is an ideal libretto for you?

EL: There's no such 'ideal libretto', there's an 'ideal librettist'. I think Glyn is

ideal! Well, I was just talking with another Russian composer and we were discussing about subjects for operas and libretti and he believes that anything can be a subject for an opera. Basically, you don't need a plot! Take Tristan and Isolde: nothing really happens. Particularly when you take mythological subjects, for example, you completely devoid the audience of suspects, there's no feeling of suspects, so it doesn't matter what you are singing about... I myself, at this particular moment, am personally interested in contemporary subjects, but not necessarily in plots. You see, in *The Lion's Face* there's a bit of a plot, but not much, it's more about emotional states. But while having the plot is not at all a condition, still characters development is crucial, not optional. Emotion as well is something that must happen in order for you to call it opera. Besides, some young composers like to say that they are setting the voices like if they were instruments, but you cannot treat a voice just like an instrument!...

MF: Could you describe how and when during the creative process of a libretto the composer can effectively collaborate with the librettist?

EL: Well, it's very personal, it depends on how a particular couple work. I've had a very unsuccessful experience with another poet, an established English poet. We both are interested in the subject, discussed and agreed about the libretto; there was one suspicious thing for me, though: whenever I asked her if she could tell me what the opera was about in one sentence, she couldn't do it but needed one, two paragraphs for that... I trusted her, because you need to trust your collaborator, otherwise nothing is gonna work. But, in the end, she wrote a libretto which I didn't quite like: it was too long, and she was against me cutting it – you know, words are more precious for a poet than for a prose writer. That project never happened. With Glyn it's not like this: he accepts the music and the dramatic reasons I give to him, as well as my ideas on how the characters shall be developed; besides, he is generous and writes so easily that he doesn't mind if you cut a whole poem, since the next day he can write another one...

MF: In your opinion, how different shall be the composer's treatment of the instrumental forces and the vocal lines? Are there any similarities between instruments and voice's function for the drama?

EL: Firstly I write the melody, very simply, and then I try to draw the notes for the orchestra out of that melody. It may not seem very obvious for the singers at first, but still the instrumental lines are often made out of their melodies. I think this technique, back to your previous question, might be Russian, since it's based on the 'old heterophony', as when you have like 5 babushkas, each one singing simultaneously their own version of the song - because they can't remember how it goes; then you have five voices that are quite similar, but not equal, actually. I often use this principle. I feel intimidated by German counterpoint, and by the level of virtuosity with which they write counterpoint, by how eventful are the orchestra and the voices, like in *Wozzeck*. I don't think you can find in Russian music such intensity in the counterpoint; even in, for example, Prokofiev's music, which is also rich and eventful, very often with many things happening vertically.

MF: Please describe your particular method of creating the opera score: what element or layer comes first? Do you consider other methodological options as well?

EL: It's step by step, very simple. The vocal line comes first, unless I write just instrumental music, like in some moments of *The Lion's Face*. I depart from the text, and while I'm writing the melody I already keep in mind what could be done with the instruments in order to amplify the meaning of such text.

MF: At that moment, are you concerned about the timbres you are going to use as well?

EL: Yes. As I said, I write straight into the score, and if it's for a relatively small ensemble of 12 or 13 instruments, it's quite feasible this way.

MF: Your score is very ‘timbristic’, so to say.

EL: Yes, I think it’s because I write specifically for each instrument. Of course, it would be practically unfeasible to do like this when you write for a large orchestra, for instance. In this case you’d rather write a short score first.

MF: What advice would you like to have been given by an experienced opera composer when you were just facing your first operatic commission?

EL: I went to Tanglewood last summer, where I met John Harbison [American composer, b. 1938]; he has written a couple of operas, and his *The Great Gatsby* was staged at the Met [Metropolitan Opera, New York]. He told me that I should never agree to any compromise or listen to the company you are working with, but just have your ears, your strong vision of what you want. You know, all comes from personal experience, and it depends on your collaborators, each time. Sometimes you can be so self-indulgent by not listening to anybody, and then the work just doesn’t make sense dramatically; you are so absorbed by it that you cannot see it.

The Moonflower

<p style="text-align: center;">H E A V E N</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">FOUR WORLDS</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRIT</p> <p>WORLDS OF ESSENCES MAGICAL / MYSTICAL INNER BEING INNER CONSCIOUSNESS</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">The Afterlife</p> <p>(A means of Memory, Immaterial Entities (Formless/shapless))</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ACT 1: SUNSET</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">FIRST OVERTURE: MYSTICAL FOREST</p> <hr/> <p>1. PHANTASMS (MEMORIES)</p> <hr/> <p>2. "THE ORIGIN OF THE AMAZON RIVER"</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ACT 2: LAVA SKY</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">SECOND OVERTURE: BURNING FOREST</p> <hr/> <p>1. PHANTOM TREES (FEARS)</p> <hr/> <p>2. "GREAT FORTUNE"</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ACT 3: SUNRISE</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">THIRD OVERTURE: CANOPY IN BLOSSOM</p> <hr/> <p>1. LIVE GHOSTS (MOURNINGS)</p> <hr/> <p>2. "THE HOMECOMING"</p> <hr/> <p>3. THIRD LUNAR INTERLUDE: ABOUT THE FUTURE DARKNESS OF MANKIND</p> <hr/> <p>4. THE RUBBER TAPPER (THE NATIVE'S FIGHT)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">E A R T H</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">THE HOUSE OF THE SOUL</p> <p>WORLD OF BELIEFS RELIGION LUSIONS MYTHICAL ELEMENTS FANTASTICAL CREATURES</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">The Folk Tales</p>		<p>3. FIRST LUNAR INTERLUDE: ABOUT NATURE AS MANKIND'S MOTHER</p> <hr/> <p>4. THE FLOWER SEEKER (THE FOREIGNER'S PASSION)</p>	<p>3. SECOND LUNAR INTERLUDE: ABOUT THE DANGERS OF THE ONLY ONE STORY</p>	<p>4. EPILOGUE: THE MOONFLOWER (THE OFFERING))</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Main theme: SEARCH</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Main theme: DEATH</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Main theme: REDEMPTION</p>

APPENDIX 6 – The libretto

THE MOONFLOWER

A chamber opera by Mario Ferraro

Libretto by Eva Daničková

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Speaking roles (actors):

The Spirit of Margaret Mee

The Spirit of Chico Mendes

Singing roles:

Lua (*Lunar Creature*)

Yara (*Amazon Siren*)

Yawareté (*Mystical Jaguar*)

Severino (*Rubber Tapper*)

Mata-Quatro (*Severino's Neighbour*)

Chorus:

Ghosts/People of the Forest/Friends

ACT 1

PROLOGUE

The stage is bare apart from the burned remains of a once magnificent tree. There is a cage suspended from the ceiling in which Lua is trapped. She looks dishevelled, a prisoner who does not belong to the world she is forever bound to.

LUA:

Bound to the Earth

Still and yet spinning

My star fixed in the sky

My beautiful prison

Captive yet powerful

I am a magnet for water

I am a magnet for you

My beautiful swamp

A piece of me in your depths

Hiding and crying

You and I intertwined

My beautiful parasite

You are a piece of me
Hiding, dying, living, growing, receding
One night is a lifetime

There's always hope
My beautiful torturer
There's always hope
My beautiful torturer

1st DRAMATIC TABLEAU: MEMORIES

The Spirit of Margaret Mee (from now on Margaret) is alone on stage. She sits on the floor with her back against the tree, holding a pad of sketch papers and a pencil. She is looking around for something she could draw. She attempts to start several times but to no avail. She is trying to draw but failing, tearing the sheets from her sketch pad and scattering them on the floor. Distant voices that belong to the Chorus of Ghosts offstage begin to whisper. The whispering gets louder and more defined. Margaret stops tearing out papers from her sketch pad. She sees something in her mind's eye. Slowly, she starts drawing...

GHOSTS

Come out of the shadow
Come out
Come out

The Spirit of Chico Mendes (from now on Chico) appears on the stage. He sits quietly behind Margaret, looking at what she is drawing.

CHICO: When you are alone and quiet, the mysteries of the forest come to you, Mrs Mee.

MARGARET: Mr Mendes!

CHICO: Your plants are alive on the page.

MARGARET: Thank you but I only draw what I see.

CHICO: Remarkable woman.

MARGARET: Remarkable man.

GHOSTS

Come out of the shadow
Your scent sweet and strong

MARGARET: I've also followed your progress.

CHICO: Progress cut short. I cannot rest. I haven't finished yet.

MARGARET: Neither have I. There is so much more to do.

GHOSTS

Your time has come

CHICO: (*Emotional*) I feel so...suspended. Funerals won't save the Amazon. And now I...

MARGARET: Now we are here. But perhaps it's not a coincidence. We have something in common.

CHICO: The Amazon.

CHORUS OF GHOSTS:

A-ma-zo-nia!

A-ma-zo-nia!

CHICO: Nothing we can do now.

MARGARET: We still have our memories. No one can ever take that from us.

CHICO: What are memories good for?

MARGARET: To tell a story.

GHOSTS

Come out of the shadow

Your scent sweet and strong

Your time has come, now show

Your beauty to the world

Margaret resumes her drawing, the Chorus of Ghosts is overpowered by the music. Slow blackout.

2nd DRAMATIC TABLEAU: THE FLOWER SEEKER

MARGARET: Journey fourteen. No time to stop. We negotiate the dark waters of River Negro, deep in the Amazonian rainforest. Wonderful flowers grow on trees and branches, as if stuck by magic. I am here to search for the Cactus of the Flooded Forest. The Moonflower. I must find her. And I feel I am close.

Yara appears on the opposite side of the river bank, singing seductively and beckoning to Margaret.

YARA:

Follow me, lost soul

I've got what you want

What you're looking for

You will be in awe

MARGARET: The forest at night is full of magic. It's both a paradise and an inferno, and not a soul in sight. I pass no houses, no people. The sounds of the darkness... They play games with my mind. I must persevere. I must find her.

Yara's singing becomes more urgent.

YARA:
Make your way
Over here
Come, don't wait
Come and see

MARGARET: Darkness transforms the forest into fantastic ghostly shapes. The jungle towers above me and the trunks of enormous silk cotton trees are ribbed like gothic columns. Between them, the solid forms of miconias. The trees are draped with wonderful strangler plants, which grow in profusion. It is getting dark but I must carry on.

Yara's singing becomes more urgent and she is beckoning Margaret to cross the river.

YARA:
Darkest night
Bats are blind
You will find
It's all in your mind

MARGARET: She is on the other side. I must cross the river to get to her. She is about to open. The volcanic dust has settled, the moon is full and blue. She might open. I'll be the witness, capture the magic. She is called *Strophocactus Wittii*. You have never seen anything like it. A beautiful, intricate, delicate flower, she dies with the first ray of light. Tonight is my only chance.

Margaret crosses the river to Yara. When she gets there, Yara laughs and disappears and the surroundings change to a forest graveyard. Dead tree stumps are sticking out of the water. All sound stops, there is only deathly silence.

MARGARET: At night by the moonlight I found some flowers of the *Strophocactus* but they had already closed forever. A vampire bat flew by, its beating wings like a sound of muffled drums. The river and its glorious forest transformed beyond recognition. It is not the same place any more. The charcoal is burning. Skeletons of trees stand deep in the river, like columns of a sunken temple. Many species are probably extinct. Could it be that she is in danger too? I am now lost in the loneliest place imaginable.

Yara emits a low laughter as dark as the Amazon at night. Margaret is lost but she refuses to give up. She is trying to find her way out.

3rd DRAMATIC TABLEAU: PHANTOM TREES

CHICO: You're not the first one who got fooled by Yara. Did you think that finding the Moonflower would be so easy? You may think you know the forest but no one ever gets to know the forest.

MARGARET: I kept coming back. I've seen the forest transform, the trees bleed and die. I didn't recognise where I'd been any more. I found many new species but never the Moonflower.

The Chorus of Ghosts resumes their urgent whispering.

GHOSTS:

Evil and sleaze

Licking our heels

CHICO: Single-handedly defending the forest and the river! Remember there are human beings in the forest too. These humans are the real ecologists because they can't live without the forest and the forest can't be saved without them.

MARGARET: The humans are destroying her. I only tried to preserve the essence of the forest. I tried to document what I saw. Some flowers are unique, they can only be seen in my paintings. I need to find her.

GHOSTS

To burn is to freeze

The souls of our trees

CHICO: You tried to defend with your pencil. I gained the trust of the people, got them together. I gave them the tools to defend themselves. To save their land and their homes.

MARGARET: I remember. Your empates.

Chico strokes the bark of the tree, deep in memories.

GHOSTS

Evil and sleaze

Licking our heels

To burn is to freeze

The souls of our trees

THE TALE OF THE GREAT FORTUNE (1st Part)

SEVERINO:

My hands are empty

My stomach hollow

My head is aching
Dreams I can't follow

I trod the path of my fathers'
Their wisdom, the seringueiro's art
Ingrained in my mind

I dream of Maria, my future wife
I dream of our new home
I dream of our new life
Nova Vida, Nova Vida

And all this dreaming, that's all I can do
The trees dry and falling
The forest a giant on its knees
I smell the burning
Lava sky above the trees

Who do I fight?
How can I change it?

*Yawareté, the mystical forest jaguar, roars in the distance. Suddenly,
Yawareté appears next to Severino.*

YAWARETÉ:
I like your passion
I like your zest
I will help you if you pass my test

I will ask you three questions
Think carefully
There is no right answer
There is no wrong answer
There is only your answer

SEVERINO:
I am ready, jaguar

YAWARETÉ:
Where is the land without people
For a people without land?
Where does the road go
Where does it end?

SEVERINO:
In the mind of the powerful
Under a mask they call progress
In the hands of the cowards

Who don't know the forest

Dirt highway to nowhere
The Devil's own plan
Ends in destruction
Of the hard-working man

YAWARETÉ:
Our world is badly scarred
Tortured and feeble
Where do we find the strength
To stand against evil?

SEVERINO:
Our world is scarred
By greedy mind
The plans to populate
Bring nothing but hate

YAWARETÉ:
The Moon is my witness
These individuals
Don't care for forgiveness
Where's *Flor Da Lua*?

SEVERINO:
Juruparí the Evil God
Awake and fat with delight
At human evil, deadly fight
Severed her stalk, poisoned her bud

The Moonflower is his hostage
Held in the dark waters
Her roots in bondage
Her tree dry and powerless

YAWARETÉ:
I like your passion
I like your zest
You have passed the test
Go and live your best

Yawareté runs off into the forest and Severino is left on his own. A shower of sparkles comes from above. Severino is scooping up Yawareté's gift with both hands, laughing. Blackout.

The forest temporarily transforms into a paradise under a rich green canopy. Severino's 'Nova Vida' has become true. The forest is alive with people, animals and creatures.

PEOPLE OF THE FOREST
Nova Vida dreams come true
Nova Vida star is blue
Nova Vida thanks to you
Nova Vida ends the feud

Unbeknown to anyone, Mata-Quatro is lurking behind the trees.

MATA-QUATRO:
Rotten business
With the darkness
Something smells here
I must find it

Next time he follows his path
I'll be on his heels
Next time he collects his fortune
I'll seal the deal

Mata-Quatro disappears again. The celebrations continue. Eventually, the music fades and the lights slowly go down.

The next morning, Severino takes his tools and follows a path to the rubber tree which never stops giving rubber. Mata-Quatro is following behind him. Severino is singing joyfully.

SEVERINO:
Severino, clever man
Always answers right
Severino, sharp old tool
Ends his sorry plight

Severino is blissfully unaware of Mata-Quatro as he sings and collects rubber from the trees by scratching its bark. Mata-Quatro makes large cuts into the trees with his axe and the trees start crying.

SEVERINO/MATA-QUATRO:
All I ever wanted /Belongs to me
All I ever dreamt of /Nightmare dream
Nothing can go wrong / Silly fool

SEVERINO:
Why do the trees cry in pain?

Severino turns around just in time to stop Mata-Quatro slashing another tree. As the axe hangs in the air, we hear the angry roar of Yawareté. Yawareté

begins angrily pacing up and down. Yara appears in the river, also angry but offering a ray of hope.

YAWARETÉ:

May the trees turn into ghosts
May the smell of burning last
May the evil spirits win
Innocent beauty buried under sin

May the man learn from the trees
May he suffer both hunger and greed
May he struggle, hurt and bleed
May the neighbours turn to fiends

I curse all the forest's daughters
May they fight their lonely wars
May their husbands follow orders
Bent down before mighty lords

YAWARETÉ/YARA:

Our fury is as red as lava sky
Our rage makes grown men cry
Get out of our sight
Before we eat you alive

YARA:

Eternal maze
The maze of pain
There may be a way out
But you have to find the light
You will have to find the light

Severino leaves with bare hands. Yawareté roars and runs back into the forest. Yara sinks deep into the river. Mata-Quatro is left alone. He starts setting fire to the forest.

MATA-QUATRO:

Nothing left for me
In this dump
Nothing to take here
In this swamp

If I can't have it
No one can

If I can't benefit
No one will

May this place
Burn to a crisp
With everything
And everyone
In it

The lights turn red and expose Lua in her cage above the flames.

ACT 2

PROLOGUE

Lua is in her cage, writhing in pain. Her words are burning and causing her pain.

LUA:
Things are getting hot
Flames reach to heaven
Where on Earth is heaven?

I need you and you need me
Yet we draw blood as we embrace
A cruel kind of love takes place
A beginning means an end
Truth isn't always said
A story may not be heard
Your mind going slowly mad

Lua starts laughing hysterically. Her insanity has reached its peak. She moves as if she is being burned at a stake. Her laughter gradually changes into sobs of despair.

4th DRAMATIC TABLEAU: THE POWER OF COMMUNITIES

Chico sits on the tree branch as if he was looking down at the goings on until now. Margaret is sitting under the tree, doodling in her sketch pad.

CHICO: You cannot undo history. The power of communities. We found to courage and strength to survive and resist. The one thing we learned from the Indians was the importance of unity.

Yara appears on the river bank, disguised as a mortal woman. She is washing some rags in the river, wearing a torn and dirty wedding veil.

YARA:

Xapuri my home
Xapuri before the storm
Women left alone
Fighting silent war

CHICO: Neighbour killing neighbour became a common occurrence. One family was feared above all. They moved into my neighbourhood and I knew it was bad news. My closest friend was murdered...defenceless, taken by surprise. Not easy to carry on but that was the only way. We had even more reason to stick together to achieve things. The common threat even stopped us killing one another. It stopped us because what they did to us was much, much worse.

YARA:

Xapuri my home
Xapuri before the storm
Nova Vida gone
Smell of burning strong

CHICO: What did they do to us? They started cleaning. Cleaning their land. Cleaning it real good, flushing us all out; creating perfect green squares of grass where the trees used to be. They tried to buy me but I'd never shake a dishonest hand.

The biggest challenge was to get the people stop saying 'it's just the way it is'. They couldn't see there was another way. No one believed the peaceful protest could work. I followed the trails of my youth, tapping rubber, reading, talking, teaching, making them believe that they had their fate was in their own hands...They started closing in, naturally. I remember the glorious morning with the faint rainbow between the raindrops, it was so near, so near I could touch it. I inhaled deeply the smell of wet grass and listened to the sudden showers falling from the trees and I knew it was worth the fight.

YARA:

Xapuri my home
Xapuri before the storm
The sky is coloured mauve
Jaguars will roar

CHICO: One thing was certain. It was December, and after the rain had gone, it got very hot, not a leaf moved. The moon was full and the silence was eerie. I saw the shot before I heard it. I wasn't surprised. I just wasn't ready. I wasn't ready. I wasn't ready.

The sound of bats' wings is heard. Yara covers her face with a torn veil and jumps in the river with a cry. Chico bows his head, deep in thought. The Chorus of Ghosts begins singing again.

CHORUS OF GHOSTS:

Look in the water
Reflect your gaze
We are all mortal
Lost in this maze

Look in the water
Where is your face?
All that is left is
An empty space

Let the dream linger
Just one more night
You can keep looking
But you won't find

Margaret suddenly remembers something and starts drawing her memory. She can see it very clearly and has to work fast before it disappears.

MARGARET: I had a dream that I saw the first petal move, then another and I could smell an extraordinary sweet perfume wafted from the flower. I sat all night, looking at the bud about to burst open. Then I woke up. But the scent was so strong I'm no longer sure it was a dream. I can still smell it. She exists. I am near.

Chico suddenly sniffs the air as Margaret describes the Moonflower, as if he could smell it too.

CHICO: She exists. As fragile and beautiful as life itself. She takes her time, you can't rush her. But when that time comes, she bursts into life with vengeance. She doesn't have long but she makes every second count. A whole life cycle happens in one night.

Chico follows the smell of the Moonflower.

THE TALE OF THE GREAT FORTUNE (2nd Part)

Severino returns home. Where once stood his house, there is a burnt out, blackened ground. Only one tree remains standing. Severino slumps down. Suddenly, a vampire bat screeching is heard from the forest.

LUA:

As sure as the Lua glides

As sure as the Sun resides
As sure as the Earth goes by
It was announced
You will die
It was announced
You will die

Lua has stopped pacing and writhing, she is now unusually still. Her face is an expression of grief.

LUA:
I'm a mere reflection
Without objection
Forever bound
To Earth
To human kind
I am your mirror
Distorted, blackened, and cracked
I am the pale face
Of diseased human race

I am the unwilling witness
Without protection
My eyes are forced open
To murder
Rape
Abjection

There is a way out
Total darkness
Total blackout
I can hide for a while
Before I'm forced
Again to come out

Total eclipse
Beyond your control
I pass through your shadow
I hide in your tow

My totality is red
My sadness is black
My anger is white
My future
Unbearably bright

I squint in the sunlight
Beg for the night

Never ending night
Never
Ending
Night

A black shadow gradually swallows Lua, and she disappears from her cage.

Everyone gathers at Severino's funeral. It is dark and the moon is hiding. The mourners lit candles. The Spirit of Chico and the Spirit of Margaret are also observing the funeral, unseen by anyone. The Spirit of Severino joins them. Yawareté and Yara are also present. Lua is nowhere to be seen and her cage is empty but we may hear her voice.

CHORUS OF FRIENDS:
Cry tears of mourning
Another light has died
Seas of tears of mourning
How senseless and blind

YARA:
This night so sad and dark
Even Lua hides
No more tears in her eyes
My rivers are dry

CHORUS OF FRIENDS:
Cry tears of mourning
Another light has died
Seas of tears of mourning
How senseless and blind

YAWARETÉ:
The world covered in purple
The saddest of nights
Our lives at the mercy
Of purple blood knights

CHORUS OF FRIENDS:
Cry tears of mourning
Another light has died
Seas of tears of mourning
How senseless and blind

ANTONIO:
We must not live at night
Let in a ray of light
Stand up for human right
Put up a peaceful fight

TUTTI:

The power is in numbers
Our freedom in our hands
Stick together, guard the forest
Our livelihood is at stake
Do not let them burn us down
Do not let them keep their crown
Non-violence will bring calm
We will turn this place around
Strength in numbers
It's our time
Strength in numbers
It's our time...

While the mourners sing, the 'Declaration of the Peoples of the Forest' appears above them.

The funeral has turned into a rally. Lua tentatively comes among the people and a ray of light reveals the Moonflower, released from the underground, has grown around the flower tree. Her buds are ready to open, waiting for full moon. Slow blackout.

EPILOGUE

Only Margaret and Chico are onstage. The light is dim as there is no moonlight. Lua is back in her cage but she is facing away from the audience, showing her back. Margaret has her notepad, she is squinting and trying to draw the Moonflower. Chico is simply observing her efforts.

MARGARET: She won't open. There's not enough light. We need full moon but there is no way of knowing whether that will be tonight. The moon is hiding. Will you hold the light for me?

Chico finds a candle, lights it and holds it for Margaret.

CHICO: The moon is hiding behind the thick clouds. We might not see it for many nights to come.

MARGARET: I don't have that much time.

CHICO: You can't command the moon, Mrs Mee.

MARGARET: Please hold the light up but not too close, it could spoil everything. The Moonflower has finally appeared and I need to capture her.

CHICO: What can be done?

MARGARET: Wait and see.

Slowly, it gets brighter and the full moon appears from behind the clouds. Lua stirs in her cage as the Moonflower opens her bud. Margaret and Chico watch the Moonflower open with astonishment. Margaret draws the different stages

of the Moonflower's bloom while Chico holds the light for her. Lua sings a song of awakening and hope.

LUA:

Come out of the shadow
Your scent sweet and strong
Your time has come, now show
Your beauty to the world

Out of the darkness a faint light appears
Signalling peace
Where before was nothing but hate
The Moonflower opens
How fickle our fate

Your bloom rich and fertile
You wait for your pollinator
The cycle continues
Things will get better

You are a diamond
You are perfection
I'd wait a thousand years
For your reflection

With the first morning star
You wither away
And die
I will have to wait
Another thousand years

For you I'll cry
Till the end of time
For you my light
Shall shine every night

During Lua's last song, Margaret's painting is finished and both Spirits disappear. The morning star has risen. The forest is green and rich again. The birds are singing. With the sunrise, the Moonflower's petals wilt and fall.

APPENDIX 7 – The programme for the Workshop at City University
THE MOONFLOWER - The workshop of the opera
City University London, 24 June, 2011.

The Moonflower, composed by Mario Ferraro, with a libretto by Eva Daničková, is inspired by the lives of two remarkable figures, Margaret Mee (British botanist and artist explorer) and Chico Mendes (Brazilian rubber tapper, an environmentalist and a freedom fighter). Margaret and Chico, not having met each other while alive, meet as souls who cannot rest. They have a common ground, their love of the Amazon rainforest which they tried to preserve in different ways. The Moonflower is the leitmotif, holding the whole piece together. A metaphor of the struggle, fragility and ultimate futility of human life, the Moonflower thrives in a flooded forest, opening her blossom once in the blue moon, and dying with the first morning star. But her blossom is so beautiful that it is worth all the time and struggle to catch a glimpse of this miracle.

As a Boffi Theatre Production, and with the financial support of the Brazilian Embassy in London, the opera has been programmed into the *Tête à Tête Festival*, with two performances of its full version on 18th and 19th August 2011. The performance you are seeing today is the opera's work-in-progress, kindly supported by City University, and only possible because of the performers who so generously offered their time and talent for this show:

Conductor: Andrew Morley

Singers:

Lua/Yara: Rhiannon Llewellyn

Yawareté: Georgia Knowler

Severino: Dionysios Kiropoulos

Spoken roles:

Margaret: Laura Harling

Chico: Braz Henrique

Choir:

Emily Heuvel

James Perkins

Ben Southam

Ensemble:

Flutes: Hannah Watts

Clarinets: Joy Boole

Guitar: Fabricio Mattos

Percussion: Glenn Mead

Keyboard: Carla Ruaro

Violins: Orpheus Papafilippou and Emily Dellit

Viola: Stephen Upshaw

Cello: I-An Tai

Double Bass: Zaynab Martin

Stage Director: Maja Milatovic-Ovadia

Producer: Berislav Juraic

Synopsis:

ACT 1 PROLOGUE

Lua is trapped in a cage. She sings about her predicament, being bound to the Earth against her will, with the Moonflower being her only salvation.

PHANTASMS (Memories)

Margaret and Chico's restless souls meet in the afterlife. They decide to open the door to the memories, hopes and fears, which will not let them rest. The Chorus of Ghosts is also present, singing to the Moonflower.

THE FLOWER SEEKER (Foreigner's Passion)

Margaret relives the memory of looking for the Moonflower in the deep flooded forest. Yara attempts to seduce Margaret into the waters. Margaret is very close. Will she find the Moonflower this time?

PHANTOM TREES (Fears)

The Ghosts return, this time with more urgency. Margaret and Chico remember how the forest had changed through their lives and they remember the people of the forest who had to change too.

1st TALE: GREAT FORTUNE

Severino, a hungry young rubber tapper, encounters Yawareté, the mystical jaguar. Yawareté promises to help him find fortune, if he passes her test. Severino gets lucky and agrees on a secret deal with Yawareté: his trees will always produce enough rubber for Severino to live comfortably. Severino and Maria get married. However, Lua comes again, warning us that their happiness will end shortly.

More at the Tête-a-tête festival!

tête@tête

The Opera Festival

HOW, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN 2011

Dates: Thursday 4th August – Sunday 21st August. Performances take place on Thursday-Sunday each week, with an average of 3-4 consecutive performances a day. We recommend 2 performances per show.

Management: Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival is managed and staffed by Tête à Tête.

Venue: Tête à Tête hires Riverside Studios, Crisp Road, Hammersmith, W6 9RL to host the festival.

Theatres: Three onsite studios: Riverside Studio 3 (capacity c120) plus Riverside Studio 2, the latter is split into 2 smaller spaces (capacity c100 and c150 respectively). There are also opportunities to perform in foyer spaces, and possibly rehearsal studio 4.

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- Gathering of detailed audience feedback on each performance
- 2 camera edit video of your show posted the Festival Online Library
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- 50% of net box office receipts

YOU provide the performance, and undertake to acknowledge Tête à Tête in programme material for all further performances of your work.

The Audience: Tickets are £6/£4 concession for every performance.

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Anna Gregg, Administrative Director

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