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‘Theatres of Music’: recent composition-led works by Andrée Greenwell

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‘Theatres of Music’: recent composition-led works
by Andrée Greenwell

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

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by

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Abstract

This exegesis provides an exposition of the theoretical basis for my two most recent music-theatre compositions *The Hanging of Jean Lee* and *The Villainelles*, both developed from poetic collections of Dr Jordie Albiston. This written documentation primarily concerns the creative adaptation of extant literary works to composition-led interdisciplinary performance.

As a companion to the documented folio works that form the greater part of this DCA, this exegesis is intended to illuminate the artistic inception, rationale and creative methodologies of these two major works created in the period of 2003-2008, and for which I undertook a variety of creative roles including composer, artistic director, image researcher, image director and performer. Together, these works assist the identification of my artistic practice as particular within the broader context of Australian and international music-theatre. Additionally, this exegesis reflects upon artistic investigations recurrent throughout my catalogue dating back to 1986 that have led to a particular area of inquiry in these two works.

Structured in three sections, this exegesis opens by taking Vivian Glance’s idea of ‘transcreation’ to formulate a rationale for the artistic inception of these two creative works. Here, and more broadly within the context of music theatre practice, I demonstrate my understanding of Richard Vella’s idea of a ‘theatre of music’ as critically operative within these transcreations (Chapter One). The influence upon my work through working with other performing and screen artists, as well as the impact of my earlier catalogue upon my current approach to extant text is acknowledged (Chapter Two) and is followed by my identification of qualities in the writing of Dr Jordie Albiston as ideal for transcreation to music theatre (Chapter Three). Chapters Four to Six discuss the three critical transcreative stages of
libretto, score and projected imagery concerning *The Hanging of Jean Lee*, that combine to reveal a methodology for creative production beyond traditional and defined codes of artistic practice, that is to say, a composer working beyond the score. Chapter Seven discusses the creative rationale to lead the composition of *The Villainelles* with my own voice, and demonstrates a methodology that activates poetic subjects through original music composition.

Both creative works required elements of improvisation and detailed interpretation thus the full realisations are best represented in the digital formats of DVD and CD which are each accompanied by a list of chapters or tracks. To further evidence the creative techniques employed, this exegesis also refers to additional support material in the form of music scores. Additionally, the image projection script for *The Hanging of Jean Lee* is provided. These items should be regarded as critical maps for creative realisation, understanding that further and minor alterations were made beyond score and script during the respective rehearsal processes.
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I acknowledge and thank the many artists, organisations and funding bodies whose creative contributions, financial and in kind support brought to fruition the works documented in this DCA research. Their many names and roles are credited in the accompanying programs.

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Chapter One

Transcreation: My approach to achieving

a ‘theatre of music’

Introduction

Since 1997 I have been interested in working with collected writings by a single author, notably the collected writings of Kathleen Mary Fallon and of Dr Jordie Albiston, as the basis for developing a performance text or libretto. *The Hanging of Jean Lee* (Albiston 1998) and *Six Villain-Elles* (Albiston 2003) typify this inclination, being two of three poetry collections by Dr Jordie Albiston that I have been inspired by, to use as a starting point to create what I consider to be music theatre.

This exegesis discusses two original music theatre works *The Hanging of Jean Lee* (Greenwell, Albiston & Pogos 2006) and *The Villainelles* (Greenwell 2008) that are both inspired by the aforementioned poetic collections of Dr Jordie Albiston. It is important that I contextualise these two bodies of works under discussion as following *Dreaming Transportation: Voice Portraits of the First Women of White Settlement at Port Jackson* (2003), which is the first music theatre work I developed, based upon a published verse history by Albiston. This earlier work, together with the two works under discussion, forms a triumvirate of my creative adaptations of poetic collections by Albiston over the period of 2000-2008.
The two works in this DCA folio emerge from a similar conceptual basis and genesis, being concerned with a transformation of poetic expression that is both led by music composition that features the sung voice with other elements. The two works also creatively rework or expand narratives specific to each of Albiston’s original poetry collections.

*The Hanging of Jean Lee* (Greenwell, Albiston & Pogos 2006) presents an impressionistic narrative of the last woman to be hanged in Australia. Beginning and ending with the birth and death of Jean Lee, it is dramatic in impulse and non-chronological. *The Villainelles* (Greenwell 2008) in contrast, is inspired by Albiston’s modest collection *Six Villain-Elles* (2003) in which Albiston revisits the centuries old poetic form of the *villanelle*. The narrative thread through this small collection is an historic sequence of notorious female subjects. To achieve a full-length concert program I invited other writers to contribute poems of suitable subject matter, written in the first person.

As creative adaptations, *The Hanging of Jean Lee* (2006) and *Dreaming Transportation* (2003) are the most similar in form and presentation of the three aforementioned works inspired by Albiston’s poetic collections. Both are conceived for a group of singers of diverse music specialisation, accompanied by seven piece amplified instrumental ensemble, and performed in conjunction with prepared digital image projections that draw upon a variety of film and music video conventions. I envisaged a music theatre adaptation of *The Hanging of Jean Lee* close to the production period of *Dreaming Transportation* and I consider the first work of this folio as a continuation of the artistic concerns and outcomes achieved in *Dreaming Transportation*. By contrast, *The Villainelles* is a simpler work in terms of production and presentation. Using slightly less vocal forces it is composed for two singers, seven-piece instrumental ensemble and digital audio. Its ‘theatre’ operates within the simpler presentation format of the concert where it combines
cabaret, popular and song cycle conventions, led by my own voice, with simple projected titles and lighting design.

This opening chapter demonstrates the difference between conventional and creative adaptation, arguing that the term ‘transcreation’ is appropriate to the methodologies critical to the creative works in this DCA folio. These are then discussed as works of music theatre of a transcreative basis. Also, to enlighten and contextualise my particular area of focus I am presenting a brief overview of recent Australian and international music theatre.

1.0 Transcreation: definitions

Western Australian poet and playwright Vivienne Glance has coined the term ‘transcreation’, to describe the creative translation of poetry between different cultures and as part of a process of working with other writers, as she describes on the website Poets Corner @ Pages Cafe:

(Transcreation is) an artistic or creative reworking of a literal translation. Through the process of transcreation the poem’s language is reworked into a form of spoken English that is accessible to a contemporary reader, paying particular attention to the cultural background and intention of the poet (2008).

Glance also claims that ‘Through trans-creating we can remove the barrier of language, and open our minds to other cultures’ (2008).
Glance’s idea of transcreation concerns the accessibility of poetic expression of non-English speaking cultures to English speaking audiences. Through her idea of ‘transcreation’ Glance promotes communication of the cultural beyond the linguistic. I would like to take Glance’s idea further and extend the ‘barrier’ of spoken and written languages to include other types of expressive language including performative, non-syntactical (musical or sonic), and image based languages, such as film and digital video. This is useful in discussing *The Hanging of Jean Lee* and *The Villainelles* in that each involve the creative translation of poetic texts, firstly into a body of text for performed and mostly sung voice, that becomes a critical unit within the overall music composition, and which subsequently operates as a performative element within a multi-layered work of numerous elements.

Throughout the process of adapting Albiston’s poetic collections to libretto or song lyrics and in consideration of their part within the broader music texture, I have attempted to maintain certain linguistic and narrative intentions of the original writings. However, it is the purposeful communication of the adapted writings through the language of music, with additional elements, that brings new perspectives and emphasis to Albiston’s poetry. As creative adaptations, or indeed ‘transcreations’, these works evolve into new artistic entities whereby the syntax of performed text, music, image and voice together suggest meanings beyond the constraints of the printed word alone. Within these new works, layered actions are visited upon the original writings to evoke multiple meanings by virtue of simultaneity in ‘live’ performance.

Beyond transcreation to music theatre performance, *The Hanging of Jean Lee* and *The Villainelles* hold potential for further creative translations, some of which have already been achieved and these include feature radio programs, film, and compact disc recording. In this exegesis I will reflect upon both the artistic aims
and the methodologies implemented to achieve the primary performance transcreations *The Hanging of Jean Lee* and *The Villainelles*, both led by music composition, and both inspired by and incorporating the published poetic text. This is in order to examine the two works within the area of inquiry that is music theatre of a transcreative basis. To provide a broader artistic context, I will refer to recent Australian and international music theatre practice as well as other artists that are influential to this body of work. My discussion of the transcreative processes for *The Hanging of Jean Lee* and *The Villainelles* will focus upon the creation and preparation of various texts for performance and here I mean libretto, music score and image script, rather than a full discussion of the rehearsal and production stages. Saying that, my discussion of *The Villainelles* will include some reflection upon the rehearsal and production processes because my choice to compose as well as perform in the latter work directly impacted upon the overall conceptualisation.

1.1 Working toward a ‘theatre of music’

Throughout much of my working life, and as exemplified by the two works presented in this folio, I have been working towards the realisation of a ‘theatre of music’. This is a concept advocated by composer and academic Richard Vella who broadens the definition of music theatre to turn it ‘on its head’ so that it becomes a ‘theatre of music’, or a ‘theatre of ideas’ (1990). Following this idea, I have also been informed by new music theatre practice that has flourished in Australia and internationally over the past three decades, alongside and often overlapping with burgeoning forms of interdisciplinary and contemporary theatre, and also more broadly across other art forms.
I summarise Vella’s proposition that music theatre is a space in which music as action, or with other actions is observed, that is the drama, and through which an argument, or thesis, is communicated. This is achieved via relationships constructed between sounds, between musical parameters, and through the relationship of the music to other elements of the performance (1990). Within his proposition, Vella points to Stravinsky’s seminal idea that ‘any performance of music is automatically a piece of theatre by its sheer presence’ as a precursor for the broad scope of artistic expression that music theatre practice of today affords (1990). Thirdly, and of equal significance, is Vella’s discussion of ‘argument’ as part of the endeavour of music theatre, and what denotes the ‘text’ of that argument within such a context:

The setting of words to music is not simply text and music but rather the text is the overall weaving of the literary text with the musical texture. The text is the ‘meaning’ (argument) the composer wants to communicate via all these elements. Even in a work without words the ‘text’ of the piece is its argument. Its thesis. And this is what a music theatre is essentially about: the viewing (perceiving) of a thesis, theory, metathesis via music (action in sound) and its relationship to the text (the overall web) (Vella 1990).

Furthermore, within the context of ‘post-dramatic theatre’, Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) describes a levelling of non-literary elements as theatre texts including the sonic, and these do not necessarily include a ‘staged text’:

In post-dramatic forms of theatre, staged text (if text is staged) is merely a component with equal rights in a gestic, musical, visual, etc., total composition (Lehmann p46).
In his discussion of music theatre as a ‘theatre of ideas’ Vella identifies contemporary and historic works as a space of action between the performer, the texts - understood as encompassing both the music or sonic and the written word and possibly other elements - as well as the audience. He proposes music theatre more broadly as something that is active and experiential, exceeding its common-sense use, as a cross art form genre descriptor. Following Vella, this exegesis opens up a discussion of a greater lineage and range of practice than the terms ‘opera’ or ‘contemporary opera’ may suggest.

In contextualising my own practice and building on Vella’s idea, I will discuss transcreative processes within the two folio works as a means of achieving argument through a ‘theatre of music’. The music compositions that lead these two transcreations are prepared as a texture of considered collisions and fusions that reference or implement a variety of Western art music and popular music conventions, instrumentations and technologies, to communicate ideas to an audience. In co-operation with the music composition, other textual elements such as literary texts, screen arts practices and performance conventions also contribute to the arguments, or theatre, of each work. Here, I have deliberated upon textual collisions, juxtapositions and references across the textual elements of each transcreation to bring about a dismantling of hierarchies pertaining to the procedure of the ‘parent’ music and other artistic practices. That is to say that in the context of the new work the referent or ‘parent’ texts (be they musical, visual, or literary) are endowed with new meanings beyond their original context, and this is an accepted trait of post-modern arts practice. Such deliberate repositioning or ‘dislocation’ of diverse music (and other artistic) practices within a single work impacts upon production and rehearsal methodologies as well as the formal articulation of the work.
1.2 An historic and recent music theatre context

Within the terminology of performance culture that is ‘post-dramatic’ (Lehmann 2006 pp25-28) and across international performing arts festivals, ‘music theatre’ is an accepted term that describes an area of artistic practice that is most often composition-led, performative, and which may involve a combination or elements of the collaborative, the hybrid or interdisciplinary, and the innovative or exploratory. I consider this practice in the context of the work of certain European music theatre composers of the mid to later twentieth century, particularly the Argentinian-born and German Mauricio Kagel, the German Hans Werner Henze, and the English Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, who were all leaders in the exploration of this burgeoning form. Acknowledging that Henze also created large scale operas, the music theatre works of these composers are frequently of modest scale and have been made in collaboration with, or include artists from other disciplines in a commitment to the creation of innovative and hybrid composition-led forms. Their artistic practices and teaching have also impacted upon a flourishing of music theatre creation by younger composers.

The works of these composers continue a resourcefulness and economy of scale, that was arguably established in the two landmark early twentieth century works, *L’Histoire du Soldat* of 1918, in which Stravinsky writes dramatic instruction into the temporality of the score for this work ‘to be played read and danced’ (1987), and Schoenberg’s melodrama, *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), in which a narrative of the commedia dell’arte character’s eerie imaginings proceeds across a song cycle, that also draws upon early twentieth century German cabaret. It is worth noting here in regard to the discussion of the works in this folio, that Ramuz’ telling of a Russian folk tale and the poetry of Giraud were the literary sources of inspiration for the composers of these works. More pertinently, in the two seminal music theatre
works cited and then significantly in the works of Kagel, Henze and Maxwell Davies, argument proceeds through the music score, to assert a ‘theatre of ideas’.

Three decades ago Paul Griffiths described music theatre as ‘denot [ing] works for restricted forces which are to be performed on the concert platform’ (1981, p260). In the 1995 revision of his examination of post-war Western art music, Griffith traced a ‘sporadic’ lineage, that included the aforementioned works of Stravinsky and Schoenberg, and then considerably earlier, to Monteverdi’s *Combattimento* (1624), (Griffiths, 1995 p176). I suggest here an even more ancient lineage, being the *Ordo Virtitum*, composed by abbess, painter, writer and cosmologist Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), described by musicologist Audrey Ekdahl in her introduction to the score as ‘combining in one work a concert of sacred music, a drama and a ritual’ (c1985). In his earlier discussion of the emergence of music theatre Griffiths focusses upon works by several composers for small forces, including *El Cimmaron*, by the German composer Hans Werner Henze, and the collaboration of English composer Peter Maxwell Davies and Western Australian poet Randolph Stow, *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1981 pp260-268). In his synopsis to the published score of the latter work, Griffiths introduces the work as a ‘classic of music-theatre’ and ‘an extravagant, disturbing and poignant portrayal of madness’ (1969). *Eight Songs for a Mad King* requires little design and production resources, and its dramatic premise - the king’s mental decline - is metaphorically played out within the environment of the instrumental ensemble in concert. In the episode, ‘The Lady-In-Waiting’, theatrical metaphor is extended into the visual representation of the score, where vertical and horizontal flute staves bend to represent the wires of a birdcage. The composer provides dramatic instruction beyond the apparently mimetic, so that the musician simultaneously accompanies and comments upon the king’s voice:
the flute has a dialogue with the King, replying to his phrases (with mimicking parodying versions of them freely), & accompanying him with the given figures discreetly, in any order, quite freely (1969, p12).

Additionally, the visual organisation of the flute part inevitably affects the physical performance of the flutist as he/she reads the score, shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1 - ‘The Lady-In-Waiting’ from Eight Songs for a Mad King (1969)
Another well-known work of even smaller forces is Mauricio Kagel’s *Match Für 3 Spieler* (1964) that uses a competitive spectator-sports game as a template for the composition’s construction and procedure. Scored for two cellists and a percussionist, the musicians compete in a display and effort of extended instrumental techniques, and work to ‘match’ each other’s music performance skills. Sequences of virtuosic musical gestures-in-action bring about a kind of theatre that is a visual and aural display of extreme music performance, whereby the cultural metaphor of the spectatorship of elite sports is transferred to the conditions of the chamber concert hall where a musical game is ‘played out’. Like Stravinsky, and in more layered ways, Davies and Kagel write gestural action and/or dramatic instruction into the temporality of the score, so that a theatrical argument is active in the music, as Vella describes (1990). While Griffith’s definition in the first edition of his book might be viewed as somewhat reductionist, there is foundation for this assertion concerning European and North American and music theatre works created prior to the 1980s. Today however, music theatre has broadened beyond this definition to incorporate other artistic practices including new technologies, and is executed within a variety of performance environments determined by a great range of production visions and budgets.

In additional to the incorporation of theatrical argument within the score by the aforementioned composers, I also refer to the early twentieth century works of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill that influenced music theatre practice in a different way. While *The Threepenny Opera* (1928) is often written about in terms of ‘breaking of the fourth wall’, this exegesis argues that the achievement of the work of Weill and Brecht may be understood as a music theatre politic by way of a levelling of the fine and popular arts, as opposed to a referencing of the popular within the fine or elite arts. *The Threepenny Opera*’s precedent is John Gay’s satirical ‘ballad-opera’ of 1728, *The Beggars Opera*. Significantly, Gay drew upon popular songs of the time and replaced operatic recitative with dialogue. While
John Gay’s satire is significant in its theatrical use of extant popular music within a new form, the employment of folk and pastoral songs retain a certain politeness.

In his musical response to Brecht’s reworking of Macheath’s crimes set in a social underclass, Weill’s original score revels in the liveliness of European cabaret and early jazz idioms, to present a feast of chromatic songs propelled by visceral melodic rhythms, sung by actors. Admittedly, the staccato and guttural sonorities of German language contribute to the melodic texture. Here, the integration of ‘vulgar’ arts practices predates the equalisation of fine and popular arts practices within the post-modern. In terms of drawing upon a popular musical syntax as theatre in its subject matter, and in its music realisation, The Threepenny Opera is of particular influence to The Hanging of Jean Lee. As described on the Kurt Weill Foundation website, Weill’s seven-member band played twenty-three instruments – one who played banjo, bandoneon, cello, guitar, Hawaiian guitar and mandolin (Kurt Weill Foundation 2011). Clearly Weill’s instrumentation exploited the individual instrumental talents of his players and I continue this non-conventional orchestration approach in my scores. Furthermore, it is the verve and bite of the musical texture propelled by acerbic harmonies that absorbs and then theatrically flaunts a decadent cabaret that Weill created to work with Brecht’s words as allied subversion, that I hear as relevant to the first work in this folio, beyond the influences this play and its score have had upon theatre and music artists for nearly a century.

In addition to discussing the importance of gesture within the score, or as Griffiths observes, his ‘long-standing concern for the pathology of performance’ (1981 p265), Mauricio Kagel was also a prolific composer of hörspiel or radio plays, as he was a filmmaker and instigator of cross artform performances led by music composition. Kagel’s artistic catalogue establishes a precedent for the composer to venture beyond composition into other art forms, which precedes the work of
German composer, performer and director Heiner Goebbels as well as North American composers and artists such as Laurie Anderson and the British composers and artists Gavan Bryars and Brian Eno. In Australia, Kagel’s thought and practice has directly influenced composers Rainer Linz, Caroline Wilkins (now based in the United Kingdom) and Moya Henderson, who all studied with Kagel in Cologne. Maxwell-Davies moved to Australia from 1965-1966 where he was composer-in-residence at the Elder Conservatorium of Music. While Martin Wesley-Smith describes in an email correspondence, ‘Max's influence might not have been as strong in this area as it was in others’ (2012, May 4), Wesley-Smith went on to compose many music theatre and interdisciplinary performance works, and fellow-students Gillian Whitehead and Graham Dudley both went on to study further with Maxwell Davies in England. Together with colleagues Richard Vella and David Chesworth who have also made significant explorations in recent Australian new music theatre practice, these Australian artists have introduced or integrated their music theatre practice with other new media and traditional music practices including sound art, installation, audio-visual, interactive, opera, concert, chamber opera and orchestral composition. Vella, Linz and Chesworth in particular have not only composed but also have artistic directed and sometimes performed in their own works. In turn, through their practice, and in many cases also through teaching, these artists have influenced a generation of younger Australian composers, interdisciplinary and new media artists such as Gretchen Miller, Robert Iollini, Raffaele Marcellino, Stephen Rae, Christine McCombe, David Young, Robert Davidson and Stuart Greenbaum, who are my peers.

That is to say, within current Australian hybrid and interdisciplinary arts practices that are composition-led, there are overlaps between music theatre practice and

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1 Graham Dudley composed the youth opera *Snow Queen* for the Come Out festival, Adelaide 1985. Gillian Whitehead has divided her time between Australia and New Zealand and has a prolific composition catalogue that includes many vocal, chamber opera, and music theatre works.
other artforms within discreet works and there are overlaps between music theatre practice and a flexible interdisciplinary performing arts scene and this is reflected in my own artistic catalogue. Furthermore, within this fluidity of practice, the two works in this folio are music theatre works of quite differing orientation, despite being derived from writings of the same author. More pertinently both works evidence ‘theatres of music’ made from a transcreation of the literary and it is this feature that distinguishes my own artistic voice.

1.3 Problems of terms

Despite the brief lineage of ‘music theatre’ practice that I have outlined, the term is problematic and ongoing debate continues regarding the overlaps and differences between new music theatre, musical theatre and contemporary chamber opera both in the public domain and within artistic circles.

For instance, during the music theatre conference Breaking the Cycle Festival within the Sydney Festival in 2004, Robyn Archer raised the problem of this term and similar ones:

There is something implicit about the label (which we dislike but haven’t in all these decades come up with a better one) ‘music theatre’ which sets the genre apart from its commercial counterpart ‘the musical’ and its museological antecedent ‘opera’ or ‘operetta’… (Archer 2004)

During conference discussion, a member of the Sydney Opera House Producers Unit claimed the term ‘music theatre’ had negative connotations for audiences, the reason being apparently that music theatre works were too difficult and strange.
The implication was that the term was something they were not keen to use as a descriptor of works that were in fact, music theatre.

Typically the European terms ‘musiktheater’ (German) and ‘die nieuwemuziektheater’ (Dutch) refer to a broader spectrum of artistic practice involving exploration, than ‘musical theatre’. Yet, in discussions of commercial musicals, ‘music theatre’ and ‘musical theatre’ are often confused and used interchangeably. ‘Musical theatre’ is widely accepted and understood as a continuation of the nineteenth century light opera and operetta traditions, developed largely in early twentieth century North America and the United Kingdom. The composition for ‘musical theatre’ commonly abbreviated as ‘the musical’ and ‘musical’ proceeds from and serves the writing of a dramatic text, commonly known as a ‘libretto’, which in more recent times is also referred to as ‘the book’. Conversely, and as Vella points out, music theatre does not necessarily follow a libretto that is written first, though it can, and nor does it necessarily involve spoken or sung text (1990). In musical theatre, the score generally combines sung and spoken text, and mostly accords with an Aristotelian dramatic climax, in the operatic tradition. This is exemplified in works such as Evita (Rice, T & Lloyd Webber, A 1976) and The Phantom of the Opera although there are exceptions that present alternative narrative structures, as for example the episodic single act Assassins (Sondheim S. & Weidman, J 1990) and CATS (1982) also composed by Lloyd Webber, based upon the T.S. Eliot poetry collection Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats. In music theatre the form is often not defined until the work is complete. This can be because the work is made through a collaborative or exploratory process, or in a more systematic way where one artistic component precedes the development of the next.

In their book, Arias: Contemporary Australian Music theatre, John Jenkins and Rainer Linz claim that the literal translation of opera as ‘work’ was ‘often the most
useful for works that were difficult to pigeon-hole' (1997, pp7-8). They also suggest that whilst ‘music theatre’ continues to be a problematic term, that nevertheless ‘some critics have preferred it to opera in order to emphasise the dramatic nature of the art. Thus in Arias Jenkins and Linz choose to use the terms ‘music theatre’ and ‘opera’ interchangeably, as do many composers and production companies, one example being the Melbourne-based Chamber Made Opera whose website byline, now obsolete, under the artistic direction of Douglas Horton was ‘musictheatreopera’ (Chambermade 2009).

In a conversation with composer David Chesworth circa 2005 I asked him whether he described a work as ‘music theatre’ or ‘contemporary opera’. His response was that the description was flexible, depending on the context and our discussion continued, noting that producers and presenters practice a fluidity of definitions to suit the achievement of productions. Similarly, I have frequently changed formal descriptors of my works to suit different contexts, sometimes because of the confusion that can be associated with the term ‘music theatre’. For instance, I alternated between definitions of The Hanging of Jean Lee as ‘music theatre’, ‘retro-indie post punk musical’, or as ‘song cycle meets rock concert meets the biographic documentary’ for varied contexts of grant applications, press interviews, publicity and marketing copy. To some degree this is symptomatic of my artistic investigations within hybrid forms, many of which are often most recognisably kinds of ‘music theatre’, but more consistently, each work operates as a ‘theatre of music’ before it is classified. While the aformentioned descriptors have been appropriate in different contexts, finding a single formal definition for a new work is of less interest to me than identifying what is active within the work as a ‘theatre of music’, as a distinctive feature of my artistic voice.
1.4 Usage of terms in this exegesis

Thus, while acknowledging the problems inherent in a term such as ‘music theatre’ I will use this term according to the meaning that is understood as a continuation of mid-twentieth century European artistic practice, that developed internationally as part of post-dramatic culture, and that has in turn impacted upon music theatre practice in Australia, as outlined.

Within the following chapters the term ‘score’ will be used in the traditional sense of music notation, and in certain instances ‘score’ will be also be used in contexts meaning notation that includes a libretto or literary text. ‘Score’ will also be used to denote a music and/or audio element, for example a ‘score’ for theatre might be realised as audio files that include recorded or live music and recorded or live audio. The word ‘text’ will not only be used in reference to literary texts, but also according to Vella’s explanation of an element through which a composer or artist communicates meaning, whether verbal or non-verbal. ‘Texture’ will also be used in relation to its normal music meaning, that is the combining of musical lines and their materials, as well as according to Vella’s idea, as a combination of literary and/or non-literary texts and/or other elements. These varied meanings of the same words should be clear in the context of my discussion.

Furthermore, both works in this DCA folio have an aesthetic and methodological basis in contemporary music theatre practice, but are nonetheless as previously mentioned, quite different in terms of form. The Hanging of Jean Lee is more clearly identifiable as a music theatre production while The Villainelles is more presentational, combining traditional and popular concert formats within the environment of a theatre. In this context I also describe them as ‘composition-led interdisciplinary performance works’.
The term ‘theatre of music’ is of a greater methodological significance to me because it identifies what is operative within my works, and is preferable to finding words to pigeonhole the hybrid forms I achieve.

Lastly, I will prefer the term ‘transcreation’ to discuss my creative translations of written poetic or literary sources to other composition-led performance forms that incorporate other elements. This applies to the discussion of the overall works in this DCA folio, and then more specifically to original music composition, and where appropriate, other featured artistic elements that significantly contribute to each respective work’s thesis. While the more widely accepted term ‘adaptation’ is suggestive of utilitarian modification than creative change, I will prefer ‘adaptation’ though not limit it to the discussion of one particular type of translation within the overall transcreative process – for example the creative change of poetry collection to libretto and poetry collection to song cycle lyric.
Chapter Two

Assessing literary texts for composition-led transcreations

Introduction

This chapter discusses the relationship of a literary text to a musical score and the many permutations that may result through the combining of these two artistic areas. In doing so I will be referencing several of my compositions that have utilised literary text in varied ways, specific to artistic context.

2.0 My scores with/as text, in prior contexts

Unlike most songwriters I am not a writer of words as well as music, despite often wishing otherwise, which is due to a desire for an ease of procedure as much as a desire for song. However, it is precisely because I do not simultaneously write words and music that I have been drawn to writings from a variety of literary forms as well as collaborations with artists of many disciplines from the performing and screen arts. This has led to my composing within collaborative contexts which has resulted in a diverse catalogue of scores: chamber opera, plays, song cycles, music theatre, dance, puppetry, audio installation, radio, as well as film forms that are documentary, short drama and experimental. In these contexts I have worked with a variety of performers, instrumentalists and music technologies to achieve scores of diverse application and ethos. In the scores that I have composed for other artists, I have contributed to the areas of inquiry of those artists through the
medium of composition, and it is here that I have developed my composition skills, and taken those skills into my own artistic projects.

The realisation of scores for a wide range of performing and screen arts contexts has developed my interest in the contribution of music composition to the construction of narrative, whether linear or non-linear. This applies to works which foreground literary texts as well as other works that feature little or no text, such as dance and puppetry. Many of these scores require flexibility to implement the diverse compositional skills particular to the musical setting of linguistic and other texts such as original music composition drawn from or made to the metered poetic, lyric, dramatic, narrated, prose, ‘found’ texts, and improvised texts without syntax. More specifically this has involved melopoeia, that is the crafting of melody; orchestration or devising of a sonic accompaniment; ‘underscore’ of dialogue/spoken word/dramatic scene/choreography; composition that is notation-based and/or studio-based; composition that includes or is generated from improvisation; the imitation or referencing of specific music styles of other cultures and historic times; and arrangements that propose new and often multifarious meanings with/against the featured text source/s.

The artistic rationales of works I have composed for have ranged from the conventional to the liberating and adventurous. Some have required a great deal of music, others have needed little, yet all have demanded my consideration of music as text within the broader artistic context; that is, the ways in which the score might interact with other elements. Here I have constantly considered the operations of the score toward a work’s argument/s, be they ironic, dramatic, supportive, expressive, autonomous, evocative of ‘mood’, or suggestive of historic period and geographic location, and within these processes varying degrees of conscious and intuitive decisions take place. While there is a consideration of the operation of the music score within a broader context, at the same time there is also a
consideration of the rationale (argument) within the score itself. Such simultaneous co-operations can be understood as inter-textual. Here, through the tension and dynamic of inter-textual operations a ‘theatre of music’ can be achieved, via the active relationships within layers of the music itself and then also between the music, words (if any) and other elements.

2.0.1 An early example of a musical translation of poetry by a contemporary Australian writer

My first setting of George Franklin’s poem ‘Moonlight’ (circa 1985) was one of three of his poems I translated into five songs to form the song cycle *The Backdoor Songs* which marked my first attempts to combine Western classical and new electronic instrumentation with studio composition techniques (1986). Composed for soprano, my own voice on tape, violin, viola, guitar and bass clarinet and Yamaha DX7\(^2\), it made use of the conventional art-song composition technique of word painting, together with the post-modern technique of quotation, while my approaches to melody, harmony and arrangement were reminiscent of minimalist, new simplicity and art rock composers such as Michael Nyman, Chris Newman and Laurie Anderson. My second setting of the same poem by Franklin as ‘Moonlight #2’ is more strongly reminiscent of Anderson’s landmark minimalist art-rock song, *O Superman*, that topped the British popular music charts in 1981. In this composition, I subverted the traditional art-song conventions of a dominant and linear vocal line and a vertical and harmonic instrumental accompaniment. In this instance I made a multi-track recording of my own voice, so that my recorded voice

\[^2\] The instrumentation for this work was based upon the instrumentation of a Schoenberg composition performed in the same concert. Instead of harmonium in the Schoenberg piece, I composed for the Yamaha DX7. While I do not recall performing keyboard in the Trinity College concert I did at a second performance at The Victorian College of the Arts. *The Backdoor Songs* was my earliest foray into the creative mode of composer/performer.
provided the main rhythmic-harmonic texture, while the ensemble performed an accompaniment of decorative melodic fragments that related to the first and more traditional setting of the poem. I sampled the word ‘moonlight’, as well as many other words, to create an alternate melodic setting of Franklin’s poem. Additionally, I recorded smaller word samples, for example ‘moon’ and ‘light’, and through non-sequential combinations (in the linguistic sense) and then via ‘multi-tracking’, other meanings were generated beyond the first linear art-song setting of the poem. By repeating and layering various sampled melodic fragments I exploded melody into harmony as well as texture, constantly finding harmonic pivot points over the ostenato figure ‘moon’. Within the overall shape of the song cycle, I presented varied and contrasting readings of the same poems and these multiple settings suggested the possibilities of transcreation through a fluid authorial voice. Upon recognising these deconstructive and other post-modern techniques, the composer Richard Vella with whom I was studying music theatre, suggested that I score a theatre work for The Sydney Front, a commission that he was unable to fulfil. That recommendation was important in terms of leading to the deepening of my understanding postmodern techniques in artistic practice, which subsequently impacted throughout my catalogue.

2.0.2 The influence upon my artistic practice through working with The Sydney Front

A constant consideration of the score’s internal and broader co-operations in context is an identifying feature of my own artistic methodology, and working for, or with many artists has influenced my practice to this end. While a fuller discussion is beyond the scope of this exegesis, some relevant instances include my scores for the post-dramatic theatre group, The Sydney Front, who from the mid 1980’s–1993 devised models for theatre creation in opposition to the cultural hegemony of the single authored play, or according to Lehmann as ‘subordinated to the primacy of
the text' (2006 p21). In an interview with Suzanne Olb and Sarah Miller, founding member John Baylis describes their working approach to text as:

Taking something, gutting it and filling it full of other things. We move in one direction and then suddenly change course so the audience feel the vertigo of not knowing where they stand. When I go to so-called ‘straight’ theatre, the things I enjoy just jump out suddenly. All the rest is just the trash you have to go through to get to those moments (1989).

Through a process of both individual and group improvisations, The Sydney Front would devise many scenes, and the dynamic sequencing of such diverse and layered scenes was characteristic of their theatre works. To affect the ‘vertigo’ Baylis described, many identifiably post-modern methods were implemented within and between the theatre episodes including: interruption, deconstruction, bricolage, catharsis, silence, and perversion. Like the ensemble’s transformation and layering of diverse text sources, my approach to content for the scores was to use a variety of extant and original music and audio texts. This was the case for *John Laws/Sade: a confession* (The Sydney Front 1987) that was later merged with another work *Waltz*, scored by Sarah de Jong in the same year, to become *The Pornography of Performance* (The Sydney Front 1989), and later *Passion* (The Sydney Front 1993).

In creating scores for The Sydney Front I sought to translate the group’s theatrical techniques into my approach to the creation of the scores themselves. My composition processes incorporated traditional notational practice and studio production techniques that were transparent to the audience as layered enactments of change upon source and original materials. Also, each score episode had a dynamic relationship with the scene that it was part of. For
example, that the score operate as irony, as parody, or that the score operate qualitatively, for instance, as a violent use of sound against other elements to literally intervene as a theatrical element within a scene. The aforementioned post-modern techniques implemented by The Sydney Front, and subsequently in the scores I composed for them, organised the temporal in a way that brought a kind of dramatic shape to the content, as John Baylis describes in the interview with Olb and Miller (1989). Similarly, the dynamic juxtapositions of the score episodes assisted the dramatic shape and this was also a theatrical use of score. In the longer term this type of organisation has continued to influence my own structuring of diverse texts within larger structures, particularly the poetic collections of Albiston later detailed in this exegesis, and Kathleen Mary Fallon’s novella The Mourning of the Lac Women (1997).

2.0.3 Composing for other theatre contexts

I have written scores for many plays, both historic and contemporary. In the case of classic written texts that contain old words, strange syntax and unfamiliar poetic references, it has been difficult to immediately envisage music successfully working with, or enhancing, the primary literary source. This was particularly the case for the Sydney Theatre Company’s production of Ben Johnson’s Jacobean drama Volpone (2002) and more recently a theatre adaptation of William Shakespeare’s sizable poetic fable, Venus and Adonis (2008), originally written entirely in iambic pentameter, and published in 1593. Updating these historic works according to specific directorial and production briefs has extended my technical skills, especially when the director has musical genres/cultural references in mind. In the case of Volpone, Marion Pott’s brief was explicit and challenging: to emulate the music style and chaos/celebration of Goran Bregovic’s gypsy band score for Emir Kusturica’s film Underground (1995). Although Johnson’s play was set in a Venetian doge’s palace, Potts wanted to harness an
excitement particular to the South-Eastern European gypsy music to suggest a lavish but also chaotic indulgence in the home of Volpone, and to lead the performance style of his home entertainment ‘trio' toward the burlesque and vulgar, ‘spearheaded' - as Potts described it - by the cabaret artist Paul Capsis. Within this instance, as well as for many other collaborators, meeting directorial and production briefs meant that I wrote music alternatives overnight. While sometimes fatiguing and frustrating, this has sometimes been contrary to my own initial musical instincts. However, persevering to find a mutually satisfying musical solution within a defined aesthetic, schedule and budget, has extended my composition techniques as it has my skills in negotiating with other artists. Realising artistic visions other than my own led eventually to the creation of scores that on my own, I would not have otherwise imagined.

2.0.4 Exploring the musical translation of non-literary texts

I have also explored the peripheries of linguistic vocal expression in my own works. The audio installation work Mother Tongue (1992) investigated inherent and learned speech intonations in the women of my own family. This project was fuelled by a preoccupation with spoken language as bearing influence upon a localised music expression and that the performance of a spoken language might impact upon music performance practices. In the environment of an art gallery, the fourteen-speaker box audio installation suggested to the audience alternate receptions of ‘portrait’ and ‘subject’ that were sonically, rather than visually based. This translation of conventions pertaining to one artistic practice into the domain of another, or from the operation of one music parameter to another, relates back to my multiple settings of three poems by Melbourne writer George Franklin to form The Backdoor Songs (1987), composed for Melbourne’s Backdoor Sinfonietta and this is an approach that has continued in my works for over twenty years.
Beyond *Mother Tongue* my experimentation with non-literary text sources continued in the song cycle *Songs With a Few Words* (1995), for the vocal ensemble The Song Company and for The Sydney Front’s *Passion*, but by the end of 1995 I had exhausted my experimentation with non-literary text sources which ultimately I found unsatisfying, and turned to collections of contrasting writings by the same author, namely Kathleen Mary Fallon’s ‘The Mourning of the Lac Women’ (1997).

### 2.1 What a composer can make of a literary text

In their explorations of relationships between music and text, the ensemble Lake Effect explain on their website that ‘once the text enters the realm of interaction with music it is never the same’. They cite the multi-serialist and electronic music composer Pierre Boulez who describes how a composer can eliminate the original authorial intention through a music/sonic translation: ‘once a text is set to music, it may even become foreign to its author’ (The Lake Effect 2001).

Beyond the layered decoding that takes place when the linguistic is linked to the sonic or musical, Boulez’ statement refers to situations where a music translation by a composer privileges the sonic and possibly ignores the linguistic text’s semantic in favour of a compositional outcome. Boulez’ perception is catalysed by many art music composition practices that have developed since the mid twentieth century that prioritise complex musical syntax and/or a cognition of audio over the syntax of literary or linguistic texts, thus foregrounding the composer’s intervention and often his or her identity.
’Make a film out of this then. You film makers can make a film out of anything.’
(Fallon 1997)

Similarly, in the challenge made within the text of her novella, Kathleen Mary Fallon suggests that the act of filmmaking can be prioritised over the film’s subject matter. Both of these quotes suggest that either the identity of the trans-creator, or the enactment of transcreation, can potentially eclipse the original idea of an author. To take the point of the relationship of the composer’s intervention upon a literary text beyond electro- and acoustic art music further, Fallon’s sarcastic challenge can be directed to the songwriter or composer and points to a conundrum of the postmodern age, that any source can be appropriated/mediated to say anything, or nothing. The word replacement on the ABC television game program Spicks and Specks (2005-2011) demonstrates this, in the game ‘Substitute’, where the lyric of a well known popular song is replaced with an incongruous text, usually prose or instructional, from an obscure book. Panellists compete to decode the melodic pattern from the absurd and distracting linkage to the replacement text. While the point of ‘substitute’ is to achieve humour through extreme inter-textual incongruity, the game crudely demonstrates the problem of meaninglessness that can occur in the effort of making a musical/sonic setting of a literary text.

Yet, in some circles the centuries-old debate of whether compositional skill should be prioritised over linguistic intelligibility continues. The reactive advents of Minimalism and the ‘New Simplicity’ have instigated less complex and more transparent musical settings of literary texts in a variety of art music subgenres, while the virtues of lyric content versus music craft continue to be argued today in various popular music genres. Following the many approaches to text that I have explored in my works and in the works of other artists, I have arrived at a point in my practice where I am seeking to elicit layers of meaning from literary texts, by using considered compositional techniques, so that an audience can find new and enriched ways to connect with and even expand upon the ideas of the originating
writer or author. In undertaking the transcreation of a text, I consider that the
process of creative music translation should bring something beyond, or enhance
the ideas expressed in the original writing. Within the process of transcreation I
avoid a distancing of the lyric, or literary text, through overtly complex music
syntax. To this end I am interested in how the composition process adds to,
enhances, enlightens, comments upon, or refutes the text it translates. That is to
say that an active relationship is established between the text source and its
performance as music composition, and this is towards the achievement of a
‘theatre of music’. Here, my transcreative processes to music, and/or music
theatre, are purposeful and developed through the use of composition techniques I
have developed throughout my career.

2.2 Identifying a literary text as appropriate for a composition-led
transcreation

2.2.1 An imaginary space for music and other elements

There are no rules about which texts may or may not benefit from a music
realisation, and personal taste for writing styles and subject matter varies from
composer to composer. However, generally speaking, prose is usually too dense to
explore the dynamic inter-textual relationships of the sung voice, because of both
narrative impetus and the suggested speed rate of ordinary speech. In prose there
is generally insufficient potential space between the words, and their syntax, for
music to contribute or intervene. Of course there are exceptions and while some
composers have found ways to musically accompany spoken prose, the choice is
less common. Brian Eno, for instance, provided a meditative ‘ambient music’
accompaniment in his transcreation of David Eagleman’s Tales of the Afterlives
(2009). In this work of music theatre, reflective passages of prose from the science
writer’s book were read by a number of performers, including Eagleman, at a considerably slower rate than everyday speech and this allowed for the comprehension of the linguistic as well as a contribution by the sonic. The live music that Eno provided was a non-intrusive, slow moving digital and largely tonal texture. This score supported the read texts in a complementary way that Satie would describe as ‘wallpaper music’. Additionally, a triptych of portraits from various historic periods and cultures digitally morphed at an even slower rate, resulting in a mesmerising counterpoint between the rates of speech delivery, the music score and projected images.

In my own works I have set prose-like texts, for instance, within *LAQUIEM: Tales from the Mourning of the Lac Women* (1997) and in setting those episodes I drew on the conventions of ‘film noir’. With the collaborations of Hitchcock and Hermann in mind, I set lengthy passages of Fallon’s poetic prose for a narrator with a chamber music accompaniment, which incorporated the film composition technique of ‘underscore’. Here I measured both spoken and musical phrases, inserting linking rests or varied lengths for the speaker and instrumentalists, to aid linguistic comprehension as much as to suspend dramatic tension and evoke ‘horror’. While I have enjoyed the challenge of setting prose, I find its potential for music transcreation to be somewhat limited and prefer to place texts of this kind amidst a sequence of other writing forms, which in context can provide a most effective contrast, as was the case in the aforementioned work.

Throughout history, composers have favoured poetic works to make vocal compositions for a variety of reasons. Poetry generally offers words that are sonically interesting, that is in addition to the ideas communicated by the author, meaning that there is a sonic basis in poetic writing to commence a transcreation. Secondly, the sequence of words is of similar importance in poetry as is the sequence of sonic events in music and this concerns the temporal as it does the
textural. Thirdly, many poetic structures have a rhythmic basis in music structure/s. Lastly, in poetic writing there is often an economy of words that is conducive to the temporal expansion of language that occurs through the physical act of singing.

Despite these generalisations, not all poetry is appropriate for music translation. When considering a literary text for a composition-led transcreation I have discovered that the words need to suggest an imaginary space for music to occupy. This is similar to what artists of other disciplines imagine when they envisage a music or sound score alongside their own discipline, as for example a choreography’s relationship to other elements that are combined to create the performance. It has become important that I am able to imagine the nature of the interaction between word and sound that will take place as I read a potential text for a transcreation. Here I ask myself questions that pertain to the potential of a composition-led transcreation such as: “What kind of music/sonic world might be evoked?”, “What will the relationship of that music/sonic world be to the text?” and “What kinds of densities and intensities will eventuate due to a combination of the sonic and the literary”?

Now, with considerable experience in working with written texts, I can make a reasonable assessment of the potential of sung voice or spoken word with music, almost immediately from looking at the page. Alongside an interest in the writer’s subject matter, which is often non-musical, it is the shapes of the words - their rhythms, stresses, sonorities and sequences, and how an authorial expression moves through them, that are the primary features of inspiration for music realisation and these are particularly pronounced in poetic writings. Also, the typographical arrangement and formal design might suggest particular music structures and from here I can also perceive how modifications might achieve a particular type of music form. However, many contemporary poetic forms present an impenetrable relationship between syntax and authorial expression that does
not allow an interaction with music. Thus I seek writings from which I can imagine music in co-existence and interaction.

2.2.2 The singability of the text

In considering a literary text for a music transcreation that features voice, the ‘singability’ and ‘performability’ of the language needs to be taken into account. Certain written texts are conducive to rhythmically based vocal performance genres, while other texts are more suitable to more *cantabile* settings, that is to say melodic flow. Technically speaking, through control of the vocal folds and breath, ‘singing’ demands the determination, emphasis, sequence and durational control of pitches. This involves the slowing of ordinary speech to accommodate the physical exertion required to produce sequences of sustained pitches. This ‘slowing’ also applies to extended vocal techniques of the twentieth century that are between the exertion of sung and spoken voice such as *Sprechstimme* and *Sprechgesang*. Generally speaking, the word to time ratio is less for singing than everyday speech, and this impacts upon the amount of text required for compositions that are sung.

Other vocal genres may place more emphasis upon the rhythmic organisation of words and syllabic stress and do not feature sustained pitch. For example ‘hip-hop’, ‘rap’ and ‘*opera buffa*’ all make use of rapid articulations closer to, or faster than, everyday speech. The speed is achievable due to a narrow bandwidth of pitch deviation and requires considerable breath control. Also, in these genres the voice is generally projected louder than in everyday speech, whether or not a microphone is used. Performers of rap and hip-hop often contract words for ease of enunciation so that the tongue is not stumbling to enunciate the syllabic sequence. In these and other fast tempo genres, a consideration of the enunciation
of the text applies and these genres may involve linguistic texts of considerable length, because the word or syllable ratio to duration is relatively short.

Furthermore, while texts might appear suitable to the composer for a music setting, the process of adaptation to a vocal line frequently requires editing by the composer, or the writer (if living), to accommodate the narrative impulses of the music itself, particularly through a need to resolve music phrasing, rhythmic organisation and in the positioning of rhythmic stresses of the originating language.

2.3 A rationale for transcreation

Beyond these kinds of technical considerations, I believe there should be a solid rationale for the enactment of artistic change upon the source material in order to justify transcreation. In the context of the works discussed in this exegesis this concerns transcreation to music theatre. I continue to find it frustrating that many contemporary operas and films are adapted from literary works that have weak basis for transcreation to those mediums. This often involves an exploitation or adaptation of a famed or controversial literary work to apparently justify the making of a more grand, antiquated or conventional form. One example is the adaptation of Dorothy Porter’s verse novel *The Monkey’s Mask* to feature length film (*Lang* 2000). Porter’s verse thriller was lauded as a landmark hybrid poetic form that made use of elements not previously seen together in a poetic narrative, including film noir, the detective novel, and lesbian eroticism. However, in the transcreation from Porter’s poem wholly to one of its referents - the detective film - the unique hybrid of Porter’s poem was negated, rendering the film as ordinary crime thriller and somewhat less dangerous than Porter’s erotic poem of textual collisions.
Commencing with the transcreation of Fallon’s *The Mourning of the Lac Women* (1997) the four music theatre works I have developed have been transcreations of writings that are either poetry collections, or collections of writings that combine poetic, dramatic and prosaic forms of expression. These four productions are: *LAQUIEM: Tales from the Mourning of the Lac Women* (1997), *Dreaming Transportation: Voice Portraits of the First Women of White Settlement at Port Jackson* (2003), *The Hanging of Jean Lee* (2006) and *The Villainelles* (2008). In considering composition-led transcreations of literary hybrids, I firstly identify something in the text to serve as a conceptual pivot between the literary text and the music score and in certain instances, with other elements. Beyond this, other technical considerations are the ‘singability’ and appropriateness of the text, as previously described. Then, in combination with my personal taste for the writing and an interest in the author’s subject matter, I am compelled to proceed with composition-led adaptations. From this integrated conceptual basis, the resources to be used and appropriate production methodologies are established.

In the four music theatre works mentioned above, and including the two works that form this DCA folio, I allow what is hybrid in the original writing to lead the new form in an organic way. This is in contrast to an approach that begins with a defined form and then stretches a body of writing to fit an historic or possibly more commercial mode of expression. Arguably, this is where the term ‘adaptation’ may be more appropriate. For example ‘We are going to make an opera/film of …. (insert bestselling contemporary novel)’. In such cases, the established form of opera or film is used to justify the transcreative act, and this can be led by a desire to perpetuate the production methodology of that form. That is not to say that films should not be made from novels, or operas not made from films. Such creative adaptation processes can also take little known works to larger audiences and provide an enriched and contrasting artistic experience. The point is that a transcreation should provide further insight into and beyond an original source because of the attributes of the new form.
Chapter Three

The writings of Jordie Albiston that have inspired my transcreations to music theatre

Introduction

In this chapter I will be discussing the writings of Jordie Albiston that have been of immense importance to my own creative work.

3.0 An inherent musicality in the writings of Jordie Albiston

The Melbourne writer, Jordie Albiston, is like myself a classically trained musician who has pursued a different artistic practice following her tertiary music studies in music. Coincidentally, we both studied flute with Thomas Pinschof at the Victoria College of the Arts in the early 1980’s, although our years of study did not cross over. Our music interests have not been limited to the classical music world; we similarly explored the breadth of music activity that was part of Melbourne’s post-punk era. Like many of our generation we have emerged as artists who have forged our own forums for hybrid artistic practice. Our artistic practices draw from the fine arts, popular culture, and at times other artistic disciplines. Additionally, we share an interest in cultural, historic and social representations of the feminine.

More specific to Albiston’s writing style is her referencing and usage of music forms, parameters and terms, for example, in the titling and organisation of poems according to classical music forms and Italian music terms and expressions, for...
example in her book *Vertigo (a cantata)* (2007). This is attractive to me, as a composer, and has provided the type of literary ‘pivot’ I have sought in order to substantiate a composition-led transcreation. Jordie described the impact of her own music practice upon her poetry in an interview with Anna Messariti, for an ABC Radio National podcast series through the radio program, *Poetica*:

I don’t think I’d write the poetry that I do write if I didn’t have such a strong background in music. And it’s more than simple metrical structures and rhyme schemes and that kind of superficial music, there’s a sense of orchestration that I think I’ve learned from music that has an almost three-dimensional effect when it’s successful in poetry. I do tend to think in musical terms rather than poetic terms. If I’m working with a triplicate kind of beat I won’t think of a dactyl or an anapaest, I will tend to more think of triple meter or some term from music. And the same with the tempo of a poem, I will tend to think of Italian terms that are used at the top of a score to indicate how fast or slow a piece should be played (Albiston 2009).

The rhymes in Jordie Albiston’s poems are often immediately apparent to me. At other times they are more intricate and concealed, suggesting a multitude of music-rhythmic possibilities. During a work-in-progress panel discussion of *The Hanging of Jean Lee* at the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts in 2004, Albiston declared that she was always surprised by the rhythms that I drew from her writing, because these were different to the rhythms she heard as she wrote (Greenwell, Albiston and Pogos, 2004). Despite my editorial changes that often result in different stress and emphasis from Albiston’s original, her reception of my music translations continued to be enthusiastic, and I believe this is because I have attempted to maintain her authorial intention in my transcreations of her writings.
3.1 My previous transcreation of Albiston’s poetry to music theatre

Between 1998 and 2003 I set about a transcreation of Jordie Albiston’s verse biography, *Botany Bay Document – a Poetic History of the Women of Botany Bay* (1996) to the music theatre work *Dreaming Transportation: Voice Portraits of the First Women of White Settlement at Port Jackson* (2003). Typically, there were several factors that propelled me to pursue a creative adaptation of this poetry collection to music theatre. Drawing on shipping logs, newspaper excerpts, etchings and letters, Albiston had reconstructed her own interpretation of the little-documented experience of European women of that time. The book presented an array of mostly singular female experiences encompassing perspectives that were convict, free settler, middle class and aristocratic. I envisaged a transcreation that involved the ‘voicing’ of mostly individual characters and this was attractive to me as a somewhat oblique continuation of the voice portraiture explorations I made in the audio installation *Mother Tongue* (1992). Thus I subtitled the work ‘voice portraits of the first women of white settlement at Port Jackson’. However, in contrast to *Mother Tongue* my production methodology for this work was based in music theatre practice as opposed to gallery installation.

Albiston’s *Botany Bay Document* utilises a smorgasbord of writing styles that presented many rhythmic and formal possibilities for a music translation. I wanted to take Albiston’s individual characterisations further through the use of composition styles that were even more divergent. Some poems were clearly musical in basis such as the ballad and the reel, and some were in strophic formats. In contrast to the forms that I considered to be ‘music ready’ there were also personal letters, factual lists and imaginative interpretations of the historic, such as the reason for the death of the botanical painter Dorothy English Paty. Together these writing forms suggested a dynamic composition-led transcreation
to music theatre score. Later, Albiston told me that she heard the poetry collection as music when she wrote it.

Albiston’s use of public and personal documents as well as historic artefacts exploited evidence of this female history. To me this suggested a deeper probing of the ‘documentary’, and here I imagined a visual and projected component. I envisaged that the cultural metaphors of gallery exhibit and film documentary could be utilised to ‘frame’ the collection of vocal portraits that, while revealing a series of personal narratives, were not linked in a conventional narrative way. As well as providing enriching and layered information about the women and their experiences, these conventions that pertained to visual and screen arts practices could aid the shape and flow of the work.

Integral to the transcreative process was a manifestation of European female class distinction and here Albiston had demonstrated a fine ear for an historic vernacular. I saw opportunity to further articulate class distinction between her subjects by using a variety of Western music performance practices as cultural metaphor. For instance, I made use of vocal styles that had elite music cultural associations as well as others associated with popular and folk music. There was, however, a danger of generic class prescription both through vocal assignation and instrumentation. To counterbalance this as well as the exposition of Albiston’s individual narratives - many of which were tragic - I endeavoured to realise the work as a celebration of individual Australian singers of today. I brought together five highly individual yet flexible vocalists of national standing, from contrasting music genres. These were the rock singer/songwriter Deborah Conway; actor and folk/jazz singer Justine Clarke; baroque and classical soprano Miriam Allan; operatic soprano Christine Douglas; and theatre and cabaret singer Amie McKenna. Through this vocal palette I could establish immediate class distinctions in song, yet in doing so I ensured each singer’s display of individual vocal prowess.
My aim was to highlight individual vocal quality rather than endorse any kind of music-cultural privilege and consequently I ensured there were equal contributions from each vocalist so that no one style was preferred over another. It did not matter to me if the music was learned aurally or through reading notation and within the music production methodology this diminished the elitism associated with notation-based music practices over the oral traditions of folk and popular music.

*Dreaming Transportation* employed triple screen projections, and was performed by five amplified singers of extremely diverse singing techniques, accompanied by a seven-piece instrumental ensemble. As a music theatre work that successfully integrated music performance and screen arts practices, I consider *Dreaming Transportation* to be a significant work in my catalogue. It is a formal precursor for the two works discussed in this exegesis, particularly *The Hanging of Jean Lee*, also adapted from a similarly substantial poetic work that might also be described as a literary hybrid.

### 3.2 A concern for a personal expression of (feminine) history in the writing of Jordie Albiston

While Albiston has not devoted her entire oeuvre to a feminist poetic, a revision of history from a female perspective propels much of her work and this certainly applies to the writing that inspired the transcreations discussed in this documentation. Bev Braune observed an ongoing preoccupation of ‘restricted’ women in three of Albiston’s publications:

The theme of the restricted woman, that territory of real, imprisoned lives, is Albiston’s singular interest in her published collections to date. Her first collection, *Nervous Arcs* (1995) opened, not surprisingly, with: ‘I am a woman locked in a /
room in a house in a / suburb/ you could call me / some kind of princess / though
the only spinning / done is in my head / this is / my industry’ (1999 p251).

In this example, Albiston’s personal metaphor of imprisoned poet is exemplary of
the unsettling proximity she establishes between author and subject that is
achieved through a series of contracting spaces. In her other writings I have been
able to identify with many of her subjects that she has moved from the distance of
historic anonymity and mythology to characters that speak with startling personal
proximities. She continues to survey a breadth and complexity of human
expression pertaining to difficult human experiences, primarily using a female
subjective and personal voice that has frequently suggested song to me.

3.3 Considering The Hanging of Jean Lee for transcreation to
music theatre

At my request, and following the success of Dreaming Transportation³, Albiston
sent me a copy of The Hanging of Jean Lee to consider for creative adaptation to

³ Dreaming Transportation was commissioned by the Sydney Festival, 2003, and performed at
Riverside Theatres, Parramatta. It was produced by Green Room Music and presented in
association with the Sydney Festival, Music Theatre Sydney and Riverside Theatres, Parramatta. It
was subsequently recorded at the ABC Studios, Ultimo, by the Radio National Drama and Music
Units and was fully broadcast on ABC Classic FM. ABC Audio released the entire work on CD. The
ABC studio recordings were also used to create other feature-programs for radio that incorporated
artist interviews. One such program In Studio: Dreaming Transportation, produced by Jane Ulman
and Russell Stapleton, won an international prize, the Prix Marulić, Croatia. The song ‘Dreaming
Transportation’ won the category of ‘Best Classical Composition’ at the MusicOz Awards, 2004. The
music theatre work Dreaming Transportation received a further production through Performing
Lines and the Sydney Opera House Producers Unit, at the Playhouse, Sydney Opera House in
2004. Excerpts were also performed at the Queensland Festival of Music International Music
another music theatre work. Upon my first reading I was reticent to commit to ‘living with’ the psychological terrain for what I estimated what might be three years to take it through composition to fruition as an independent music theatre production. The French translator Yves Bonnefoy articulates the problem of making poetry translation from one language to another that involves the translator’s ‘reliving’ of the authorial experience:

We should in fact come to see what motivates the poem; to relive the act which gave rise to it and remains enmeshed in it; and released from that fixed form, which is merely its trace, the first intention and intuition (let us say a yearning, an obsession, something universal) can be tried out anew in the other language. The exercise will now be the more genuine because the same difficulty manifests itself: that is to say, as in the original, the language (langue) of translation paralyzes the actual, tentative utterance (parole). For the difficulty of poetry is that (langue) is a system, while the specific utterance (parole) is presence (Bonnefoy 1989 pp138-139).

As Bonnefoy suggests, in order to make a creative music translation of The Hanging of Jean Lee, it was clear I would need to retrace Jordie’s own research and then delve into the work’s psychological territory in order to engage with the character of Lee that Albiston had created. The exploration of content undertaken for Dreaming Transportation had been dark enough and required my considerable attention for over five years. At the core of The Hanging of Jean Lee was even more challenging material: the exploration of a criminal’s psychological territory, and to me Albiston’s writing of the imaginary voice of Jean was daunting in its directness. Poet Dipti Saravanamuttu observed the closeness between the writer and her subject in her review of The Hanging of Jean Lee: ‘it’s as if the poet enters

into the spirit and mind of Jean Lee …’ (1999 p101). She also described the collection as a ‘work of imaginative sympathy’, noting that ‘… the poems sustain an emotional force and directness that one wonders if Albiston would allow herself if writing from her own persona’ (1999 p101). As part of my compositional process it would be necessary to repeatedly test songs and scenes through my own singing, and as part of that testing process Albiston’s writing of her subject would need to ‘live within me’ to be credible within a performance context. Given the subject matter, a kind of emotional exhaustion was inevitable.

I reconsidered the challenge of the project a couple of years later. Locked in a tiny cell for well over a year with no visits from her family4, awaiting responses to appeals and counter-appeals against a potential then later certain public death, for Jean the passing of time must have seemed surreal and interminably sustained. This predicament reminded me of the romantic and classical operas, in which a dramatic moment is suspended and a subjective expression of generally limited sentiment, or a sequence of thoughts, is augmented and repeated - through the music form of the aria, for example. More specifically, the location of Jean’s psyche within a confined environment and dramatic predicament suggested to me a sung exposition of voice to ‘release’ and externalise Albiston’s subjective tracing of Jean’s life. However, as part of the transcreation rationale, the music vocabulary and production methodology of this work would not be either a nineteenth century or even a contemporary opera, but founded in twentieth century music styles of the underground and popular. The rationale for this music politic is further elaborated in Chapter Five.

4 In Jean Lee: The Last Woman Hanged (1997 pp1998-1999) Treble notes that according to Pentridge Gaol records, some names of visitors in the days preceding Lee’s execution had been scratched out. Whether or not these visitors were the family of Marjorie Jean Maude Wright cannot be confirmed.
At the time I was also investigating emotional flux as a means of structuring hybrid music performance works that draw on varied writing styles. An earlier example of my use of a dynamic emotional flux as a structural device is in *Laquiem: Tales from the Mourning of the Lac Women*, observed by composer and academic Corinna Bonshek:

The work follows an emotional trajectory (of gradually increasing emotional states) rather than a dramatic plot. Musical refrains are used to bind narrative personae experienced as states of joy, degradation and sorrowing in various states of attraction and repulsion’ (Bonshek 2006 p.343).

and

Following Fallon’s text, emotion is privileged over stable subjectivity. Greenwell’s musical setting presents a plateau of a luxuriating sorrow, joy, anger and despair threatening implosion’ (Bonshek 2006 p.349).

Similarly, I used emotional flow as a structural device in *Dreaming Transportation* and I saw potential to further this method, and bring cohesion to a selection of poems as part of the transcreation to the music theatre work, *The Hanging of Jean Lee*. Within the claustrophobic space of a prison cell, Lee’s intense reflections suggested to me extremes of expression that a leading female (mostly sung) voice might articulate. The complexities of her character and circumstance that Albiston had drawn, including her struggles with society, men and god compelled me, and here Albiston had artfully avoided a feminist moral high ground. As Alan Gould has observed,
Indeed Jordie Albiston’s constraint is impressive, for Jean Lee’s story doubtless held opportunities for polemics whereby a present sensibility punishes the past for being sexist, judicially brutal, whatever (Gould 2000 p67).

Albiston’s book is almost written in the first person but despite this, there is also a juxtaposition of Jean’s voice against others that are public. When thinking about performed vocalisation, I envisaged the potential to further contrast the performed solo and mostly private voice of Jean Lee with differing combinations of plural voices. These included a male judicial voice, a media voice, a community voice, the voices of schoolyard children, a diaristic voice, and additionally, a narrator’s voice. Through a dynamic of vocal expressions and combinations, the music theatre work could further grapple with the book’s complex themes of innocence, precociousness, rage, culpability and punishment. Typically, Albiston had also referenced particular music genres in the verse biography. She told me that she used rhymes to evoke elements of jazz and ‘swing’, but I did not find these clearly apparent and looked for opportunities to implement similar references in the score, apart from the libretto. To begin with, I responded most strongly to Jean’s vitriol in the diaristic ‘god’ poems as excellent material for ‘blues’ style songs. Here, a personal expression in the form of diaristic rage was the impulse for a music realisation through genre.

Beyond these considerations pertaining to the technical aptitude of the literary text for music theatre transcreation, there was the significance of this story within the broader Australian community to consider. Unlike the last Australian man to be hanged – Ronald Ryan – in 1967, Jean’s story was relatively unknown and the issue of capital punishment remains one that continues to divide public sympathy at approximately 50% for and against. Public controversy re-emerged through international death penalties handed down to Australian citizens and drug traffickers Van Nguyen in Singapore and the ‘Bali Nine’. Thus, a revisiting of an Australian social and historic position on capital punishment seemed timely, where
further questions pertaining to crime and punishment could be probed. While not claiming to deliver answers or pass judgements, an artistic interpretation of history featuring contemporary music performance offers an opportunity to reflect upon a broader and continuing social debate.

3.4 Making live poetic expression

In the music theatre work, *The Hanging of Jean Lee*, I attempted to further articulate what Saravanamuttu observed as the emotional force and directness of Albiston’s subjects to bring about Bonnefoy’s idea of a ‘release’ of the poetic via music translation, through the sung and performed female voice. As previously noted, in combination with the inherent ‘musicality’ of her writing, Albiston’s ability to conjure strong female subjects within particular situational dilemmas strongly suggested ‘song’ to me, and further to that, a theatrical context for the physical release of song. The particular song forms that the poems suggested have advanced the intensity of that personal expression, and I believe this to be more powerful than a straightforward reading of the poetry collection, as realised in an earlier ABC radio drama work, *Jean Lee - the Last Woman Hanged* (Douglas 2002).

So, using music and sound - physical disturbances of the air - asserted by performers, sensually experienced by audience, I have endeavoured to further instigate a connection between author, subject and audience, to ‘make live’ Jordie’s wrestling with difficult human experiences that previously had been limited to a fairly small poetry audience. Primarily through a performance that featured the sensory mediums of performed original music with other elements, I aimed to bring to life a characterisation of Jean Lee that was part imaginary, part factual. Taking further Bonnefoy’s idea of translation from one language to another, the translation
would firstly be from poem(s) to a foreign system of music, with other elements in
the theatre including image projection and theatrical staging, and its ‘utterance’
would be performance. Here we would develop and ‘make live’ the characters
Albiston had drawn, firstly through their ‘voicing’, then by way of additional layered
performance elements into and beyond the score.

3.5 Establishing a production vision for The Hanging of Jean Lee

Following my studies in sound and filmmaking at the Australian Film Television and
Radio School, and the success of the short films Medusahead: a video opera clip
for decapitated soprano and 3D animated snakes (1997) and Laquiem (2000)
which I composed and directed, I was interested in working with film languages in
performance contexts. My own experience as a composer of film scores for
feature-documentaries, documentaries and short form dramas as well as theatre
fuels my interest in hybrid forms that are composition-led but that integrate screen
and performing arts. Also, the integration of conventional performance practices
and new media practices within my own practice-led research is inspired by largely
self-producing artists and it is here that I wish to acknowledge a whole area of
research around the use of projected digital imagery in live performance that is
beyond the scope of this exegesis. Concerning this last point I am thinking of
artists whose works are similarly led by music composition as part of hybrid
performance with/in new media forms such as North Americans Laurie Anderson,
Meredith Monk, Robert Ashley and Mikel Rouse, as well as the creators of large-
scale works such as Writing to Vermeer, an opera in six scenes composed by
Louis Andriesson, written by Peter Greenaway and directed by Saskia Boedekke
(1999), that integrated spectacular scenography with immense visual projections.
I also mention the work of Heiner Goebbels, whose works are often produced using substantial resources, and who Lehmann describes in the context of ‘between the arts’, as a creator of ‘scenic concerts’, as well as ‘multiform theatre pieces’ that ‘he realises as a composer, director, arranger, and ‘collagists of texts’ (2006 p111). Anderson, Monk, Ashley and Rouse in particular have worked at the cutting edge of hybrid arts practice for decades using both new and old materials, and often involving modest numbers of performing artists in their productions. It is important to note that within what is now a very large area of hybrid arts practice, that their principal practice is the creation and performance of original music, and that they have ventured without necessarily having traditional formal education in creating or incorporating other artistic elements within their hybrid works such as film and video, and that their works can also be viewed as in continuum of ancient artistic practices that explore expressions of music composition together with narrative. This is the domain of my own practice-led research.

Within the context of developing my own artistic voice, I wanted to further my exploration of a performance language founded upon interactions between voice, music, words and projected visuals in a production vision for The Hanging of Jean Lee. Specifically, I wanted to extend the artistic explorations undertaken in Dreaming Transportation: Voice Portraits of the First Women of White Settlement at Port Jackson (2003). In the case of The Hanging of Jean Lee I wanted to consolidate my artistic thought, and continue my pursuit of creative methodologies that promote interactions between diverse media and performance practices.

In the following three chapters I will discuss those transcreative methodologies that achieved the music theatre work, The Hanging of Jean Lee. I will speak further to aspects of Albiston’s writing from which I developed rationales for a libretto that was biographic, lyric and poetic; a score founded upon underground popular music conventions; and a visual component that draws upon the film biography,
documentary and the rock-video clip. In combination, these elements can be understood as the ‘writing’ of the work. These three stages all required dramaturgy as key elements of the music theatre work.

In my discussion I will refer to excerpts from the DVD documentation of the performances at The Studio, Sydney Opera House in 2006 as the best representation of the music theatre work. Additionally, I will refer to the ABC studio recordings of the music theatre work made firstly in a workshop in 2004 and then in a week of studio recordings early in 2007 that are presented on two compact discs. In many instances the representation of the score is superior on these CDs, despite some differences in casting, and the apportioning of the shared narrator role to a singular voice is for the purpose of radio broadcast. Furthermore, I discuss my rationale for use of visual projection in music theatre in more detail in Chapter Six, where I make specific reference to a range of recent hybrid works by Anderson and Monk et al, which are influential to my own artistic practice.
Chapter Four

The Hanging of Jean Lee – the Libretto

Introduction

This chapter discusses the first significant stage of transcreation to the music theatre work, *The Hanging of Jean Lee*. Specifically the processes and techniques utilised to achieve an adaptation of Albiston’s verse novel to a libretto in accordance with my approaches to music theatre creation, are examined.

4.0 Identifying a role for a dramatist in this transcreation

In the process of creatively translating the verse history *Botany Bay Document* to a performance text for the music theatre work *Dreaming Transportation*, I was able to achieve the adaptation of the written text mostly on my own, with additional narration and dramaturgy by Francesca Smith, and editorial checks and minor additions by Albiston. I was able to find a shape for the dramatic song cycle that, like Albiston’s book, traced an emotional geography from transportation to emancipation, with little character development. However, *The Hanging of Jean Lee* presented a more complex challenge. Despite its non-chronological structure, Albiston’s poetic work inevitably contained a narrative of forward progression in the life of Marjorie Jean Maude Wright, commencing with her notice of birth and ending with her death. Following the considerable culling process of the book to music theatre libretto, a new dramatic shape needed to be established within the libretto and then balanced in consideration of other anticipated narrative contributions from
the score and the image projections. Furthermore, a *dramatic personae* needed to be established for a limited cast of chiefly singers, and the contribution of the other characters needed interrogation in terms of their potential contributions to a new dramatic structure and musical score.

I had previously collaborated with the writer and dramatist Abe Pogos on numerous projects dating back to our respective tertiary studies at the Victoria College of the Arts in the early 1980’s. Our most significant collaboration involved his adaptation of Claude Tardat’s novel *Le Mort Sucré* to a libretto for the chamber opera *Sweet Death* (1991). Because of his skill in the transcreative process of achieving a libretto from a literary text by another author, I engaged Pogos to undertake the main part of adaptation to libretto of *The Hanging of Jean Lee*. Albiston was also involved albeit to a lesser degree in this process, to cross check my own and Pogos’ research, approve editorial changes to her poems, and where possible extend existing ones. Sometimes Pogos, Albiston and myself shared rewrites and lyric additions, while at other times these would be made by either Pogos and/or myself. There was an ongoing back and forth between the three of us throughout the writing process and my gradual progress on the composition informed the development of the libretto throughout.

5 While *Sweet Death* is a seminal work in my catalogue that examines musical and social representations of the feminine within a post-modern method that is reflexive, the creative translation was from novel to chamber opera and this involved a different methodology to the works under discussion in this exegesis. For broader reading, and for a deeper discussion of ‘the feminine’ in this context that is outside the capacity of this exegesis, please refer to the comprehensive musicological critique of this work, *Sweet Death: Strategies of the feminine grotesque in a contemporary Australian opera*, a PhD thesis written by Dr Linda Kouvaras (1996).
4.1 Objectives of the adaptation

In an early creative development workshop for The Hanging of Jean Lee that involved the two writers and myself in Melbourne, December 2003, and then through ongoing personal communications, specific objectives were identified to achieve the transcreative stage that was an adaptation of a verse history to libretto. These were:

- The writing of a synopsis
- The research of biographic and socio-historic material
- The culling of fifty-five poems to approximately thirty
- The reintegration of biographic/narrative information lost in the culling process to other creative aspects of the production
- The writing of additional narration for a narrator, and its function
- The development of characters other than Jean Lee
- A chronology of events through titles, dates and narration
- The editing and extension of poems for music composition and sung purposes
- The writing of additional dramatic scenes
- The formulation of a new dramatic structure
- The dramaturgy of the libretto

An overview of the realisation of these objectives is provided under a variety of subheadings, some of which are further discussed in Chapters Five and Chapter Six.
4.2 Synopsis

As a starting point for our adaptation to libretto, the following synopsis chiefly penned by Pogos, was written to encapsulate the story we wished to tell:

Jordie Albiston's verse biography *The Hanging of Jean Lee* follows the grim life of the last woman to be hanged in Australia in 1951. From suburban housewife to participant in a horrible crime, Jordie's evocation of Jean is compassionate and insightful, and offers great potential for exploration of her psyche in the solitude of incarceration as she awaits the gallows.

Jean Lee, along with lover Robert Clayton and criminal Norman Andrews, was convicted for participating in the brutal torture and murder of 73 year-old bookie William "Pop" Kent. The court case and surrounding media coverage drew immense controversy in post-war Melbourne. Despite the brutality of the murder there was unease at the prospect of hanging a woman. The murder itself was an attempted robbery gone wrong, but during police interrogation, Jean Lee perversely confessed sole responsibility for what had taken place, in an attempt to protect her lover. She retracted the confession at trial, but by then she had fatally incriminated herself.

Marjorie Jean Maude Wright began an ordinary life in the North Sydney suburb of Chatswood. Her life circumstances contained prospects available to many of her generation. What is extraordinary, are her repeated choices to place herself in grimmer circumstances, affiliating with men who drew her into financial difficulty and gave her constant physical abuse.

We will create a unique music-theatre form that examines the specific historical event of *The Hanging of Jean Lee*, through music, image and dramatic text. The work will also make space for the exploration of the subjective reaction of Jean Lee.
as a person who has been involved in a killing, and the trajectory of her thoughts as she approaches execution (Green Room Music 2004).

This synopsis prefaced a funding application to the Theatre Board, Australia Council for the Arts, 2004 and was later refined for other funding applications. With editorial refinement, the synopsis provided a seminal reference for the many artists who participated in the ensuing transcreative stages to music theatre. Later, it was used to generate publicity and marketing copy to provide an artistic context for the production.

4.3 Formulation of the dramatic structure

In contrast to the substantial personal expression of many of her poems, Albiston arranged her verse history into five thematic sections that ‘mimic its newspaper origins: ‘Personal Pages’, ‘Entertainment Section’, ‘Crime Supplement’ and ‘Death Notices’ (Croft 1999). But within these sections, a female first-person vocal expression contrasted the public, harsh, male voices of the press and judicial system. Julian Croft observes that Albiston provides the reader with access to Lee’s mind:

… Albiston has allowed her subject’s consciousness to move around in time, building up to the pathetic climax of her hanging. The blend of direct and indirect narrative through real and imagined sources and revelation from Lee herself create a finely realized and sympathetic account of a blighted life (1999).

We did not maintain Albiston’s themed newspaper sections in the shaping of the libretto. Initially, I had planned to reveal Jean’s story impressionistically through a non-linear narrative that furthered Albiston’s approach, and here I wanted to
continue my explorations of non-linear narrative in hybrid music-performance works. Building upon this idea but in keeping with a more dramatic premise, Pogos suggested that we open the work with the hanging, and then use Jean’s awaiting death in her prison cell as a pivot to reflect episodically upon past events.

Eventually we arrived at a slightly different structural model. We chose to open with the ballad ‘Murder at Mallow House’, led by a narrator, later joined by the trio of murderers in chorus, who in a single song summarises the events leading up to murder, on the afternoon of November 7, 1949. The distancing effect of the narrator is reminiscent of ‘The Ballad of Mack the Knife’ that opens The Threepenny Opera and similarly summarises the murder of Jenny Towler by Macheath, prior to the unfolding of the full narrative (Brecht & Weill 1928). From here, the first seven episodes of The Hanging of Jean Lee involved large time leaps, but at the point of Jean’s teenage pregnancy - a significant event that we believed impacted upon her character as discussed in Don Treble’s biography (Treble, Wilson & Lincoln 1997) and also in interview between Treble, Pogos and myself⁶ - the narrative proceeded chronologically towards the murder and then propelled towards Jean’s death, with occasional dynamic jumps backwards in time that emphasised the escalating tragic contrast between child and adult experience.

Like Botany Bay Document (Albiston 1996), an array of writing forms were utilised by Albiston in her poetic work and those writing forms were used in dynamic juxtapositions of the personal against the public: diaristic entries, schoolyard

⁶ Pogos and I visited Don Treble for interview in our early stage of our production research in 2004. I also visited Don on a separate occasion and he made available to me his entire collection of research for his biography, housed in many boxes in his garage. Treble had copies of the newspaper articles that Albiston had also sourced to write the non-subjective poems. Treble’s generosity in allowing us to draw from his research was invaluable, particularly for the process of my relocating the original articles for incorporation within the visual component.
chants, broadsheet headlines and newspaper notices. After reading Treble’s biography *Jean Lee: The Last Woman Hanged* (1997), a principle research source for Albiston that was unique in its thorough non-sensationalist account of Jean’s life, we wanted to expand the tensions between personal, social and public narratives apparent in Albiston’s verse biography, within the dramatic structure. This was in part to probe Treble’s view that Jean’s hanging was one of example, because she abominated the Australian ideal of the post World War Two housewife.

One example of Albiston’s juxtaposition of public and private narratives by using various forms of documentation, or evidence, of Jean’s life in her verse biography is Jean’s intense horror fantasy in ‘Cell Talk’, followed by the clinical ‘Pentridge Poem’, derived from the printed rules for prisoner care. Here we identified themes that further probed the dramatic tensions inherent in: crime and justice, a vernacular of the underclass against the poetry of religious writing, innocent child and sexualized woman, and the female criminal in post-war Australia. Male and female characterisations were also inextricably linked to the broader themes of the personal and public, and this is something we wanted to further in our approach to casting, which is discussed in Chapter Five.

### 4.4 Culling and reshaping

Following my previous adaptation of Albiston’s verse history for *Dreaming Transportation*, it was clear to me that a collection of fifty-five poems would need to be considerably reduced for a libretto that would serve a performance of roughly eighty to ninety minutes without interval. As I have mentioned in Chapter Three, this is principally because sung speech generally proceeds at much slower rates than the spoken word. From my experience in working with Albiston’s writing I
estimated that we would need to make use of approximately two thirds of the published poems.

The culling process happened in parallel to the music composition. A chief task for Pogos was to prioritise those poems most critical to Jean’s story, which also contained a dramatic quality or impulse. Keeping in mind the poems I had also designated as strong for music realisation, Pogos considered the exposition of themes and then found a new structure for those themes within the narrative structure of the libretto. The shape of the music theatre work was continuously revised between Pogos and myself, in a fashion that was similar to the construction of a jigsaw puzzle but here the form was not as pre-determined. By using techniques available in the ‘home studio’, it was possible to concurrently dramaturge the score and the libretto as the content evolved. I recorded my voice singing all the characters, and used ‘on board’ sample instruments, in the software program ‘Logic Platinum 7.2.3’ to prepare ‘demo’ accompaniments so that Pogos and Albiston had a sense of the instrumental texture. I also recorded temporary narrations using my own voice, and allocated particular poems to be realised through creative improvisation in the production rehearsals with musicians. As the content of the libretto and the music composition developed, I updated CD ‘demo’ recordings and experimented with the sequence of episodes to assist the dramaturgy of the libretto and music score. The use of such ‘demos’ was also advantageous when working with the other theatre artists, who are generally not readers of music notation.

The culling process precipitated the formulation of an entirely new structure of different narrative sequence. Inevitably, certain biographic information was lost in the culling, so we had to find ways to reintroduce that information, which most often happened through the layering of images or in the writing of narration. Pogos also asserted that a key dramatic scene needed to be written to catalyse Jean’s
pervasive ‘Confession’, to provide a dramatic impulse that was necessary in our music theatre context to build to this surprising action, when Jean claimed that she was solely responsible for Kent’s murder. Subsequently titled ‘Interrogation Scene’, the dramatic scene was written in a rhythmic way, that utilised the skills of the performers who were primarily singers, rather than expose them as non-actors. In place of what would have been a sequence of interrogations, Pogos used a simultaneous interrogation of the three suspects by Senior Detective Henry McKnight to expose the lies each suspect told to police under duress, that built to the moment where Clayton effectively betrayed Jean and ‘dobbed her in’ for the murder. Pogos avoided what could have easily been a jarring of writing styles, by making use of short repeated and similar phrases that overlapped in near canonical ways between the characters, so that there was rhythmic momentum and a music-like texture in the dramatic writing.

4.5 Titles, chronology of events and use of narrations

In our first creative development workshop in May, 2004 held at the ABC Studios, Ultimo, we attempted a development of the biographic and the socio-historic by way of short dramatic scenes and narrations that linked a sequence of songs. However, we discovered that these new writings interfered with the dramatic momentum already within Albiston’s poems. From this point, any newly written biographic and factual information was intensively condensed. Later, the brief

7 This is with the exception of Josh Quong Tart who is a trained actor and who has sung back up vocals professionally with Australian rock artists such as Jenny Morris.

8 The Australia Council for the Arts supported this creative workshop, with in-kind support from the ABC Radio and Drama Units, executive produced by Anna Messariti, held in May 2004. A DVD document was made of the four-day workshop. The first two days were allocated to vocal performance and the final two days we rehearsed with the seven-piece band, concluding with a showing to invited presenters, producers and representatives of funding bodies.
narrations were further refined in the production rehearsals by the director Tim Maddock, the cast and myself.

In her book *The Hanging of Jean Lee* (1998), Albiston provides a brief chronology contextualising Jean’s personal milestones against significant historic events and I thought it would be useful to find another device appropriate to music theatre to provide similar context. I also wanted to maintain the titles of Albiston’s poems because they provided biographic and narrative information in an efficient way. Sometimes the titles were used ironically in relation to the expression of the poem to suggest, for example, the immensely different experiences of the personal and public of the same event. For instance, the title ‘Divorce File’ encapsulates the clinical formality of a marital divide manifest in the public record, while the body of the poem imaginatively explores Jean’s reflection upon her troubled relationship with Ray Brees over many years. Also, the diaristic poems include dates of journal entry, so a continuum of date reference became another feature we developed. Thus we followed documentary film convention, researching dates and locations for each song/episode, and this information was realised either through title projections or in spoken narration. However, the juxtaposition of personal history against social history was to be most powerfully communicated in the production via the considered juxtaposition of both archival and newly created images with or against the score. This was in both our minds when writing the libretto.

### 4.6 Development of the biographical, and further characters

Albiston’s verse biography is told primarily through the voice of Jean, however there are small appearances from a schoolteacher, the fleeting presence of her father and mother, the hangman, and the ambiguous observations of photographers, journalists, police and wardens. These evocations of other
characters suggested further development for a core cast. In addition to the role of Jean Lee, we decided upon the musical model of a male vocal trio who would also be cast to play the key male roles involved in the murder: the two criminals Robert David Clayton and Norman Andrews, and the victim William "Pop" Kent. From this trio, the two men who participated in the murder of Kent would double as Lee’s key lovers, being her husband Ray Brees and petty criminal Morris Dias. This doubling introduced further dramatic tensions between Jean and the men she chose to have relationships with, be they criminal or romantic. In accordance with this mode of introducing dramatic tension through role doubling, the performer who played the murder victim William Kent doubled as the Supreme Court Judge.

Additionally, a number of roles were allocated to the members of the trio that involved varied spoken and sung performance modes of narration, solo, duet, trio, and harmonies. These roles were: Journalist, Lee’s father Charles Wright, the Chief Superintendent Harry Mc Knight, Coroner, Warden, Hangman, Schoolteacher, Policemen, Chorus and Back-up Vocals. To sustain a balance of character roles through vocal assignation, we decided to split the role of a narrator between members of the male trio. This was also required for dramaturgical reasons.

Further to this, Pogos sought to further develop dramatic connections by changing the order of the poems. For instance, the tension between childhood simplicity and innocence against adult crisis was further emphasised at various points. In the libretto, the innocent ‘Skipping Rhyme’ follows the expositional ‘Murder at Mallow House’, thus connecting Jean’s participation in a hideous murder, to her innocence as a girl of around eight years of age. In the libretto, the ‘Skipping Rhyme’ is repeated a second time as a penultimate ‘bookend’, as a sedated Jean is carried to the gallows. The dramatic device of bookend repetition plays off the young Jean against the soon to be executed woman in her prime of her life. In its recapitulation,
the poem is performed as a whispered, sedated adult voice of Jean while she lapses in and out of consciousness, ‘remembering’ the poem, recalling parts of happier childhood days. This ‘bookend’ device then again forms a poignant juxtaposition to the closing song, 'Fly Away Jean' sung in the contemporary and reflective voice of the Narrator accompanied by a Chorus, who in public address reference the childlike nursery rhyme that Albiston sourced from the Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes (1998):

CHORUS
She is dead she is dead says Peter to Robin
She is dead she is dead says Robin to Bobbin
She is dead she is dead

NARRATOR
says John alone

CHORUS
She is dead says everyone (2006)

In 'Mug Shot #1', police leer at Jean upon her arrest. As an example of character development in the libretto, we wanted to emphasise the police sniggers about Jean to further the conflict between her appearance as an attractive woman and as a suspected murderer, while her identity photographs were taken. Musically this was set as an acerbic, upbeat swing dance. Albiston wrote the poem mostly as a collective voice with small departures to the conversational, but I altered this to a balanced duet between two policemen as I composed the song, using vocal splits that shifted between conversation and shared opinion. Here is an excerpt from the original poem 'Mug Shot 1':
Mug Shot I

Shove    Push    Pull to one side
a sexy-looking red-haired piece
Confront  Adjust    a looker all
right      Jean or Marjorie or Mesha

Valez (try Vetos/Deacon/Duncan
or Brees)    A long-line coat    High

heels    Bobbed hair    We'd hate to
say what we felt if we cared ...(Albiston 1998)

In the libretto this became a rapid conversation between two policemen as they observed the police identification of Jean Lee:

5 MUG SHOT 1 (title)

Melbourne 1949 (title)

POLICEMAN 1 & 2

Shove push
Pull to one side

POLICEMAN 1

A sexy-looking red-haired piece

POLICEMAN 1 & 2

Confront adjust
A looker all right
Here, active modes of conversation and collusion are used to further dramatise the use of 'asides' within the poem. The character splits also contribute vocal contrast, as male duets do not naturally occur in Albiston’s writing. Following this song, the juxtaposition of the helpful four year-old Jean in 'Mum’s Little Helper' harshly contrasts with the grown up Jean - a known prostitute and charged murderess - in an ironic and shocking way.

The device of childhood return was used most powerfully in the positioning of the song ‘Behind the Shelter Shed’. In her book, Albiston psychologically traces Jean’s childhood to adolescence then adulthood as an ever-increasing downward spiral. As part of this trajectory, Albiston portrays a child participating in ordinary school pranks in this poem and its position in the poetry book is a sinister reflection upon innocence and precociousness. However, in the libretto, ‘Behind the Shelter Shed’
is not sung by the young Jean, but instead by the trio of murderers and it accompanies the torture and murder of William Kent. The song jumps backwards in time, so that the trio sing as schoolchildren in unison and in a happy complicit sway, while the torture murder carried out by the adults is projected in dramatic reconstruction behind them, cutting in and out of black. Thus at the point of dramatic climax, childhood past and adulthood present cooperate. As an alternate character assignation, the collision of the rebellious school song with horrible images of the torture and trashing of Kent’s room and his death produce a powerful irony, between childhood innocence and adult tragedy. Here, the repositioning and layering of poetic elements advanced a ‘theatre of ideas’ and a ‘theatre of music’.

Much of the creative adaptation to libretto involved creative decisions that are somewhat invisible and did not necessarily require the abundant writing of new words. Rather, within this transcreative phase there was a stringent revision and compression of extant material, so that with Pogos’ dramatic invention and with my own editorial into vocal composition, Albiston’s writing worked anew in enriched poetic, dramatic and co-operative ways in the context of our music theatre realisation. Significantly, beyond the transcreative procedure as outlined in this chapter, a social question emerged that seemed to ask what it was that happened to transform an innocent child into a murderer, and can there be a rational answer?
Chapter Five

The Hanging of Jean Lee – The Score

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the score as a crucial element of the process of a transcreation to music theatre in *The Hanging of Jean Lee*. While it is not possible to provide a full analysis of the composition within this exegesis, I will discuss techniques I have employed that have their basis in both traditional and post-modern approaches to the creation of scores for music drama and music theatre. I will discuss my choice of music materials and refer to a variety of score excerpts that are attached as figures and as appendices to demonstrate a rationale for music composition appropriate to the subject matter. These examples also demonstrate the impact of score as essential to the argument within the overall music theatre work.

5.0 A politic of music style

The music theatre score of *The Hanging of Jean Lee* updates the exploration of the underclass through a folk-music vernacular, so compellingly established by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill in their musical play of 1928, *The Threepenny Opera*. In our production application to the Australia Council for the Arts (Green Room Music 2005) we articulated the evolving form and style of Green Room Music's music
theatre productions⁹, as contributing to the lineage of the famous Brecht/Weill collaboration:

The work is heading in the direction of a retro-indie post-punk musical in the tradition of the 1980s urban neo-gothic re-interpretation of country, folk and blues roots music exemplified by the work of The Triffids, The Black-eyed Susans, PJ Harvey, and Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, among others.¹⁰

Like *The Threepenny Opera*, the tragic story of Jean Lee is located in a criminal underworld. While I perceived elements of the narrative to have 'operatic' qualities, I felt that to cast an operatic soprano in the role of Jean Lee and evoke a mid-twentieth century Australian crime world by using the instrumental forces of an opera or chamber opera company would be pretentious. Given that Jean spent much of her life operating within society’s criminal margins, I wanted to draw on music subcultures that flourished outside of, or against the mainstream of popular music culture, throughout the twentieth century. As Kurt Weill had absorbed the vulgar in his musical syntax, it was conceptually critical to me that this score should reference both non-mainstream and mainstream popular music conventions across the twentieth century as a calculated kind of music politic. Here, in consideration of achieving a ‘theatre of music’, I believed that I could reference a history of twentieth century social music styles while not attempting ‘authentic’ period recreations. This involved the positioning of music subcultures and generic

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⁹ In the late 1990’s, I established Green Room Music as a platform to compose and direct innovative screen and performance projects that are composition-led, under my artistic direction.

¹⁰ This definition of the music style owes much to a conversation and further correspondence I had with composer and ABC Classic FM producer Stephen Adams, who posed questions as to where the work was heading. This discussion followed the first creative workshop at the ABC Studios, Ultimo, in August 2004. The email containing Adams’ suggestions is now lost, but I recall his astute observations here, that were absorbed into our production definition.
references across the narrative to dynamically affect tone, mood, dramatic intent and/or location.

5.1 Voicing and cast

In the early stages of the project’s development I desired to establish voicing and instrumentation that would reasonably evoke a range of music genres to suggest the temporal, the locational and the situational, as much as I wished to evoke the changing psyche and evolving personae of Jean Lee as social dancer, barmaid, rebel, party girl, prostitute, mother, alcoholic, prisoner, lone voice, outsider, etc. This is because I prefer to compose with individual vocal qualities in mind and so most of the key roles were cast some time prior to the commencement of rehearsals.

In the early stages of planning the score, I vacillated between composing for singers with dramatic qualities and actors who could sing. In the creative development workshop of 2004 I tried a cast of three actors who sang alongside one musician, the iconic lead singer of ‘indie-rock’ band Hunters and Collectors, Mark Seymour. This rock singer’s mature ‘gravel-like’ singing style provided a striking timbral and emotive contribution. Although he was not able to participate in the final production, his performance as petty criminal Morris Dias in Go West Young Woman can be heard in the ABC studio recordings (CD#1, track 16). This experience disposed me to compose for and cast experienced rock/popular singers of varied popular music specialisation, where the identification of a singer’s individual voice, often colloquially described as his or her ‘sound’\(^\text{11}\), is important. I

\(^{11}\) During the 2004 workshop, I asked Mark Seymour not to make a registral break in the song ‘Fly Away Jean’ and to sing the leap as \textit{legato}. The bass guitarist Cameron Undy astutely pointed out
was less interested in working with actors’ trained singing voices, which often suggest an idealised training similar to classical voice and opera, in that a homogenised and smooth tone is achieved across the vocal range of the singer. Consequently I sought vocal power and stamina, preferring what Barthes discusses as the ‘grain’ of the voice (1984 pp179-189) over the skills of a singing actor for this vocal role. This consolidated my aim to anchor the work within a theatre of post-punk, jazz and retro-indie music genres, rather than locating it within the conventions suggestive of commercial musical theatre or contemporary chamber-opera.

There were other dramaturgical and technical considerations in my approach to voicing and casting. The central role is virtuosic; Jean Lee is on stage for most of the performance and does not share any other roles. The part demands the dramatic conviction capable of evoking the character of Jean Lee from the age of four to thirty-one years, with the technical ability to execute many popular and non-mainstream vocal styles. I was also mindful of the potential to vocally exhaust this performer who, beyond singing demands, needs also to deliver spoken monologues and dramatic scenes.

Rock singer Max Sharam was cast to play the role of Jean Lee. Her reputation as a ‘wild child’ of the early 1990’s independent rock music scene well served her rugged and powerful interpretation of Jean. What attracted me to Sharam was the force and colours of her voice as much as her performance persona; her soprano range included a solid low register, and she made use of imperfect tones - particularly idiosyncratic ‘cracks’ as a kind of timbral embellishment. That she had also performed in an Italian musical over Europe suggested that she was

that to make such a break was characteristic of Mark Seymour’s ‘sound’, meaning his individual singing style, so the break remained.
interested in music performance practice beyond the rock music industry. Largely due to illness, Sharam struggled with the spoken monologues in rehearsals, so three dramaturgically important spoken text episodes were cut for the production at the 2006 season at the Sydney Opera House. However most of the deleted scenes were reinstated during the ABC studio recording of the work that took place some months later. In these recordings, the actor Pippa Grandison performed the role of Older Jean.\textsuperscript{12}

Treble’s prose and Albiston’s verse biography present Jean Lee as having few female friends, preferring either her own company or the attention of men. Here, I saw opportunity to use voicing as social metaphor so I sought to literally surround Jean with men. I decided upon a trio of male vocalists of tenor, baritone and bass ranges to dramatically support, challenge and court Jean. I furthered this approach in the casting of a mostly male band, with the exception of violinist Naomi Radom. Together with Sharam’s soprano, the trio provided a full range vocal palette with character splits modelled on the three male characters involved in the murder: SP bookie William Kent, Lee’s lover Robert David Clayton, and criminal cohort Norman Andrews. As previously mentioned in Chapter Four, from this distribution of the central roles, other characters were assigned to the trio members to suit individual performance strengths and to maintain vocal variation. Thus, several poems were adapted to solos, duets, trios, and quartets either separately to Jean, alongside Jean, or as supportive (in the music technical sense).

\textsuperscript{12} The casting of Grandison for the studio recordings was a negotiation between the ABC and Green Room Music. The reinstated omissions were ‘Cell Talk’ and ‘In Defence of the Working Girl’. ‘Ode to my Family’ was also realised in the ABC studio recordings but I deleted this episode for dramaturgical reasons. Thus the CD recordings submitted with this report provide the best overall rendition of the score while the DVD provides the best representation of the music theatre work, despite the omissions.
As mentioned, the male trio also shared the spoken narration in order to bring about a performative contrast *within* the overall use of masculine voice, whilst activating a complicit public voice, against Jean’s lone voice. This shared role of narrator speaks from the present to the past in a similar mode to the narrator in biographic films, where a constant ‘voice-over’ provides information and reflection upon a subject with distance, erstwhile making a de facto authorial connection with the audience, and breaking ‘the fourth wall’, in the Brechtian sense.

Like Sharam, each of the male vocalists had distinctive vocal styles. Hugo Race, lead singer of the post-punk Melbourne band The Wreckery and founding member with Nick Cave of the Bad Seeds, was cast as Jean's pimp lover, Robert David Clayton. As a singer of bass range, Hugo’s performance style is somewhat reserved but timbrally powerful and comparable to the vocal styles of Johnny Cash, Nick Cave and Tex Perkins. As a teenager, Race performed in theatre productions at St Martin’s Theatre in Melbourne and was comfortable with the proposed hybrid form. His lower register tones were ideal for the sinister role of 'The Hangman' (CD#2 tracks 20, 21; DVD chapter 30). Josh Quong Tart, an actor known for his television and theatre performances, and an experienced back-up vocalist for the Australian rock singer Jenny Morris, performed the role of Norman Andrews and provided a tenor vocal range. Given his acting skills, Quong Tart was assigned a greater proportion of character-based monologues. Rock and roll vocalist Jeff Duff, known internationally for his transitions between glam-rock, cabaret and post-punk, sang the role of William “Pop” Kent. An active singer in his sixties, Duff also performed the senior role of the Judge, as well as that of the small-time crook Morris Dias. As a baritone, Duff’s voice completed the trio of diverse male vocal register and quality.

An important part of the transcreative processes of libretto and score was the expansion of the male voice in the music theatre work via the trio. Here, potential
characterisations as well as music voicings were exploited for both dramatic and music purposes. Thus a variety of sung and spoken roles that ranged from intimate to public were split or shared between the three men, in consideration of their respective vocal qualities and ranges. Here, the musical technique of vocal delineation, that most often involved the use of conventional approaches to the organisation of the sung voices, advanced the male and female vocal representations of the narrative to further the dramatic.

When composing and then casting this work, I did not require any singer to read music notation. In fact I preferred that each performer be skilled in the aural practice of popular music, which is largely learned through repetition and memory. Thus, I recorded my own singing, and made MIDI recordings, of every singer’s line, including split chorus harmonies, so that the singers could learn their parts prior to the rehearsal period. The rehearsal period was relatively short – one week for solo work on Jean’s role, followed by a second week with all cast, then a final week with cast and musicians, so I requested the cast to be as familiar with their individual parts as possible. Given the time pressure of rehearsals it was advantageous that Max Sharam was a reader of notation through her earlier classical vocal and piano training, however, this skill was not essential to my conception of the role.

5.2 An ensemble of diverse instrumentation

As with the casting, the instrumentation for this work was informed by the range of music references that I wanted to weave into the texture of the score. In the songs ‘Murder at Mallow House’, ‘The Hangman’s Handbook’ and the diaristic poems addressed to god, ‘Dear Diary 1934’ and ‘Dear Diary 1951’ (CD#1 tracks 7,8; CD#2 track 22), I wanted to emulate the dark, neo-blues style instrumentations and music production distortions of post-punk groups such as The Bad Seeds. Here, I
used sonic and music styles for sensory effect but I also had in mind Cave’s own
struggle with ‘god’ that he enacts through a return to blues and roots forms, many
of which have their foundation in Christian worship, such as the musical styles of
Southern American Baptist ministers, choirs and congregations.

Also, I planned to appropriate other music styles to further social and historic
contexts. For example, I wanted to allude to the dance culture of the swing band
era to highlight Jean’s love of dance with her first husband Ray Brees. In ‘Saturday
Arvo’, the cultural reference of swing band in the instrumentation became the
narrative location from which Jean and Ray performed a stylised choreography.
The end of this song segued into the one of the work’s few quotations, an
instrumental arrangement of Irving Berlin’s popular song ‘Let Yourself Go’ in which
Fred Astaire and Gingers danced in the RKO film Follow the Fleet (1936)\textsuperscript{13}. Here,
the music theatre band becomes the band in the room that Jean and Ray dance to
(Score 8. bb86-118), that it is to say that within one song the function of the band
switches from music drama score to diagetic music within the scene. Similarly, in
‘Living It Up’ and ‘Learning the Trade’ (CD#1 tracks 9,14,18), I wanted to evoke the
energy and optimism of the American-led jazz styles of the Second World War,
also enjoyed in Australia at the time, and such culturally specific music references
can be heard in the featured instrumentations of these songs.

Furthermore, I wanted to achieve textural improvisations that suggested Jean’s
deteriorating psychological state of mind within the gloom of Pentridge Gaol in
‘Mug Shot II’ and ‘Cell Talk’\textsuperscript{14} (CD#2 tracks 14,19). I was thinking of the abstract
sonic textures of morose tone created by Lydia Lunch and Roland Howard in I fell

\textsuperscript{13} In the poem ‘Saturday Arvo’, Albiston refers to ‘Ginger and Fred’, so the in-score quotation further
emphasises the poet’s textual reference.

\textsuperscript{14} For reasons previously outlined ‘Cell Talk’ was only realised in the ABC recordings of 2007 and is
not included on the performance DVD.
in love with a ghost (Lunch 1982) and of Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds’ homage to beat poetry That’s What Jazz is to Me (Cave 1984) which, while not entirely satisfying as a composition, is sonically imaginative and has a brooding quality that was useful as a reference point. In these examples and elsewhere in the score I asserted the dramatic by making reference to, or being inspired by, existing popular musics and sonic sensualities to accomplish a ‘theatre of music’.

To achieve these and other music textures, I arrived at the instrumentation of an extended rock band: violin; trumpet; alto saxophone doubling flute, clarinets and bass clarinet; electric guitar; keyboards; electric bass; and drumkit, small percussion and glockenspiel. Within this instrumentation I was able to make use of further subsets. For example, I used the violin, clarinet or saxophone and trumpet for sectional writing to evoke orchestrations of the swing band era; the trumpet and saxophone is used in pairs for jazz and other pop/rock feels; and the violin is often featured with piano, and then as solo instrument with the rock band. The timbral unpredictability of the electric guitar was featured both as a lead instrument in familiar song forms and within the more sonically inventive textural improvisations that were workshopped to accompany or sonically react with monologues.

Like the conventions of opera and musical theatre composition, I used particular instrumentations to emphasis other narrative themes. For example, I repeated the instrumentation of solo piano with featured trumpet or violin in the reflective ballads to consolidate the mother/child abandonment, when Jean sings as a young child (Score 4 ‘Mum’s Little Helper’), as a mother thinking about the child she left behind (Score 9 ‘I Have a Baby’; Score 31 ‘Jilly’s Song’) and post-marriage to Ray Brees (Score 19 ‘Divorce File’).
The band comprised outstanding jazz, improvisation, classical and post-rock music specialists, many who were composers in their own right, who were used to different rehearsal and performance methodologies and languages. I had worked with most of the artists on my previous scores, but not simultaneously. In contrast to the singers and because of the limited instrumental rehearsal, strong reading skills were essential, as the score was principally notated to the level of 85% of the music content. An ability to interpret many styles in detail, and improvisation skills involving timbral invention in order to achieve dramatic intent, were essential. Due to the ambition of the work as an independent production with limited resources, and in working toward a presentation deadline, to a degree this was unavoidable. Yet, in terms of a music production ethos, and to complement the aural approach of the cast in learning their music parts, I wanted the score to sound as if ‘owned’ by a band and performed intuitively according to the subtle performance dynamics of the cast within each performance, rather than to sound as read by a ‘scratch’ ensemble, which commonly happens in the premiere productions of new music theatre and chamber operas.

To expedite the communication of stylistic and interpretive detail, I sought sub-groupings of musicians who had played together in other music contexts. With the exception of the keyboard player, I maintained the line-up that participated in the 2004 creative development workshop, as for the production two years later. Like my approach to the cast, to maximise familiarity with the score I supplied individual CDs to all musicians to have a strong sense of the varied musical styles, prior to rehearsal. The exception of course, were those scenes created through improvisation in rehearsal.

There were two instrumental parts that I allowed greater interpretive freedom than the others to affect the individual interpretation, which is integral to the practice of most popular musics. I workshopped the underlying ‘feels’ of many of the songs in
sectional rehearsals with drummer Jared Underwood, using written charts and audio ‘demos’ on CD, encouraging a personal embellishment so that his part was known, as opposed to sounding as ‘chart-read’. I also approached the writing for the electric guitar more freely, leaving the electric guitarist Michael Sheridan latitude to ‘fill’ in lead solo lines, extended techniques and digital stereo effects, providing points of return to the score. An example is the song, ‘You Stalker’, in which Sheridan contributes an integral stylistic interpretation to the realisation of the song. This was the introduction of a ‘funk’ rhythm guitar feel over his charted chord progression (CD #1, track 15).

Although the coming together of these artists involved a recess of two years between the 2004 workshop and the 2006 production rehearsal, the players were each able to witness the progression of the score from its early preparations, to its full realisation with complete libretto. Despite the length of this recess, the continuum of the band members aided a shared interpretation of music style with the idea that the ensemble itself in some way progressed the articulation of the score. Thus overlaps of specialist music practices within the band assisted a sense of community, in that they were aware of intersections between each others’ artistic endeavours and this aided a unified purpose of score realisation.

5.3 Examples of ‘theatres of music’ in the score

Now that I have established the rationale for my score materials, I will provide examples that reveal my composition methodology of layered interactions between the musical elements against or with the lyric and the dramatic, to achieve ‘theatres of music’.
In many instances I made use of conventional composition techniques, including the centuries old artistic technique of *mimesis*, by which I mean the sense of imitation or mimicry. Historically mimesis has a strong basis in music drama, as for example in the classical operas of Mozart, where the orchestra represents, imitates or expresses the dramatic through the playing of Western classical period musical instruments. Mimetic techniques are used in many and complex ways within the score for *The Hanging of Jean Lee*.

For instance when I composed the song, ‘You Stalker’, my priority was to evoke Jean’s volatility towards Ray Brees’ aggressive stalking of her in an effort to return Jean to the family home and to their young child, Jilly. While the song ‘You Stalker’ (Score 13) is set in Brisbane, early in World War II, I prioritised the personal dramatic impulse of the song over an allusion to music of the period. Instead, the location of the song was ‘set’ within a music environment based upon tension and pace. Saying that, a quotation of Glenn Miller’s *In The Mood* was inserted as a wry historic gesture at bb55–56 in parallel thirds in the trumpet and violin parts, but against a contradictory angular sample-like quintuplet motif on the piano.

More generally, to imitate the kinesis of stalking, an action inherently suggestive of rhythmic pulse, I had in mind themes composed for television detective series of the 1970’s that feature criminal ‘chase’, such as *Mission Impossible* and *Hawaii Five O*, both built upon driving percussive textures. To further the song’s anxious pace, I also had in mind certain 1990’s dance based genres, such as ‘trip-hop’ and ‘jungle’ that are built over highly paced semiquaver high hat grooves. The musical texture of ‘You Stalker’ was founded on a driving bass motif that featured an unstable tritone, generally accompanied by rapidly paced accented semiquavers on high hat (Score 13, ‘You Stalker’ bb9–16). Here, the drummer Jared Underwood used a second snare drum to create rapid rolls of different pitch, acoustically imitating the extremely fast electronic drumkit rolls that are characteristic of the
aforementioned recent dance-music styles. There was another level of tension between the line of the vocal soloist - the one being chased - and the driving texture of the band that suggested the point of view of the stalker. Here, by way of the featured music elements of rhythm and pace, the ensemble enacted Ray’s stalking of Jean (CD#1 track 15; DVD chapter 10) and this mimetic device was accompanied by another in the fluctuating harmonic stability in the tritone-featured bass and trumpet lines that suggested Jean’s anxiety given her literally unstable circumstance.

In the song, ‘Learning the Trade’, petty criminal Morris Dias promotes prostitution to Jean as a desirable professional advancement. In this instance, and to make use of a term coined by Richard Vella, a ‘music environment’ was constructed so as to evoke a sordid glamour, by alluding to familiar cultural locations, such as the music score of the ‘striptease’ and the jazz music of nightclubs. While the song is more stylistically akin to hybrids of jazz and popular music of the 1960’s and 1970’s some twenty years later, the establishment of a mood through the signification of familiar music styles was more pertinent here. Against the nightclub ‘showman’ performance of Jeff Duff as Morrie, a style close to his own performance persona, Tom O’Halloran’s piano solo and embellishments added considerable panache to the musical and theatrical environment of this song (CD#1 track 18; DVD chapter 12).

15 Underwood used a second snare drum in the Sydney Opera House performances, captured in the DVD documentation. However, in the ABC Studio recordings, Underwood omitted to bring the second snare drum. Due to time constraints, we proceeded with recording ‘You Stalker’ without the second snare drum so the CD recording contains one snare instead of two.

16 Musical Environments is the title of Vella’s educational text subtitled as a ‘manual for listening, improvising and composing’
Other factors operative in the score of this song advance dramatic intent, including an ascending graduation of chromatic modulations implemented to intensify the fervour of Morrie’s seduction. Here, a conventional music composition technique is implemented to assert the dramatic, by way of increased harmonic tension. Additionally, a motivic reference is made from another part of the score. Commencing in B minor, the introduction quotes the opening ‘hook’ of ‘You Stalker’, originally in Bb minor (Score 16, ‘Learning the Trade’ bb5-16). Slowed down and inverted, the violin this time leads an introductory duet motif, accompanied by trumpet in parallel fourths in low register. As a downward transposition and at a slower pace the quality of the ‘hook’ from ‘You Stalker’ changes from its original driving quality and establishes sleaze. While this was an intuitive decision, the transformative composition techniques upon the original motif asserted new meanings that aided the tone of this song/scene, and as a thematic variant that also contributed to the narrative of the music score, itself.

To expand the male role in this song and bring about vocal contrast, I wrote further lyrics with Abe Pogos for the male back-up vocalists as a countermelody to this song. In dramatic context, the rhyming chant-like chorus became a plural, male and coercive voice, encouraging Jean to ‘join in’:
In the vocal assignation, the metaphor of Jean’s ‘joining in chorus’ became a metaphor for her ‘joining in’ a glamorous sex industry. With the chorus she
triumphantly sings: 'It’s all up to your girl, to do the next bit … Harbour bridge hips, torpedo tits!' (Score 16, 'Learning the Trade' bb55-59).

As another composition strategy, I wanted to create intense songs that would unleash the raw emotion of the personal poems, and these would be traced back to certain popular and non-mainstream music styles. As mentioned, I had in mind the neo-gospel style songs of Nick Cave as well as the post-punk feminism of PJ Harvey. Because of its striking rage, the poem ‘Dear Diary 1934’ was the first song I composed (CD #1 tracks 7,8). Albiston, following Don Treble’s theory posited that Jean Lee’s sudden removal from Willoughby Domestic Science School to accompany her mother Florence interstate, was most likely due to a confinement owing to teenage pregnancy. Directed at a wrathful Old Testament ‘god’ following her teenage pregnancy, Jean’s opening line ‘When I meet God I will kill Him’ suggested to me a wild blues/torch song, driven by a melodic line that would allow the unleashing of vitriol, that a singer such as Janis Joplin might display, microphone in hand, using a dynamic range of soft tones to full-throated wail. I had hoped that the singer would burst into the song without a pitch referent but this proved difficult, so a simple introduction to establish the key in the 2004 workshop remained in the score. The middle section of the poem suggested to me an ironic take on early gospel hymns:

but first I will force
Him to crawl through
the valleys and shadows

scrawled over my soul
I will teach Him the
scriptures from inside

of me I will preach till
He prays for verses of

*Mercy*

‘Dear Diary 1934’ (Albiston 1998)

While there were minor editorial changes to the words from the original poem, the end of the song ‘and as you forsook me so I forsake you’ fell on the dominant chord and required resolution. I added a coda to resolve the harmonic design by lengthening the dramatic climax ‘and as you forsook me, now I forsake you …. I will kill him ! I will kill him ! I will …’. (Score 7, bb57-65). This segued into a mini-chant where Jean leads a complicit gospel-style chorus: ‘La la la la la la la la la …’, reminiscent of Leonard Cohen’s ‘La la’ chorus from his song *Dance Me to the End of Love*. In contrast to Cohen’s melancholic whimsy, this coda is perverse and of vengeful intent (Score 7, bb67-83).

5.4 A dramaturgy of score: ‘tracking’ vocal casting and instrumentation

As part of the dramaturgy for the vocal and instrumental composition respectively, I ‘tracked’ the contributions of each singer and instrumentalist. This was through colour coded track lists that traced the dynamic of the vocal and ensemble instrumentations as well as music style. Here, I also ‘tracked’ the dynamic of keys, textures and song styles and I checked comparable contributions by each male performer while ensuring appropriate breaks for Jean Lee. While these ‘tracking’ sheets were a tool for the performers in rehearsal and performance, they furnished me with shorthand templates to follow the contributions of every performing artist – as having separate narratives that contributed toward the overall dynamic arc of the score.
Chapter Six

*The Hanging of Jean Lee – The Visual Projection*

Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the body of work in this folio and its precursor, *Dreaming Transportation*, is informed by the 1980's New York 'Downtown' music scene, which nurtured hybrid artistic works that included the combining of diverse artistic practices as much as the combining of traditional music instruments with new technologies. This included a cross fertilisation of various video and film art practices into works led by artists who are principally composers. I am thinking here of the early works of Laurie Anderson including the *Mister Heartbreak* tour to Australia in 1986 for which the singer, writer and composer created the visual animations; the television operas of Robert Ashley, which he composed and directed, including *Improvement: Don leaves Linda* and *Private Lives*; the film opera *Insatiable* (1986) directed and composed by David Chesworth; and also the films *Medusahead* (1997) and *Laquiem* (2000) that I directed and composed, that position score as a crucial element.

I wish to mention *Failing Kansas* (1995a) by Mikel Rouse, a music theatre work developed from Truman Capote’s controversial telling of the Clutter murders from the point of view of the murderer in his novel *In Cold Blood* (1966). This work occupies similar territory to *The Hanging of Jean Lee* in terms of its subject matter and incorporation of archival documents in the visual projection. Rouse sings and speaks at four standing microphones, to a pre-recorded and multi-tracked minimalist accompaniment featuring acoustic guitar, while black and white images
are projected behind him throughout the performance. In contrast to *The Hanging of Jean Lee*, the narrative connections between score and projected image are abstract and the artistic experience is more of a layered textural and meditative experience. As a sequence of episodes of similar quality, the work is propelled by Rouse’s wish to ‘move beyond a narrative approach and toward the effect of pure sound; the sound of many conflicting voices assembling the story’ (Rouse 1995b). In comparison, and in keeping with my approach to score, the design and use of projected visual content within *The Hanging of Jean Lee* is more strategic and dynamic in terms of its general and specific contributions to the work’s narrative and conceptual themes, while the score seeks to expose an extreme range of vocal expression through the narrative of its central character.

### 6.0 The function of the screen projection component in *The Hanging of Jean Lee*

Continuing on from the experience of *Dreaming Transportation*, it was clear that the use of digital projections in *The Hanging of Jean Lee* offered both artistic and narrative possibilities: projections could be used to suggest time and location changes, present information and visual textures in layered ways to enhance mood, or to provide and even compact additional biographic information that complemented the score.

The visual projection element was researched and conceived over a considerable period of time, assisted by various stages of creative development, and then post-produced\(^\text{17}\) prior to production rehearsals, leaving some latitude for minor changes.

\(^\text{17}\) The terms ‘post-produced’ and ‘post-production’ are used here in the meaning of film post-production, in that the images were filmed/collated, edited, layered, graded and virtually ‘locked off’
While it is not possible to speak fully to the complexities of this component here, this chapter seeks to discuss the conceptualisation and post-production choices for this third key element of the transcreation to a music theatre work.

6.1 Expanding the biographic within this visual element

Albiston specifically described her verse novel as a ‘verse biography’ articulating the collision of the poetic with the biographic. An avid reader of biographies herself, Albiston approached this biography as a history that was part imaginary and part factual. This is similar to her approach in *Six Villain-Elles* (2003) and *Botany Bay Document: a Poetic History of the Women of Botany Bay* (1996).

The use and type of documents as text in Albiston’s verse biography led me to envisage a digital projection component that drew from archival documents in more developed and layered ways. Thus, the investigation of the biographic would draw from documentary film conventions rather than the literary biography. Albiston’s use of the biographic in poetry was readily transferrable to pictorial narrative conventions of documentary filmmaking, including for example, a chronology that included significant events in Jean’s life alongside momentous social and historic events such as the outbreak of World War II, or the building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, as well as poem titles and dates, personal and public documents, newspaper articles, and photographic portraits that were private, journalistic and criminal.

for use in rehearsals for the production. Thus the image production was almost completed prior to the music theatre production rehearsals.
As part of the expansion of the archival within this transcreative process, which also translated to the sourcing of still images and documents, I wanted to use other documentary filmmaking techniques, such us dramatisation and pictorial reconstruction. For instance, there was biographic material beyond Albiston’s book that was ideal for screen projection, which would also provide relief from the overriding dark tenor of the work. Given Jean’s love of dancing with her first husband Ray Brees, I planned to include a performed choreographic element but this became unrealistic within our budget. Instead, to evoke the popularised screen dances of Hollywood idols Ginger Rodgers and Fred Astaire that Albiston had cited in ‘Saturday Arvo’ we made use of filmic dramatisation and filmed professional ballroom dancers in period costume. Cinematographically this was in an impressionistic style, captured by cinematographer Steve Macdonald using faster than usual film speeds to achieve a variety of slow motion rates. The dancers were featured as a continuous layer throughout the song, superimposed with many archival photographs and image paraphernalia from Sydney’s dance era of the 1930’s. Additionally, digital artist Katerina Stratos created an animated layer of calendar years passing – an old technique of dramatic filmmaking – that was superimposed over the photographic montage. In front of this backdrop, the cast performed simple stylised dance moves. Combined with score and performance, the layered projected images communicated Jean and Ray’s dancing the nights away over several years towards marriage (DVD chapter 5, 13:20).

Given the importance of a popular music vernacular to the production rationale, it made sense to extend the vocabulary of the digital images beyond documentary film, and to also draw upon conventions of the rock-video clip. Using a variety of techniques the projected images contributed visual textures, and like ‘Saturday Arvo’, worked in both impressionistic and contextual ways. The form of the presentation was summarised in an application to the Myer Foundation in November 2005, as a number of conventions rarely seen together in performance as, ‘The rock concert meets rock video meets documentary film-making with
stylised dramatic staging’. However, whether providing information, mood or commentary, the image type and style was always purposeful, that is to be ‘read’ in conjunction with the score. This purposeful use of images with or against score continued my methodology of a ‘theatre of music’, so that the featured elements of music, text and image presented active, autonomous and combined meanings within the performance space.

6.2 Improving upon past work: research and image production planning and aesthetic

Given their dual roles as an integral narrative and design element, I anticipated that images would be projected for approximately three quarters of the duration of the performances. Here, technical considerations were informed by previous experience as well as the specifics of this particular project.

Due to its late inclusion in the Sydney Festival program, the production lead up to Dreaming Transportation was short. This impacted negatively upon the archival research, and to a small degree weakened the coherence of content used in the triple screen image projections. To avoid this happening a second time, I undertook a thorough research phase to develop and unify the content, which was followed by the integration of the projections within the overall production design. Furthermore, I desired the images to have a ‘cinematic’ impact, meaning that the scale of the projection in the performance space should be arresting, ‘larger than life’ in terms of scale, and ‘sharp’ in quality. Although we were using many ‘do it yourself’ and low budget processes to create the images, we aimed for a consistent and high-quality image aesthetic that would read smoothly.
Dan Potra achieved a production design that fulfilled the dual functions of projection screen and set surface, in the form of an immense cloth that covered the performance space and rostra, and which then extended upward and behind the performers. My wish for unified content concerned the narrative contribution of the images as much as the style of image production. This is a challenge when working with images in many formats from different periods of the twentieth century. Furthermore, I have seen many performance works in which projected digital images upstage performing bodies in dance, hybrid performance works and plays. This is often due to the nature of projected light onto wall or screen surfaces, which is more intense than theatre lighting. Shorter durations of visual projections may interrupt flow and the overall performance environment, so I wanted the visuals to be projected for a substantial amount of the performance duration. As well as accommodating the cinematic within the set design, when thinking about the staging of foreground performing bodies, other technical considerations during the image production phase included: the rate of edits, the speed of image motion, the visual style and content of each episode, the continuum of projection, and the ratio of image to screen surface.

The use of the visual projection element in a theatrical context required consideration of the eye’s ability to consume images at a much faster rate than Albiston’s poetic reflection upon discreet images, and here the screen projections afforded a greater amount of visual content. Saying that, the libretto and score already presented fairly complex layers of information. Thus, the projection content required expansion but the use of filmmaking conventions needed to be ‘stripped out’ in a more simplified way than in the parent forms, because the central focus needed to be upon the performers in front and outside of the image projections, on stage.
With these technical considerations in mind, ordinary biographic and historic research was required to expand the image content. The project was awarded funding for a specific image research and development phase by the Theatre Board, Australia Council for the Arts. I undertook the archival research role myself and, to save production costs, negotiated all image licensing. I wish to mention here the subject of this work involved required a considerable amount of research into criminal, social and archival history beyond the artistic inquiry that is the focus of this exegesis. Also critical to the creative development stage of the visual projections was the work of filmmaker and designer Janet Merewether who advanced the aesthetic of the image projection concept and effectively contributed a dramaturgy of the images.

6.3 The development and dramaturgy of the image content

As part of the early development phase, I made notes of image ideas to suit, enhance, support or comment upon songs and scenes as I composed. At first these ideas were skeletal, but once the score was completed I undertook vigorous research, collecting a library of hundreds of images to develop those ideas. To conceptualise and plan the visual content I designed an ‘image template’ that contained title, characters, dramatic intent, song style with image type and format.

Then, through a shared creative and editorial process, Merewether and I interrogated the image content, style and format, in consideration of dynamic operations with or against the score, referencing the CD ‘demo’ recordings and the libretto. We discussed probing the ‘documentary’ by using images such as: archival stills from state and national libraries, private collections, family photographs, newspaper and magazine stills; archival moving footage from pre-existing documentaries; archival animation; dramatic reconstruction; and graphic indicators.
which included still and animated titles, dates, maps, drawings, tables, and locations; and then colour palette. The use of rock-video conventions needed to be rethought given considerations of performer focus as well as budget constraints. Consequently we planned to use a mix of archival and newly shot footage, as well as faster cut images from a variety of still and moving footage sources in ways that evoked mood and tone, and the poetic layering of text, historic images, and moving footage to establish complex evocative environments. We also identified what images could be sourced, and discussed economical ways of creating images that we needed to generate ourselves.

Generally, a singular image projection aesthetic was identified to work with or against the score in each episode. Here, the template I developed was useful in that it tracked the relationships between score and projected image throughout the work and this assisted the dramaturgy of the visual projection. I had envisaged some animation because this was Merewether’s strength, but she had to leave the production for family reasons, so her input was largely confined within the pre-production conceptualisation, and therefore the animation used in the production was minimal\(^\text{18}\). Merewether’s contribution was significant nonetheless, as she also filmed sequences on Super-8 camera and photographed colour and black and white stills in various Victorian and New South Wales locations\(^\text{19}\).

The image research template was constantly updated and became the working document for the image post-production phase, undertaken by editor and digital artist, Shawn Seet. See Appendix 1\(^\text{20}\). Whilst many ideas changed during the course of my research and then in the later image production process, nonetheless

\(^{18}\) Katerina Stratos and Shawn Seet created a limited number of animations during the image post-production phase.

\(^{19}\) The images captured by Merewether are identified in the Appendix 1, image research template.

\(^{20}\) The template example provided is edited to omit the contact details of private copyright owners.
this template summarises the conceptualisation of possible images that enhanced the biographic, the drama and mood of the narrative, in co-operation with score.

6.3.1 Archival research – unexpected findings

Following the initial image conceptualisation, a more complex phase of archival research proceeded including the location and sourcing of specific types of images. Because Jean’s life spanned the first half of the twentieth century, I assumed a wealth of relevant archival images would be relatively easy to find. However, it turned out that visual material associated with the case was limited. Locating specific images published in Treble’s book Jean Lee: The Last Woman Hanged (Treble, Wilson & Lincoln 1997) that had inspired Albiston’s verse biography, was a lengthy process. The passing of time had seen the copyright of newspaper images transferred to commercial agencies, and several documents needed special release through Freedom of Information. Despite my application many months prior to the production, release approval for some of these items was not granted until the night before the first public preview.

The final page of Robert David Clayton’s statement to police appeared with permission in Treble’s book and was referenced in Albiston’s poem ‘Interrogation Song’. Our image conceptualisation for this episode included the ‘tracking’ across a copy of the three-page letter, written in a policeman’s accomplished calligraphy, and signed in Clayton’s scrawl. Eventually, I located the letter with the enthusiastic assistance of the Victoria Police History Museum staff, who also located other pertinent items in the ‘dockets’ of Clayton, Andrews and Jean Lee, the latter containing typed records of her arrests for petty crimes and soliciting, the last of which was for murder. At the same time several fingerprint records were also discovered within the docket of Jean Lee that I found quite moving upon sighting
because of the dichotomy they presented. They were at once a perfunctory method of documenting the real person, yet with so few extant photographs they remained as meagre, even pathetic evidence of a criminal end to a life.

Together with Clayton’s statement these newfound archival materials were featured in the ‘Interrogation Song’ (DVD chapter 22, 50:46) and here, the positioning of the documentary in performance with score was to dramatic effect. The digital artist and image editor Shawn Seet used an animation effect to simulate the motion of a camera slowly tracking downwards through the statement. Slow dissolves between the pages effectively create layers of images that juxtapose Lee’s raw ‘bluesy’ wail against her lover-pimp's betrayal, shown to her by Senior Detective Henry McKnight. Clayton’s betrayal of Jean is made visible as Jean sings:

I squeeze out a tear so the mongrels will know what betrayal and fear can do to a girl who never gives up on her love or on her man, love or on her man, even after losing her soul (DVD chapter 22; Score No. 25, bb59-81).

Seet cropped the document scans to feature a horizontal tracking of Jean’s fingerprints. This cross-faded from positive to digitally simulated photographic ‘negatives’ that were placed near the end of the song to poignant effect. The juxtaposition of documentary evidence - police documentation of Jean’s digits - alongside the private release of her inner rage is at once tragic and ironic.

I found other valuable images through private collections, including two photographs of Jean, through Nola Dam, a relative of Jean’s first husband, Ray
Brees. The first photo shows a happy and smiling Jean with Ray, as a young couple in love. The second photo is of Jean as a smiling contented mother, proudly holding her daughter. While a modest finding these two photographs furthered the depictions in Treble’s book of a woman whose visage changed markedly throughout her relatively short life. These original artefacts further brought to life our characterisation of Jean despite their fragmented narrative: as shy girlfriend in ‘Girl Meets Boy’; proud young mother in ‘I Have a Baby’ reprised in ‘Jilly’s Song’; hardened criminal in ‘Mug Shot #1’ and much later, resigned prisoner in ‘Mug Shot #2’; concluding with a smiling studio portrait of Jean as a young woman that was presented to tragic effect during the closing song ‘Fly Away Jean’. Here the juxtaposition of human artefact (photograph) with personal expression (score) catalysed unique tensions between personal and documented histories, and also between the private individual and public knowledge.

To further emphasise Treble’s and others’ theory that Jean’s punishment was somehow influenced by her transgression of the ideal Australian post-war housewife, I researched images of women in fashion magazines and newspapers. In particular, I sourced Women’s Weekly hand painted covers as a visual theme to track the increasing gap between the idealised images of femininity of the time and Jean’s increasingly rebellious lifestyle. For the scene ‘Living it Up’ I found photographs and drawings of the Brisbane establishment, ‘Lennon’s Hotel on George’ where Jean had travelled to escape Ray Brees (DVD chapter 9; CD #1 track 14). Jean certainly cavorted with the ‘Yanks’, including a legless American soldier whom she befriended and who was one of few who wrote to her while she was in gaol. I found period images of American soldiers in Brisbane to accord with Jean’s optimism expressed in the ‘beat-poetry’ style of ‘Living It Up’ (DVD chapter 9, 24:25). The photographic montage in this episode concludes with the

21 During the writing of the libretto I wanted to include this positive anecdote about Jean by this G.I. but Pogos’ dramaturgy proved it extraneous.
famous ‘V for Victory’ Women’s Weekly cover of September 13, 1941, in near cruel ironic juxtaposition of barmaid and goodtime girl Jean against the ecstatic wartime image of male and female sacrifice in Figure 3:

Figure 3 – ‘Living It Up’ from The Hanging of Jean Lee, The Studio, Sydney Opera House, 2006. Michael Sheridan on electric guitar and Max Sharam as Jean Lee.

6.3.2 Archival research – other problems encountered

Albiston’s poem, ‘Coroner’s Report’, listed the damage perpetrated upon the body of William Kent. In the writing of the libretto, Abe Pogos believed it was important that we show this photo to convey the horror the trio enacted upon Kent, to avoid a
simplistic portrayal of Jean as victim and to convey the tragic outcome of their shared toxic culpability. In the music theatre production, the Coroner demonstrates his findings, pointing to the shocking post-mortem headshot of Kent as an ‘exhibit’, where the damage could be viewed, in close-up.

Despite the photograph being in the public domain, the family of William Kent objected to our application to the Public Records of Victoria to use the image, together with the published police photograph of Kent’s trashed room, where his body was discernible beneath the rubble (Treble et al 1997). At the point of mid-production rehearsal we opted to ‘reconstruct’ the post-mortem photograph of Kent using an actor and a prosthetic make-up artist; that is we made use of the film documentary technique of photographic still reconstruction for this representation.

Here, and on other occasions, the ‘documentary’ was extrapolated and repositioned to suggest further layers of meaning in the music theatre context. Initially evidenced in print, the Coroner’s demonstration is loosely timed to a grave chamber music accompaniment, stylistically reminiscent of the minimalist composers Phillip Glass and Michael Nyman. At the same time, the photograph of Kent’s face slowly turns from black and white to an intense blood red by the close of the episode. With the expression mark ‘solemn’, the music is sombre in tone and proceeds at a slow tempo of sixty beats per minute (Score 26). This establishes a sobering and tragic effect that directly follows the trio’s riotous carnage. Despite the emotive colour gradation of the photograph, the sudden and combined change of dynamics in score and imagery allows the audience to reflect upon the murder from a distanced, clinical perspective.

Although the digital effects of aging were well executed by Seet, on seeing our reconstructed and simulated photographic ‘still’ image, I was initially disappointed
that we were not able to utilise the actual photograph to affect the dramatic. As it turned out, some family members who objected to our use of the original photograph believed our reconstruction to be the original when they viewed the performance. Thus the ironic juxtapositions of the material remained affective, as intended.

6.3.3 Broader image research

Rock-video conventions were most useful in the glamour and fantasy sequences and provided relief from the majority of images based in documentary filmmaking. Here images operated in both kinetic and atmospheric ways. For example in the song, ‘Go West Young Woman’ (DVD chapter 11, 28:32), Morrie Dias persuades Jean to travel with him across Australia to a more fortunate way of life, funded by prostitution. The duet is performed in front of Super-8 footage of wide Australian bush roads, indicating the passing of day and night, in ‘road-movie’ style. These images come from two distinct projects including footage shot by James Manché and myself in central Australia for a friend’s documentary Up In the Sky (Cole 1999) and from Megan Simpson’s short film drama An Australian Summer (1986). Superimposed over these Super-8 landscapes are animations created by Katerina Stratos that ‘track’ arrows across period maps of the states of Australia that I sourced from the National Library of Australia, showing Jean’s extensive travels with Dias. The speed of the road movie footage, superimposed by the animated journey, enhances the sense of excitement experienced by the duo. Stylistically the images carry overtones of mid-twentieth century ‘adventure’ and ‘western’ television series themes, such as the American series Bonanza and also the feature film Bonnie and Clyde, the allusion of which returns when Jean sings of her attraction to a criminal and alcohol fuelled life with Robert Clayton in the song ‘Bobbie and Jean’.
Within ‘The Hangman’s Handbook’ the Hangman appears to Jean in a nightmare before her execution (DVD chapter 30, 1:07:23). The feel of the music is in the style of late twentieth century gospel reinvention as previously discussed in the previous chapter, with the Hangman performing a perverse preacher-like role. The fantasy of this song, located within Jean’s mind, allows more poetic, layered and associative use of images in a quasi rock-video style. Here, I thought it would be interesting to contrast a more extensive use of historic imagery predating the twentieth century. In this fantasy, the act of ‘hanging’ is considered historically, yet within the work, it provides a function similar to the metaphoric divertissement of the play within a play. A diversity of image styles associated with hanging were sourced including: medical drawings of a garrotted skeleton, a weight calculus for hanging sourced from Charles Duff’s book *A Handbook of Hanging* (2001), woodcut and oil paintings of hanged women and hunted witches dating back to medieval times and hanging ‘death’ masks exhibited in Old Pentridge Gaol, Melbourne, photographed by Janet Merewether. These images were animated, moving slowly across the screen in layered and various directions. Superimposed onto these slow moving images is an animated ‘Hangman’ game in large chalk handwriting, coloured blood red. The game provides sinister puns as much as a ‘framing’ context for the varied image sources to move beneath and across. The gradual revelation of Jean Lee’s name builds to coincide with a climactic imaginary rope descent. Here the image content introduces further layers of meanings that complement the perversity of the Hangman’s duet with Jean: a wordplay game spelling out Lee’s name; images of women hanged throughout Western history; sinister fascination with hanging that has developed over centuries in Western culture; and popular and judicial suspicion of those women who defy normal codes of living to reflect more broadly than or upon the hanging of this woman.

While there is clear allusion to the rock video clip, the number of images, the frequency of edits and the rate of image motion are modest compared to the self-contained rock video clip, so as not to detract from the live performers. However, in
contrast to rock-video practice where the impressionistic use of images can bear
loose, arbitrary or even no relationship to a song’s narrative, the content in this
scene is deliberately chosen.

6.4 Some stylistic considerations

In terms of the images we created, with the exception of the post-mortem
photograph of William Kent, we sought to avoid ‘authentic’ historic recreations,
preferring to distinguish between distant past and recent past dramatic
reconstructions through our choice of media formats. For example, footage relating
to Jean’s early-twentieth century childhood is shot on Super-8 film in a ‘home
movie’ style for the episode ‘Skipping Rhyme’, that is later recalled in text,
accompanied by a different edit of the same footage as Jean is carried to the
gallows. For the mid-twentieth century archival and dramatic reconstructions we
maintained a clinical photographic style, preferring either black and white
photography or light colour tints suggestive of 1950’s chemical film print.

For dramatic reconstructions pertaining to Jean’s adulthood such as the seduction
and murder scenes, a clean look was preferred and achieved through use of mini
digital-video, to suggest a recent past. Here, actors were filmed who were not in
the production cast, but were chosen for visual resemblance to the trio and Kent.
This approach - typical of documentary filmmaking – is described as ‘flashback’
dramatisation, as for example, when an elderly subject describes a dramatic life
event that occurred a long time ago. In cutaway, the described event is
reconstructed using an actor to credibly represent the subject in situ. The decision
to film actors rather than the music theatre cast in dramatic reconstruction was
twofold: firstly there were availability problems, but more importantly for the context
of this particular film sequence within the music theatre work, the casting of actors
better served a filmed performance of drama according to the convention of ‘flashback’ documentary as previously described. This principle is maintained in all documentary-style dramatic reconstructions within the projected image component.

**6.5 Titles and links**

As identified in the libretto, the combination of live narrations performed in film voice-over style, with projected titles, dates and locations provide an efficient way of filling in and progressing the narrative. The titles are designed as white on black (sometimes layered over an image) in a slightly embossed ‘Courier’ font suggestive of a mid twentieth century typewriter - a utilitarian style associated with the male dominated professions of the time including the police, the judicial system and journalists, all characterised in the work. This further delineates the more distanced ‘official’ and public points of view within the image content.

**6.6 Images in context**

The scene ‘Divorce File’ will be examined as case study in this section to reflect upon operations of and between images and the score, within a single scene. While the relationships between the critical elements of libretto, music score and image projection varied from scene to scene, I am providing one example to demonstrate the types of interactive and interdependent relationships that combine as complex layers of meaning, towards the achievement of Vella’s notion of a ‘theatre of music’ or a ‘theatre of ideas’ (Vella 1990).
Albiston’s poem title, ‘Divorce File’, serves as a clinical reference to an artefact as the context for Jean’s turbulent reflection upon her failed marriage with Ray Brees. To expand Albiston’s reference to public records within the image component, we sourced a copy of the marriage certificate and then filmed it as moving footage that played out in the scene as follows: In the opening line of the song, the certificate of marriage appears static. The marriage title is cropped to fill the screen, revealing the names and occupations of Ray Thomas Brees, painter and Marjorie Jean Maude Wright, of ‘domestic duties’. The careful ink pen calligraphy and graphic typeface co-exist as ‘of-the-day’ signifiers of the human (personal) and the official (public).

Musically, the song ‘Divorce File’ reprises the chorus of ‘Girl Meets Boy’. In terms of the narrative, the return of this music theme associates Jean and Ray’s better times. As another standard and mimetic music-drama convention, the slower tempo and downward transposition in the theme’s return furthers the expression of their relationship’s demise and this enhances the emotional impact of the song within the overall dramatic structure. For Jean and for the audience, this recollection of past events through the score’s narrative is also reprised through the visuals. As ‘Divorce File’ progresses, the portrait of Ray Brees used earlier in ‘Girl Meets Boy’ fades up as an underlying layer, cropped to a headshot, only this time without Jean. Over Ray’s portrait, the marriage certificate begins to slowly burn. Juxtaposed against a painful emotional release, the burning of the document is metaphor-in-action. Jean recalls Ray’s physical abuse and philandering, and in a damning conclusion of their time together, declares a preference for prostituting herself for Bobby:

```
and I think I must say that I tried to survive those final difficult days
and I tried to put up with his meandering ways
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but I would rather be working flat on my back for Bobby, than look once more at Ray Brees, forget me please
(The Hanging of Jean Lee, Score 19, bb37-44).

The concluding song lyrics, ‘Goodbye Ray Brees, forget me please’ are followed by a brief instrumental coda that suspends the melancholy tone. The timing of the picture edit is estimated so that the blackened paper remnants in the projection fall away to synchronise just after, or close to, the song’s final chord, so that nothing remains of the document by the end of the scene. Here we were making poetic use of a documentary artefact to emphasise the dramatic realisation of Jean and Ray’s break-up, to underpin the tone of the score in official communication, and to provide a visual caesura to the episode, in a small metaphorically laden moment (DVD chapter 15, 39:46). This approach, somewhat reminiscent of the symbolic imagery fashionable in 1980’s ‘new romantic’ video-clips, suggested poetic interpretations for the audience to ‘read’ from the image content, such as the end of a relationship, life chapter, self-destructive behaviour, finality, even mortality. Without Jean’s reflection and anger expressed in song, the moving images have little meaning, logic or weight on their own terms. It is the juxtaposition of the specific visual content against the performance of the song that brings a layered commentary to the scene.

As part of a greater movement of interdisciplinary work that is composition-led, and recalling comments by John Baylis regarding The Sydney Front’s extreme approach to appropriation in Chapter Two, it is arguable that the forms of The Hanging of Jean Lee and Dreaming Transportation ‘rip out’ the film or theatre score from its traditionally supportive function, in order to firmly plant the score as the central performance element, while documentary and other film techniques, as well as other elements, work in performance to complement it. It could be said that this is a development of my early attempts to subvert or alter the traditional functions of
musical parameters or performance elements, that I commenced in *The Backdoor Songs*, as discussed in Chapter Two.

In summary, the digital projections perform several functions within the production beyond this single example. They enrich the reading of the score, provide a changing and dynamic design landscape, open upon the possible reading of metaphors of a visual-poetic nature and provide additional historic and biographic information. The original ideas of Albiston’s poems are extended so that commentaries *between* the critical elements of text, score and image are more complex in operation than the referencing of documentary artefacts in print alone. Arguably, the image projections are active in a performance space where relationships between different types of artistic practice co-exist and it is the co-operation between those artistic practices that brings about a particular kind of theatre – a theatre of music. So with these conventions and techniques, drawn out from Albiston’s original text, the image projection component introduces further rhythms and dynamics into the performance space to enrich this transcreation to music theatre.
Chapter Seven

The Villainelles: A voice and composition-led transcreation

Introduction

This chapter examines the rationales of voice and of music composition in leading a transcreation of poetry to music theatre within the second body of work in this DCA folio, The Villainelles.

7.0 The ‘undetachable seal of melody’

My ambition - even more than that, a profound urge within me - has always been to unite my music to poetic texts that arouse my interest and emotion, to interpret them and at the same time to set them forth in lyric expression, to stamp them with the authentic and therefore undetachable seal of melody, to give utterance to the music that is latent within them, and, in doing so, to discover their real source in the emotions that brought them into being. In short, it is the “need for song” that has spurred me on, a need quite natural and altogether familiar to Italians. (Castelnuovo-Tedesco 1944).

Like Castelnuovo-Tedesco, I am interested in the arousal of emotion made manifest in the musical setting of poetry. In fact, alongside the achievement of overarching artistic principles, such as creating a ‘theatre of music’, it is fair to say that when I am using text as the basis for a work my music composition is mostly
driven by vocal line, including sung, spoken or mediated voice. Here, the enactment of change from poetic phrase to melody, or what I prefer to define more broadly as ‘vocal line’, leads my transcreative purpose of composition. Even at its most difficult, I design the melodic arc to be either memorable or to maintain a logic between word and music, and thus I test all vocal lines by singing them myself as I compose, even if the lines call for considerably greater vocal skill than my own. Subsequently, singers frequently comment upon the ‘memorability’ and ‘singability’ of my vocal lines.

This exegesis seeks to further Tedesco’s idea of the ‘undetachable seal of melody’ as a leading feature of this composer’s transcreation of poetry (or a linguistic text) to song. Via a memorable or learned contour, that is a sequence of pitch lengths, the melody (or vocal line) takes on an impulse of its own, which the performer relives through voice: that is an embodiment of the original text. As I reflect upon the songs I composed that are The Villainelles, I recall the vocal lines as part of song architectures in a three-dimensional way, as varied ‘arousals of emotion’, and these are now stronger than my memory of Albiston’s poems. Like Castelnuovo-Tedesco’s description, this recollection evidences a certain sensory pleasure activated by a voice-led transcreation of poetry to score and then song.

7.1 A simpler production methodology toward a theatre of music

The Villainelles is the third major performance work I have composed and produced that has been inspired by a poetic collection by Dr Jordie Albiston. There are specific formal and stylistic differences that set it apart from The Hanging of Jean Lee and from Dreaming Transportation. These differences arise firstly from my desire for formal and procedural change as well as relief from the dark subject matter of the two previous music theatre works, particularly The Hanging of Jean
Lee. Practically speaking, I wanted to make a piece that did not involve the production expense and complexity of the two previous music theatre works, and that was comparatively easy to remount, but which still exercised a theatrical code. Significantly, this project marked my return after a decade to the role of composer/performer, and the central placement of my own untrained voice within the composition. Taken together these considerations and impulses led me to develop the particular concert presentation format that became *The Villainelles*. While a considerable downsizing occurred between these productions, *The Villainelles* communicated a scale and substance that belied its resources. As it turned out, the subject matter of *The Villainelles* was not as ‘light’ as I intended, but the project’s execution maintained an ease that contrasts with the production complexity and lengthy gestation of *The Hanging of Jean Lee*.

### 7.1.1 A return to my own voice

During the 1980’s and into the mid 1990’s in Melbourne, I was active as a composer/performer. While I have continued to sing in many recordings of my compositions, following *The Hanging of Jean Lee* I wanted to return to a composer/performer mode. In practical terms, my own performance would assist my wish for an economy of production but more significantly, I sought a closer connection with audiences by my singing in my own compositions. This wish grew in tandem with my extensive practice of composing for, and music directing other trained and untrained vocalists, especially as on many occasions I would find myself asking performers to sing the music as I would myself.
7.1.2 The incorporation of vocal ‘otherness’

My recent music theatre works demonstrate that I am less interested in composing for voices that are trained toward an idealised and homogenized sound and as discussed earlier in Chapter Six, this is particularly evident in the vocal casting for The Hanging of Jean Lee. Generally, singers of opera, classical concert music and musical theatre work toward a vocal expression that is idealised, and this is most often through the achievement of an evenness of ‘tone’ across individual range. Together, this inevitably brings about an editing out, or a censorship, of a wide range of vocal sounds. While I am not averse to working with classically-trained singers, I am most interested in the singer who emits an individual vocal lexicon, who can express a range of emotions through voice, who is sensitive to lyric meanings through choice of timbre, articulation and inflection, and who can effectively establish a rapport with the audience through voice. It follows that beyond the desired unified tone of ‘classical’ singing, I am interested in a vocal practice that is often relegated to ‘other’ and this involves vocal technique as much as expression.

Vocal ‘otherness’ has been much interrogated over the past three decades within Western art and popular music. This interrogation has involved the expansion of acoustic vocal techniques, the study and incorporation of non-Western vocal techniques, and vocal techniques that have evolved through the design and implementation of new technologies. This has been undertaken more so by vocalists who are not conventionally trained and some who continue classical traditions. Many are women composers such as: Cathy Berberian, Laurie

22Today, the term ‘classical’ is sometimes used as a nomenclature for contemporary Western art music practice. I use the term ‘classical’ here according to its generic meaning beyond the few decades of the classical period to include early and later Western art music practices up until today.
Anderson, Diamanda Galas, Bjørk, Giovanna Marini, Joan La Barbara, Kate Bush, Meredith Monk and more recently in Australia, Caroline Connors, Jo Truman, Jacqui Rutten, Donna Hewitt, Amanda Stewart and Melissa Madden-Gray.

With an awareness of these vocal explorations in recent music and sound art practices, I currently favour the individual expression of the sung voice, that is to say I am more interested in achieving a connection with the audience by working with singers who achieve individuality through the expression of their own sonic palette, whatever their music specialisation might be. Individual vocal expression has been celebrated particularly in the performance practice of popular song since the early twentieth century, and this applies to individual vocal expression as much as an expression of the individual, through voice. The popular singer-songwriter model embraces microphone-captured voice, that classical Western art music training works to excise: roughness of tone, snarls, breath, wheeze, approximate pitch, the stretching of rhythmic stress and beat placement, accent, broken diphthongs, idiosyncratic embellishment, emphasised glottals etc., all of which are considered as ‘bad singing’ within the classical music tradition, signifying ‘otherness’. However, in the context of popular music these vocal aberrations have currency and signify individuality, and their amplification changes the audience’s perception of physical closeness; that is through amplification, an artificial proximity is achieved. Here, the signals of the voice are captured and increased, literally carrying the source, and its sign – the singer - closer to your ears, to you, the audience.

Further to my thinking about vocal expression and technique is the communicative ‘connection’ between performer and audience that can be achieved, even if the artist has limited vocal skills in the traditional sense. I am thinking here of popular and folk music singer-songwriters such as Lou Reed, Nick Cave, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Laurie Anderson, Johnny Cash, Lee Hazelwood and Tom Waits,
as well as younger Sydney artist Inga Liljestrøm, who are all singers of limited vocal technique and range. They all use the microphone to expand their sonic palette, and performances of their own music are driven by an intense commitment to a lyric expression that sets them apart as distinctive performers. All engage with their audiences through a display of an individual vocal palette that is ‘other’, that sits outside of the skill base and ethos of ‘classical’ music. While they also may not be considered as ‘good’ singers within the domain of popular music culture, they are all arguably intensely attractive performers in the individual ways that they employ their voices. Through individual vocal expression, they all inhabit an enhanced performance persona, in Jane Goodall’s sense (2008, pp1-3), and through this they have ‘stage presence’.23

In the vocal performances by the aforementioned artists I have found the connection between the singer-songwriter and audience to be intense and this is something I wanted to instigate myself, through The Villainelles. Furthermore, the experience of the composer’s delivery of her/his own music is inevitably more immediate than an interpretive musical act, which is always mediated one step away from creative inception, and despite the best intentions toward replicating the original, can never retain the impulse or context of the original source when experienced ‘live’.24 It is important to note here that another impetus for my performing in this project is my own love of singing and The Villainelles is designed for me to express that love of song, primarily through a release of melody. Thus, with the idea of featuring my own untrained and amplified voice, I wanted to take

23 For further reference see Goodall’s discussion of performance presence which focusses upon energy and physicality in the performances of Bob Dylan and John Lydon. Goodall also discusses the apparent limit of one extreme register of Lydon and that he had no ‘apparent’ technique at all. pp181-189. Arguably Lydon’s ability to express his voice in this range as a kind of sonic assault was his trademark technique and this was copied by many others in the punk movement.

24 I add here that this is more pertinent to the contemporary singer/songwriter in popular music, but is still applicable to certain classical and historic music contexts.
on the risk of performing in my own music, while simultaneously undertaking the role of music direction.

Returning again to Bonnefoy’s idea of the translator reliving the authorial experience, in this transcreation to music theatre I would make live a sequence of ‘villain-elles’, this time taking myself even closer to the experience of the original writers, through the articulation of my composition, led by my own voice.

This chapter will outline the artistic concept and production methodology for the hybrid concert work, The Villainelles. The ideas and procedure did not occur according to the sequence presented below but overlapped in a back and forth way, as the composition and the adaptation of texts progressed, to form a particular production rationale for this transcreation.

7.2 A hybrid concert format

Beyond the initial impulse to return to the mode of composer/performer, the type of work I wanted to create was a hybrid of the Western art song cycle, cabaret and the rock concert, led by a vocal line suited to my vocal capability. In her review of The Villainelles, poet and critic Alison Croggon pinpointed the hybrid nature of the concert format: ‘It’s a presentation that rather recalls the musical theatricality of Laurie Anderson: not quite cabaret, not quite concert, not quite theatre, but with elements of all of them’ (2008). The comparison to Anderson is useful in terms of a presentation and music hybrid, of minimal production aesthetic. That Anderson is also a singer of limited range, but a most engaging performing artist, given her imaginative use of microphone-captured articulations, mediation of voice using technology, stylized movement, and music composition that blends popular music
and Western art music practices, her work bears further comparison to the artistic methodologies and with the exception of writing text, to my various creative roles in *The Villainelles*.

Although I had almost completed composing *The Villainelles* before I saw Laurie Anderson’s *Homeland* (2007) in its premier season at the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts, there is a formal parallel, in that both works begin with a simple concept, made manifest as a loose narrative achieved across a song collection, or song cycle. Anderson takes her audience on an abstracted journey across America’s states, post-September 11. Her subject matter contemplates the concept of ‘state’ as both geographic and psychological. *Homeland* brings to mind the meditative ‘traveller’ artsong cycles of the nineteenth century such as Schubert’s *Die Winterreise* (1828) and Mahler’s *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (1885) that express human sorrow, by journeys through time and place. As a stripped back rock concert with minimal theatrical lighting, performed by an electro-acoustic trio, Anderson’s collection of songs propose a contained argument, through an often politicised text, music composition and performance, that combine to make music theatre. Like *The Villainelles*, the theme of *Homeland* is advanced through the sequence and progression of songs. The instrumentation is modest in comparison to my work, and realised with theatrical lighting and basic, stylised staging.

Another work that arguably bears comparison in terms of subject matter and form is the Robyn Archer and Rodney Fisher collaboration, *A Star is Torn* (1980). I saw this work as a teenager nearly thirty years ago, and was immensely impressed by Archer’s prowess as a performer in a contemporary cabaret form. I had not seen anything like it at the time.
The Villainelles and A Star Is Torn both use specific devices to bring programmatic and thematic cohesion to a collection of stylistically diverse songs. A Star Is Torn is Archer’s homage to twentieth century jazz, popular and music hall singers whose vinyl recordings, which she listened to as a girl, provided the basis of her vocal education, (Featherstone 1993) and this confines the music content to the history of the phonogram. Essentially, A Star Is Torn provided a vehicle for Archer to display her technical virtuosity in a solo show celebrating voices of female popular singers. However, during her research Archer noticed that the singers she was inspired by all had tragic lives, many with substance addictions, so an exploration of the tragic heroine in popular music and jazz provides the overarching framework - a theatrical conceit – that shapes her interpretations of the diverse but well known songs. Exploring similar territory to Archer’s work but across a much longer history, the overarching concept for The Villainelles is an expression in song of notorious women in crisis, from ancient to contemporary times. By contrast, what is on display in The Villainelles is the transcreation of extant text to contrasting compositions featuring the colourful use of voice and instrumentation.

While both productions explore the feminine voice, both works also use simple theatrical devices to link the songs. The cabaret-patter of A Star Is Torn introduced and contextualised each new artist as another singer, another tragic life. Sequinned silk portraits of the heroines were ‘flown in’ to accompany the patter and provided a juxtaposition of archival portraits with an individual interpretation of each musical artefact. Like Archer, I borrowed from cabaret and popular/folk concert conventions by using informal but factual introductions to contextualise each song/subject. I should note that I used similar introductions in Dreaming Transportation that were prompted by Albiston’s writing and further developed this method in the libretto of The Hanging of Jean Lee. However, in contrast to Archer who is a supreme entertainer and comedienne, my narration for The Villainelles was minimal and reserved, providing only essential information.
7.3 The poetic inspiration for this work

A small collection of Jordie Albiston’s poems inspired me to pursue this mode of presentation and type of creative challenge as I have outlined. Alone, her *Six Villain-Elles* from *The Fall* (Albiston 2003) reinvigorated the strict rhyming form of the *villanelle*, favoured and revived by nineteenth century English poets, that was originally a renaissance peasant and troubadour song. Certainly, the famous *villanelle* of Dylan Thomas, *Do Not Go Gently Into That Good Night* (1952), had in turn prompted Albiston to grapple with the poetic form of nineteen lines summarised as ‘seven-syllable lines using two rhymes, distributed in (normally) five three-line stanzas (tercets) and a final four-line stanza (quatrain) with line repetitions’ (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 2012).

Across such schemata Albiston had drawn six ‘villain-elles’, or somewhat problematic women well-known known for their individual achievements or notorious actions in Western history and mythology: Eve, Medea, Mary Magdalene, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Artemisia Gentileschi and Amelia Earhart. With a degree of etymological and linguistic reflection, Albiston had cleverly altered *villein* - associated with peasants or serfs (Merriam-Webster 2008) - to *villain*, and by inserting a hyphen between “villain” and “elle” she made an artful pun within the title, between her chosen form and her subjects. Because the *villanelle* has a musical precedent as a renaissance dance or pastoral song, its title immediately provided the conceptual pivot that I look for to justify a composition-led transcreation. Here the pivot was threefold - between poetry, music and female subject. In terms of my wish to explore extra-musical concepts by finding a connection between the musical and the non-musical, this was most attractive because the ‘pivot’ was already encapsulated within the writing as source material, and as a whole collection.
7.4 Transcreative procedures in this work

7.4.1 Transforming the poems to song lyrics

Like the works I have drawn comparison with, I wanted to make a self-contained and satisfying work, that was approximately of one hour’s duration. Albiston’s six poems were not sufficient material for a song cycle of this length, so additional texts needed to be found. Furthermore, while there was an interesting link between subject, music and text in Albiston’s small collection, there were technical challenges to overcome concerning the transcreation of poem to song cycle lyric. Ironically this included the strict form of the villanelle itself.

Following my score for Shakespeare’s epic poem *Venus and Adonis* in rhyming iambic pentameter (2008), I was acutely aware of the challenge of making musical invention from repeating poetic meters. In the creative translation of that text to score I often disregarded meter and altered the text to suit musical phrases and structures. While I was drawn to the idea of achieving character differentiation in *The Villainelles* by way of contrasting my composition approaches, I concluded that a strict maintenance of the villanelle meter in all poems would be rhythmically constricting and result in a similarity that would override a key transcreative endeavour. In her own working of the villanelle, Albiston had not adhered to the strict return of a repeated line, but played with half rhymes and made slight changes each time the repeated line of the villanelle came around. So, as I composed I became less concerned with maintaining Albiston’s villanelles and concentrated upon the achievement of striking characterisations of ‘villain-elle’ through contrasting music settings. Thus, in the process of turning poems to song, I made further and sometimes considerable alterations to the rhymes and line repeats to achieve balance of musical phrasing, sometimes restructuring the
poem’s content into an entirely new shape and writing additional words and lines. I sought Albiston’s approval for these amendments and in some instances she made new contributions. Thus the poetic villanelle was not completely lost in transcreation, however the voicing of women across history in song as villain-elles became the conceptual focus.

As my approach to the setting of a villanelle became more flexible, the representation of Albiston’s collection also changed. Given the project presented a fairly well traversed theme, I was aware that it could be easily criticised for presenting a dated form of feminism and here I found the poems ‘Eve’ and ‘Artemisia’ to have a somewhat earnest and clichéd quality. I spent many weeks on the song ‘Artemisia’, but it fell into a slightly camp ‘Euro-trash’ style, which diminished the renaissance painter’s livelihood struggle and artistic achievements. My motivation in including the painter in the collection was in part due to her unusual artistic profile and in part because she had depicted the blackmailed Susannah, which provided a narrative link in the collection. Despite many efforts to find other musical solutions, I could not avoid a quality of earnestness in my music setting of ‘Artemisia’, which I believe was extant to some degree in the original poem.

In contrast to Christian representations, Albiston’s ‘Mary Magdalene’ was seductive and sexually predatory. I abandoned my first songwriting attempt, which was unsuitable due to its slightly saccharine quality. Later, I came up with a drum kit and bass motif that provided a more rugged foundation to write vocal lines with the degree of raunch that Albiston’s take on her subject called for. In the transcreation from poem to song lyric, I substantially modified the poetic meter and reordered the lines into new verse, instrumental and chorus sections. Here, I arrived at a satisfying and new song shape by allowing the drum kit and bass motive to lead the phrase lengths and I modified the text to accord with this.
However, the extant text was only enough for half of the song. Here, Albiston generously provided approximately eight lines for me to freely choose from, edit, and re-order to complete the new lyric structure. For comparison, the published format (not font) of Albiston’s original villanelle and the adapted song lyrics are provided in Figures 4 and 5. Recalling Castelbuovo-Tedesco’s idea of ‘sealing’ the text with music to form melody, the typeset of the song lyrics in Figure 5 implies the sectioning of lyrics according to the melodic structure of the leading voice in the final song version.

**Mary Magdalene**

Jesus, Sweet, I am your sacred whore.
I have in me from one to seven devils:
Lord, Dear Baby, do you know the score?
All men love me, yet you love me more
And dream of slipping in among my evils.
Jesus, Sweet, I am your sacred whore.
I’m counting on you Sugar to explore
My gospel body, and for you to revel.
Lord, Dear Baby, would you like to score?
Find your blinded way to my dark door
And lay yourself beside me so we’re level:
Jesus, Sweet, I am your sacred whore.
Cast your halo off into the bedstraw.
Get thrown into biblical upheaval.
Lord, Dear Baby, I am yours to score.
I have entire testaments in store
So kiss me here, and make my hair dishevelled.
O Jesus, Sweet, I am your sacred whore.
Lord, Dear Baby, don’t you want to score?

Figure 4 - ‘Mary Magdalene’ from ‘Six Villain-Elles’ (Albiston 2003)
Mary Magdalene

SPOKEN INTRO: ‘Mary Magdalene loved Jesus
SUNG:

Jesus, Sweet, I am your sacred whore
I have in me from one to seven devils:
Lord, Dear Baby, do you know the score?
All men love me, yet you love me more

I’m counting on you Sugar to explore
Lord, Dear Baby, would you like to score?
Find your blinded way to my dark door
C’mon lay on down here on the heart of my cold floor
Cast your halo off into the bedstraw
I have entire testaments in store

Get thrown into biblical upheaval
Into biblical upheaval
Into biblical upheaval
Into biblical up –

Jesus, Sweet, I am your sacred whore
I’ve put aside some time for us to revel
Make me wealthy like you do the poor
Feed me flame until you fire my core
Wreck yourself upon my secret shore
Let us stumble forward on all fours

Get thrown into biblical upheaval
Into biblical upheaval
Into biblical upheaval
Into biblical up –

Figure 5 - ‘Mary Magdalene’ from The Villainelles (2008)
Words - Jordie Albiston, edited by Andrée Greenwell
Another poem that required considerable extension, and which evolved into an unusual song form that I describe as ‘folk-operetta’ is Albiston’s ‘Susannah and the Elders’. Again there was only sufficient material in the original poem to satisfy half of the song. Here, I returned to the Apocryphal text reference which I adapted for lyric extension. I reconfigured Albiston’s poem into a lyric for two voices that intercut strophic and aria styles for an extended song form of over seven minutes duration.

In the final program, I used only three poems from Albiston’s Six Villain-Elles being ‘Charlotte’, ‘Mary Magdalene’ and ‘Amelia’. However, I believe that her collective concept was sustained in the transcreation. I requested other poems from Albiston that might accommodate the concept of a ‘villain-elle’ outside of the aforementioned poetic design, to instigate rhythmic and formal contrast. Subsequently, four additional works by Albiston made their way into the song collection from her earlier publication, Nervous Arcs (1995). These were a trio of poems concerning the turbulent personal life of the injured artist Frida Kahlo that I reworked into a single song text; a collection of poems set during The Salem Witch Trials of 1692 from which I selected Albiston’s near transcript of a Caribbean slave’s testimony, ‘Candy’; and the afore-mentioned ‘Susannah and the Elders’. I also chose to adapt and rearrange the song ‘You Stalker’ from The Hanging of Jean Lee. While the change of subject from Jean Lee to Diana, Princess of Wales could be considered as radical, few lyric changes were required for the song to be read as pertaining to her complicated relationships with the press and her former husband, Prince Charles. This was the fourth poem by Albiston in the song collection that was ‘villain-elle’, not villanelle.

To extend the number of songs to ten, and to gather further rhythmic possibilities for the vocal lines, I sought contributions from Melbourne writers, Alison Croggon and Kathleen Mary Fallon. I had previously set Croggon’s poem ‘Medea’ for the
celebrated cabaret artist Melissa Madden-Gray in her performance of *Extreme Voice* (2002) and had considered performing a version myself. Albiston’s *Six Villain-Elles* also included a ‘Medea’ poem, and for some time I toyed with the idea of making multiple settings of Albiston’s characters in pairings with other writers, but abandoned this notion due to impracticality. I preferred Croggon’s ‘Medea’ and rearranged the electronic accompaniment for the seven piece ensemble, transferring some prepared audio from the accompaniment I had made for Madden-Gray. A further Croggon poem was included – ‘Billie’ (2003), a haunting reflection upon the legendary jazz singer’s life as a child-prostitute. Finally, Kathleen Mary Fallon sent me a section of a libretto in which the Blessed Virgin Mary laments her global and historic duties. I did not use much of *Channelling the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Fallon & Kats-Chernin 1998) which was written for a performer of greater dramatic skill. It was also too lengthy a dramatic episode to include, even condense, for the program. Instead I built upon Fallon’s situational humour and imagery, to write my own lyrics for an ironic, lilting country and western ballad.

As a song collection, *The Villainelles* presented a group of female subjects in an order that was not of historically chronological, but which maintained a dynamic shift between subject, style and emotional state, from song to song. The song titles, subjects and known dates are included in the first column of Table 1 to show an historically non-linear sequence of poems or lyrics by different authors.

### 7.4.2 Transcreative procedures: voice and instrumentation

Because the song characters ranged from ancient mythology through to recent history it made sense to use an instrumentation of varied music heritage. I imagined that the music vocabulary would fall between post-rock and
contemporary classical music practices, with comparison to the hybrid music languages of artists such as Anthony and the Johnsons, Laurie Anderson, Sufjan Stephens, Meredith Monk, and Joanna Newsome - artists who variously merge popular, folk and classical Western art music conventions. I chose instrumentation of amplified solo voice, violin, cello, trombone, keyboard, electric guitar, bass guitar and drumkit with prepared audio, using the software program Logic Pro 7, via laptop computer playback. As with the band line up for The Hanging of Jean Lee, this was an expanded rock band offering versatile subset instrumentations, with the addition of an audio element I prepared using archival recordings and synthesised textures. With this potentially broad sonic palette I would be able to construct music textures and cross music genres in metaphoric ways, and evoke changes in time or location so that recent and distant pasts could be distinguished but without being ‘authentic’ in the music-historic sense. Finally, to name to the band, I extended Albiston’s pun, naming the musicians as well as the work The Villainelles. I removed the hyphen because I preferred a single word pun on the original form above pointing out the dual meaning through typographical separation.

7.4.3 A theatre of music, featuring voice

Continuing Bonshek’s observation of my earlier work, The Villainelles did not follow a chronological sequence but progressed by fluctuations of emotional states toward a kind of exhaustion. Here, I considered how the vocal line led the states of emotion. This involved the consideration of technical elements such as voicing, range, style and genre references, microphone technique and staging from song to song, to achieve emotional contrast and to combine as a ‘theatre of music’, or even a theatre of voice. Here, the consideration of voicing was a critical first step.
For instance, ‘Candy’ suggested a duet. I imagined the male interrogator might be performed by a male vocalist such as Hugo Race or Tex Perkins, exemplary of the male/female duet characterisations of Lee Hazelwood and Nancy Sinatra, later emulated by Roland Howard and Lydia Lunch. In ‘Susannah’ there were potential multiple characters of Narrator, Susannah, the Elders, and the Young Man. Beyond these character demarcations, the other eight songs were in first person so contrast would need to be achieved by alternate voicing methods, such as adding countermelodies, pitched and non-pitched textures and back-up vocals. With this in mind, I opted to write for a second female singer and to disregard gender in the two aforementioned songs.

The second vocal part was written for the versatile singer, composer and instrument designer Donna Hewitt whose practice encompasses singing in cover bands, Gaelic folk music, electronic music composition and instrument design. Closer to the production period I was daunted by the challenge of performing all ten songs, as well as organising and music directing the project, so I allocated one of the songs as a solo for Hewitt and this also brought further contrast to the voicing. ‘Billie’ well suited her smoky timbre, although I needed to transpose the song from E flat minor to D minor to benefit her range, which at the time was against my preference for the collection’s tonal design.

25 Summer Wine, These Boots Were Made for Walking and the Howard/Lunch cover of Some Velvet Morning were all songs by Lee Hazelwood that I had in mind.
Aspects of the performance production also assisted in differentiating character through voice. For example, a sequence of different microphone techniques furthered the contrast of voice from song to song. I wanted to feature ‘close-microphone’ technique while sitting to sing the gentler songs ‘Candy’ (Figure 6i).
and ‘Charlotte’. Alternately, I wanted to make use of the physicality and vocal power that hand-held microphone affords for the hard rock styles of ‘Frida’ and ‘Mary Magdalene’ (Figure 6ii). For some songs I devised small, choreographed Laurie Anderson-like movements to suit the musical phrasing, or to make further comment upon the text. Through these subtle differences in staging and music production, I was attempting a theatre of vocal performance, where even the microphone and chairs were used as props. This was so that as singers, we had a range of presentation and physical modes that affected the way that we sang.

7.4.4 The use of visual projection in this work

The Villainelles is the third consecutive work developed from Albiston’s writing for which I have translated the titles of the poems to projected text, as part of a visual component. While the use of screen projection in this second folio work is utterly minimal, it takes the concert form into a hybrid, whereby the use of a digital technology compresses material that acts as a simple, binding, conceptual element, that is in part a design backdrop, that provides information through the use of simple text, and that is part lighting source. Like the theatrical linking device of the ‘flown in’ portraits of A Star Is Torn, the christian name of each ‘villainelle’ is projected in soft pink onto the black backdrop curtain, above and behind the drumkit player. Established by Albiston in her poems as a device of familiarity, this song ‘naming’, translated into visual projections, furthers the communication of the personal to the audience, throughout the work. Theatrical lighting adds yet a further dimension in demarcating the sonic portraiture drawn in each song. As minimal and simple as these theatrical devices are, they bring conceptual and aesthetic cohesion to an eclectic collection of songs. They provide context in action and endow meanings across the song collection that would not take place within the performance of a single ‘villainelle’. As Croggon observed on her weblog Theatre Notes the whole (music theatre) was indeed the sum of its parts (2008).
7.4.5 An arc of the vocal in this transcreation

As a strategy in discussing vocal and instrumental approaches toward the achievement of ‘theatres of music’ in this work, I am providing two templates. Table 1 below, summarises a methodology for *The Villainelles* that demonstrates the vocal design of the work. It shows a variety of techniques and ideas for each subject and song concerning tonality, style and genre, microphone technique, staging and vocal delivery. These were either prominent or vague in my mind as I composed, or that I have noticed more recently, through the reflective writing of this exegesis.

Table 1 - A template that summarises the vocal approach of *The Villainelles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. ‘Candy’</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject, era, writer</strong></td>
<td><strong>Key</strong></td>
<td><strong>Voicing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocal techniques</strong></td>
<td><strong>Microphone technique/staging</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken vowels in introduction, pitch sliding tones for dramatic emphasis e.g. <em>I miss my man</em>. Vibrato on final phrase words e.g. <em>Candy black say no more, no more</em>.</td>
<td>Stillness. Both singers seated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. ‘Charlotte’</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject, era, writer</strong></td>
<td><strong>Key</strong></td>
<td><strong>Voicing</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
American Economist and writer whose short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* is a seminal feminist literary work that inspired Albiston’s poem. (Albiston, ed. Greenwell).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocal techniques</th>
<th>Microphone technique/staging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>narration. Crossfade transition to B maj, later modulating to Bb min through an upward vocal pivot.</td>
<td>Seated. A sense of a confined space, restricted movement. Later scanning the theatre with eyes to suggest that the audience are the imaginary creatures merging from behind the yellow wallpaper.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. ‘Frida’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject, era, writer</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, who as a young woman, was seriously injured in a tram accident 1907-1954. (Albiston, ed. Greenwell)</td>
<td>Bb min.</td>
<td>Solo with back up vocals. <em>Frida</em> – Greenwell. B.V. – Hewitt, on chorus and bridges.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocal techniques</th>
<th>Microphone technique/staging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First verse has breathy, unstable pitch. The voice stabilises and strengthens through the song in accord with Charlotte’s assertions. Toward the end increased pitch bends suggest (mental) instability. Concluding as an upward, increasingly unstable and unresolved cadence to suspension.</td>
<td>Seated. A sense of a confined space, restricted movement. Later scanning the theatre with eyes to suggest that the audience are the imaginary creatures merging from behind the yellow wallpaper.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. ‘Mary Magdalene’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject, era, writer</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The prostitute, friend, apostle and contentiously, according to some, the lover of Jesus Christ. 1st century. (Albiston, ed. Greenwell).</td>
<td>Sonic/atonal introduction that commences under the introduction, resolving in F# min.</td>
<td>Solo with featured B.V. <em>Mary Magdalene</em> – Greenwell B.V. - Hewitt as support vocal, then variously B.V., canon and harmonies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocal techniques</th>
<th>Microphone technique/staging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the verses: a descending stepwise chromatic motif in the mid to lower register, which is contrasted by wide leaps in the chorus.</td>
<td>Seated but more animated. Choreographic movements to emphasise the changes to higher register, and full core sound of the chorus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal techniques</td>
<td>Microphone technique/staging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide pitch and dynamic ranges. Second voice whispering in sync, with overt articulation. Moving to full-voiced canon, unison and harmony. In the lead voice, a gradual build of dynamics and pitch range to a loud, accented chorus.</td>
<td>Standing, holding microphone, ‘rock-chick’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. ‘The Blessed Virgin Mary’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject, era, writer</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The mother of Jesus Christ. 1st century. (Greenwell, after Fallon).</td>
<td>G min/G maj.</td>
<td>Solo with B.V.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mary – Greenwell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B.V. – Hewitt, in unison and in countermelodies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal techniques</td>
<td>Microphone technique/staging</td>
<td>Verse 1: standing at microphone. Choreographed, humorous movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaintive, naïve desire. Rise and fall of volume according to melodic contour.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Holding microphone for second verse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elements of a country and western ballad but without American inflections or accent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. ‘Diana’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject, era, writer</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diana – Greenwell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B.V. – Hewitt, as repetitions and harmonies in 8ves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal techniques</td>
<td>Microphone technique/staging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard tone almost to breaking of pitch, emphasis of consonants. Contrasted by soft, seductive B.V.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand-held microphone. Assertive stance, gesticulating.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. ‘Billie’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject, era, writer</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The legendary blues singer Billie Holiday 1915–1959 worked as a child prostitute and went on to become one of the greatest singers of her time. She died in her early ‘40’s due to complications from substance addictions. (Croggon)</td>
<td>D min (originally composed in Eb min but lowered to suit vocal range).</td>
<td>Solo&lt;br&gt;Billie - Hewitt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocal techniques</th>
<th>Microphone technique/staging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jazz standard, nightclub style. Soft breathy tones to full chest voice.</td>
<td>Reflective. Standing, hand-held microphone, relaxed, walking slowly toward audience, minimal sway.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. ‘Medea’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject, era, writer</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From Greek mythology. Banished by her husband Jason, who left her for another woman and banished her. Medea killed her two children for revenge on her husband. (Croggon)</td>
<td>A min.</td>
<td>Solo with B.V.&lt;br&gt;Medea – Greenwell&lt;br&gt;B.V. – Hewitt, as close and wide interval harmonies, and as sustained harmonic fill.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocal techniques</th>
<th>Microphone technique/staging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evoking the operatic in a dramatic way. B.V. as close and wide interval harmonies, and as sustained harmonic fill. The harmonies swap between voices in descending chromatic parallel major 3rds and minor 6ths for dramatic impact on e.g. ‘I think of knives blooming…’ (close harmony) ‘… from my callused hands’</td>
<td>Rich and lengthy reverberation on voices. The sense of ‘reaching’ for the high notes emphasises her desperation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. ‘Susannah’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject, era, writer</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Based upon the apocryphal story of Susannah and the Elders. The wife of a rich man, Joachim, Susannah is blackmailed by two men who lust after her. 1st-2nd century B.C. (Albiston ed. Greenwell) | G min | Duet.  
**Narrator (sung)** – Greenwell and Hewitt  
**Narrator (spoken)** – Hewitt  
**Susannah** – Greenwell  
**Young Man** – Greenwell and Hewitt.  
**B.V.** – Hewitt, variously as countermelody and harmony. |

**Vocal techniques**

Verses are folk-like. Light 'scooping', followed by stopping the sound short (aka Brian Ferry).  
The 'B' theme has an operatic quality in the style of the Phillip Glass vocal works, but is delivered with vibrato, maintaining the overall popular/folk style.  
The Coda features a breathy falsetto tone. The final phrase ‘bookends’ the opening.

**Microphone technique/staging**

Hand-held mic. Both singers walking and swaying.  
Demarcations of singing to/with each other, to delineate shared narration and chorus. Fixed positions in the 'operatic' chorus sections.

10. ‘Amelia’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject, era, writer</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Voicing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
**Amelia** – Greenwell |

**Vocal techniques**

A wide pitch range. Use of breath and fluttering vibrato.  
A suggestion of the euphoric, near breathlessness.

**Microphone technique/staging**

Standing at the mic. Small choreographic movements suggestive of flight, encouraging an 'open' voice.
7.4.6 Locating the voice in a ‘music environment’

In her discussion of poetic space, the poet Bronwyn Lea describes the idea of *habitus*, literally meaning ‘to inhabit’, as ‘coming from a root that means to give and to receive. We inhabit a place when we give something to it and when we open ourselves to receive it’ (Lea 2006).

Generally speaking, for each song of *The Villainelles*, a melodic impulse provided the initial song framework, and the design of the vocal was the first step in terms of establishing character as much as contrast between each song. From here I sought to ‘locate’ the vocal within ‘musical environments’ of distinctive instrumental textures and music styles. As described in relation to *The Hanging of Jean Lee* in Chapter Five, I am again borrowing Richard Vella’s idea, also the title of his educational text (2000), and am combining this with Lea’s idea of ‘habitus’, so that the vocal forms a horizontal shape from which I could tease out the vertical as a ‘musical environment’, creating contrasting song-specific spaces for each character ‘to inhabit’. As I made a first draft of a vocal line, even for a song section, I imagined the interaction of instruments with the voice. Effectively, I teased out each ‘music environment’ from, or against the vocal line, and this involved modifications such as expansion of phrasing and the inclusion of rests to allow the accompaniment to interact with the vocal.

Specifically, I looked for qualities in the characters that suggested a co-relation with types of music environments and/or music genres. For ‘Medea’, I wanted to develop Croggon’s suggestion of an expansive space, ‘a vast exile’, that evoked the queen’s banishment to a desert, as a possible site for her nighttime meditation that led her to commit such shocking revenge murders. The musical texture evokes a kind of geographic spaciousness that was introduced by a smooth and slow moving string-synthesizer patch, doubled by violin and cello (bb1–8). To further this
idea of geographic and musical spaciousness, I fore-grounded low frequency
drums and an upper register decorative piano motif with digital delays, leaving the
sustained middle register lines at a modest level. The suggestion of ‘spaciousness’
was then extended to the digital enhancement of the amplified voices, through the
addition of long reverberation and digital delays. Stylistically and dramatically, I had
in mind Sinead O’Connor’s *Fire On Babylon* in which the singer/songwriter rages at
her experience of child abuse at the hand of her own mother. Like O’Connor’s
song, the wide frequency spectrum with simple and sustained middle lines
advances Croggon’s poetic location. Furthermore, its thematic development as a
*pavane*-like processional, regally endows the music environment as a space for a
murderous queen in absentia, to struggle with the pending revenge-killing of her
own children. Given this song is the most emotionally taxing to perform vocally,
featuring wide interval leaps, my approach to the orchestration allows the voice
comfortable prominence in the music texture (*The Villainelles* CD, track 8).

According to Lea’s idea, an ‘offering and exchange’ takes place in this and each
song, between the singers and instrumentalists, and then again in performance
between all elements and the audience. Thus each subject is inevitably embodied
in the design of vocal line and its relationship to the music texture. As with *The
Hanging of Jean Lee*, dynamic relationships between vocal line and
instrumentation, combine sequentially as a ‘theatre of music’.

**7.4.7 Using the music environment to assist vocal characterization**

Albiston cleverly presented ‘Mary Magdalene’ in a literary voice that is at once
historic and contemporary. Her word-plays upon desire and substance abuse are
not historically bound: ‘Lord Dear Baby, would you like to score? All men love me
yet you love me more…’. While composing this song I was aware of my limited
vocal power and wanted the musical texture to assist me in some way to deliver ‘raunch’. Rather than attempt to solely communicate Magdalene’s sexuality through the force of my own voice, which a soul singer would achieve with ease, I approached voice and ensemble as a unified force. With the exception of the electric guitar, the voice and music environment united in mutual music-dramatic purpose. The song began with a loud improvised non-pulsed electric guitar solo that actively slides across a spectrum of feedback harmonics. This achieves a marked dissonance (tension) against the unified voice and ensemble texture in both actual and metaphoric sense (harmonic and sexual tension), which fluctuates throughout the song. The drum and bass motif introduce the ‘raunch’ foundation, which I reinforce by doubling the motive at various octaves across the ensemble. The kinesis and articulation of the tutti ostenato suggest a predatory stalk (cf. ‘Mary Magdalene Score’ bb5-9; bb81-85). Here, I was concerned with locating the character within a musical environment that exemplified Magdalene’s willfulness, as opposed to suggesting a geographic location.

To reinforce a build of desire through vocal power, the second vocal slowly graduates in volume and vocalisation. To begin with, Hewitt doubles my vocal as projected whispering in bb36-43, which graduates to full-voiced doubling, that then alternates between doubling, canon and harmony. Sudden volume increases are achieved through registral leaps, with doubling on lines such as ‘Come on lay on down here on the heart of my cold floor’ from which the second voice drops away, dissipating the vocal texture. The overall impact of the unified tutti motif across a broad frequency spectrum provided me with the confidence to take my voice to its full power, without forcing the sound (cf. ‘Mary Magdalene Score’ bb101-108 with bb109-123). Here, the vocal line and music texture are calculated to achieve an assertive expression of a paradoxically well known yet uncommonly represented subject through voice, that I could stir within my own vocal limits, exploiting the music forces available.
This is only one expression of how I used my composition craft to assist, contextualize and co-operate with voice in *The Villainelles*. That is to say I was able to craft the overall role of the ensemble, and specifically the parts each musician played, to provide fluctuating music textures and environments that variously couched the voice, encouraged it, located it in time and music space, to enhance the character of each song.

Table 2 summarises my ideas and references for each song's composition and instrumentation that, in combination, establish music environments for the voiced subjects to inhabit across the collection. Here, voice and ensemble co-operate and interact to accord with Vella’s idea of a ‘theatre of ideas’ or ‘theatre of music’, within this work. It is my hope that in conjunction with the supporting CD documentation of the live performances, that the two summaries provided in Tables 1 and 2 illuminate my endeavour to make the ten female subjects of *The Villainelles* live through a transcreation to a hybrid concert work.
Table 2 - A template that summarises the instrumental approach of *The Villainelles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: A template that summarises the instrumental approach of <em>The Villainelles</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### 1. ‘Candy’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre, formal and stylistic references</th>
<th>Instrumental features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Folk-rock genre reminiscent of m./f. rock duets of e.g. Lee Hazelwood and Nancy Sinatra and Roland Howard and Lydia Lunch.</td>
<td>The introduction is accompanied by sustained strings - non-pulsed, in open fifths, similar to a hurdy-gurdy or fiddle style. This folk-like opening suggests a time past. The bass consolidates tempo from Voice 2. Tacet trombone &amp; keyboard. Featured sectional string writing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Other musical features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upredictable phrase lengths of varied 4 + 6 beat groupings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect: corruption versus resilience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2. ‘Charlotte’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre, formal and stylistic references</th>
<th>Instrumental features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A haunting film-like instrumental texture, using ‘foley’ approaches, ‘underscores’ the introduction. The ensemble mimics Charlotte’s horrific imaginings. In the main body of the song are elements of the lullaby; a whimsical quality is reminiscent of The Velvet Underground’s <em>Sunday Morning</em> and ‘I’ll be more Your Mirror’.</td>
<td>As the song is established a smooth dreamlike texture proceeds. With glockenspiel in second verse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Other musical features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trombone solo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The horror introduction transitions to a lullaby-like song that suggests the pain of the mother child removed from her child by its father. The tension between Charlotte’s vulnerability and strength of mind is conveyed through a variety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is irony in the expression of this pain through the naïve quality of the lullaby-like music.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. ‘Frida’</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genre, formal and stylistic references</strong></td>
<td><strong>Instrumental features</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast, post-punk. Attitude reminiscent of Romeo Void’s <em>I might like you better if we slept together.</em></td>
<td>Driving chromatic bass motif. Gypsy like violin solo with some <em>ad libitum</em>. Sparse instrumentation in verses. Driven by bass and drum kit; full, loud ensemble in chorus/bridge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other musical features</strong></td>
<td><strong>Comments</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A featured instrumental that functions as chorus with vocalists clapping in this section.</td>
<td>An expression that is fiery but self-destructive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. ‘Mary Magdalene’</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genre, formal and stylistic references</strong></td>
<td><strong>Instrumental features</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard rock-chick with artists such as Joan Jett and Suzi Quattro in mind. Ensemble writing reminiscent of the orchestrations of Sir George Martin on the later Beatles albums e.g. <em>Sergeant Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band.</em></td>
<td>Screeching, non-pulsed electric guitar introduction. Wailing electric guitar throughout that includes a substantial amount of textural improvisation that independently weaves about and against the pulse of the main ensemble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other musical features</strong></td>
<td><strong>Comments</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of resolution through chromatic contrary motion cadence. The ensemble provides a ‘raunch’ foundation.</td>
<td>An expression that is daring, seductive.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. ‘The Blessed Virgin Mary’</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Genre, formal and stylistic references</strong></td>
<td><strong>Instrumental features</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow country and Western ballad.</td>
<td>Piano introduction, featured. 6/8 dance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other musical features</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layering and exchange of countermelodies between voices and instruments.</td>
<td>An expression that is gentle, sad, funny, bittersweet. Ironic as an expression of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in a country music, or dance hall style.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**6. ‘Diana’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre, formal and stylistic references</th>
<th>Instrumental features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rebel rock, slight punk and funk influences. Reminiscent of Chrissy Amphlett’s performance attitude that oscillates between a characteristic ‘do/do not fuck with me’, from the Australian band, The Divinyls.</td>
<td>Funk guitar, accented chromatic bass. Fast drum beat aka ’90’s dance bands such as The Stone Roses. Two snare drums for ‘stereo’ effect rolls.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other musical features</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A featured tritone in the opening hook on trombone and bass. Underpinned by parallel 4ths, between violin and trombone.</td>
<td>An expression that is tough, exciting, gesticulating.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**7. ‘Billie’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre, formal and stylistic references</th>
<th>Instrumental features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blues, torch song, reminiscent of Billie’s repertoire stylistically, but not of her vocal sound.</td>
<td>Trombone and keyboard solos in the instrumental section prior to the chorus reprise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other musical features</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Langorous jazz orchestra feel, achieved with smaller forces.</td>
<td>An expression that is solemn, dreamy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**8. ‘Medea’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre, formal and stylistic references</th>
<th>Instrumental features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Epic Irish-rock e.g. Sinead O’Connor’s Fire in Babylon. A film score quality that interrelates</td>
<td>Commencing with an ‘expansive’ texture of synthesiser and strings. Low toms, a slow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
music with landscape. | threatening, almost orchestral bass drum feel. Slow delays on the keyboard, in the 'lounge' music style of Groove Amada.

Other musical features | Comments
--- | ---
Audio of distressed baby increases Medea's rallying to act. | An extreme and increasing dramatic resolve over the repetition of line fragments builds tension. Rock/operatic (not in the 1970's 'prog-rock' meaning).

9. ‘Susannah’

Genre, formal and stylistic references | Instrumental features
--- | ---
A folk-operetta. Beginning as a verse ballad, reminiscent of Nana Maskouri and Bryan Ferrie. Contrasted by a quasi-operatic section of judicial import, aka Phillip Glass (see vocal summary). Ending with a coda reminiscent of the Mc Garrigle sisters countermelody on Nick Cave’s *Hallelujah* from the album *No More Shall We Part*. | Modest folk instrumentation featuring nylon string guitar and darabukka juxtaposed with orchestral style arrangement

Other musical features | Comments
--- | ---
A hybrid song style | An unusual song length of 6:30

10. ‘Amelia’

Genre, formal and stylistic references | Instrumental features
--- | ---
An aria. A neo-romantic harmonic structure more in the restrained traditions of Schubert and Mendelssohn but sung by untrained voice. | A featured sextuplet cello solo of challenging harmonic sequence. This suggests undulation. This theme is transferred to piano and violin in overlap, halfway through the song.

Other musical features | Comments
--- | ---
The opening timbral improvisation and samples of her voice are suggestive of | Rich ‘reverb.’ treatment of live voice. Low fidelity samples of Amelia’s historic aviation
Amelia’s preparation for her final flight. Synthetic frequencies suggestive of short wave radio suggest motion, speed and scale. speech provide a cinematic quality, as does the quasi-short wave radio in the prepared audio track.

7.5 The experience of performing and composing this work

Finally, I would like to briefly remark upon the dual role that I undertook in this project, and how this impacted upon my experience of rehearsal and performance. My skills and experience as a vocal performer were undoubtedly less than the musicians who comprised the band, who were also diversely specialist musicians. Yet, somehow, I needed to find a way of negotiating their various working methods and artistry. Like The Hanging of Jean Lee, I needed to find a common language for rehearsals. Executing a vocal role certainly benefitted the economy of the production, but it most significantly changed the methodology of my music direction, that is to say, how I directed the ensemble as a singer and composer. For instance, instead of conducting, and/or using words to communicate detailed changes in mood, volume, accent or pace, I used vocal inflections or even subtle changes in my physicality to achieve detailed responses from the musicians. This was a very direct way of leading an interpretation of my music, through changes in the sound of my own voice, which brought about immediate sonic reactions/modifications from the players. While I found this confronting at times this was an efficient way of working. Taking the rehearsed work to an audience, I was most conscious of my offering/exchange that was best made effective through a committed performance. Upon reflection, I was taking the transcreative process of The Hanging of Jean Lee one step further, placing myself closer to the writers’ experiences of wielding the characterisations, by ‘giving voice’ to what I had composed, by releasing The Villainelles through my own voice.
Conclusion

As music theatre works of transcreative basis, the two bodies of work represented in this DCA folio demonstrate an evolution of my artistic research. This period of work commenced in 2003 upon my receipt of the biannual NSW Women in Arts Fellowship, to research and develop *The Hanging of Jean Lee* as a music theatre work, and concluded with the second performance season of *The Villainelles* in 2008, at Arts House, in North Melbourne.

The underpinning methodology of these two works is to explore ‘theatres of music of a transcreative basis’ as previously outlined. As part of this methodology, the theatrical, musical and performative arguments underpinning these works intersect with a variety of performing and screen arts practices: poetic and dramatic text, the performance of original music composition by an ensemble of diversely skilled musicians incorporating both improvisation and digital audio production, and a visual projection component significantly drawing upon conventions of biographic and documentary film and the rock-video clip. Both works are layered artistic experiences considerably removed from the written texts that they are creatively translated from, yet both works maintain a respect for the original authors’ intentions. The elements of, and within, these creative translations are considered, so that they combine to create ‘theatres of music’ or ‘music theatre’.

As composition-led interdisciplinary works, *The Hanging of Jean Lee* and *The Villainelles* are both works that require similar ‘chamber’ performing forces, yet in the context of Australian independent music theatre production, these forces are not understood as modest. However, the works employ differing production rationales, the first being more theatrical in basis while the second work is more located within types of concert presentation. Significantly, and again beyond the
scope of this exegesis, it is important to reflect that these works are expressions of the female experience in Australian, and then more broadly in Western culture, that are translated from the writings of contemporary Australian writers whose original texts each explore representations and expressions of notorious female subjects. Through the processes of creative translation these two works can both be described as being not only composition-led, but also led by a female vocal expression, in terms of their creative authorship and also their performance.

As a composer, artistic director, music director, performance maker and vocalist, I have sought in these two works, to ‘make live’ and creatively translate the feminine poetic expressions of Dr Jordie Albiston. This is firstly through an original music language that is propelled by a desire for song. This enhances the ideas inherent in the original texts through sung voice, whereby voices are ‘made live’, and which are located in specific musical environments to bring further enhancement, and which speak dynamically together in performance. Secondly this musical expression combines with other elements, to expand upon the visual, historic, and personal references and expressions made by Albiston in her poems. All of this is to explore, through an execution of the creative in performance, ‘theatres of music’, elaborated through considered creative processes that are specific to each work.
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