New directions in contemporary music theatre

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NEW DIRECTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC THEATRE / OPERA.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS (HONOURS)

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

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D.S.C.M. (Sydney Conservatorium of Music)

SCHOOL OF CREATIVE ARTS, 1986.
ABSTRACT.

Initial research in Australia into attitudes of personnel involved in the generation and realization of contemporary Music Theatre/Opera, revealed opinions that the Nineteen Eighties represented a period of consolidation for the genre in the wake of the tremendous advances made since World War II. The author was concerned that this consolidation process was, in fact, harbouring 'backward-looking' attitudes and that new ideas which would ensure the future existence of the genre were not being explored. Further research was undertaken in England to establish current opinions as to what makes artistically and financially viable Music Theatre/Opera for audiences of today.

This thesis is concerned with Music Theatre/Opera as a multi-faceted art form and in this respect, the three major works discussed as examples of some of the new directions being taken outside of Australia, are viewed from different perspectives. "Akhnaten" (Glass) is discussed in terms of two different production styles within an overall view of the work's accessibility, while "Donnerstag aus Licht" (Stockhausen) highlights the textual and musical intentions of the composer in generating a non-collaborative work. "The Mask of Orpheus" (Birtwistle) concentrates on the artistic and financial problems associated with a Twentieth Century 'spectacle'.

(ii)
Whilst not providing answers to the problems of the genre, this thesis suggests that new directions for contemporary Music Theatre/Opera are not possible within the confines of the 'traditional opera mentality'. In the words of Pierre Boulez, we must "listen to our century".
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with new directions in contemporary Music Theatre/Opera, and poses questions as to their validity within the context of the practical and artistic considerations of this latter part of the twentieth century.

Research began with an appraisal of the Australian contemporary Music Theatre /Opera scene sampled, during a specific period of time, from January 1984 to January 1985. Questions raised during this examination proved to be a catalyst for further research in England; once again restricted to a period of twelve months, selected at random. The period chosen, May 1985 to May 1986, proved to be rich in offerings and allowed for a further examination of the original questions posed in Australia. It must be underlined that works excluded from this research programme were not discussed on the grounds that their realisation did not fall within the designated time span or category of the programme.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to examine the perceived differences between Opera and Music Theatre. However, it is necessary to clarify the boundaries of consideration for the works included. What, then, is considered to be Music Theatre?

The term became 'fashionable' in the 1960's and was used loosely to describe music with heightened dramatic content but generally opposed to the formality of traditional opera. It inferred
a form limited only by the imagination of composer and audience and pursued a wide range of potential subject matter, style and approach; a variety of structural forms; an economy of means; a versatility of performers; and an awareness of the need to fuse a whole range of contemporary arts. It encapsulated much of the Performance Art tradition in its freedom from textual sources; the use of elliptical images; and the collaboration of multi-media experts. Traditional operatic form existed alongside the development of this hybrid form, dictating a certain set of conditions and strict conventions as it always had done.

Today, the edges of the two categories have become blurred, as composers dispense with the constraints of operatic form and use all or any of the elements of the original Music Theatre form in attempts to restore the balance between theatrical and musical elements and produce truly integrative work. All three of the major works realized in London during the research period were called 'opera', but none of them exhibited the approach and style of traditional operatic form. Composers label their work to meet the demands of practical considerations such as funding, venue and audience response. For the purposes of this thesis therefore, all works of a serious dramatrico-musical nature were considered and the terms 'Opera' and 'Music Theatre' were considered interchangeable.

Further clarification is sought in dealing with critical source material for such recently written works as those premiered in London during 1985 and 1986. Research strategies were those of
Interview, observation and some personal participation in new Music Theatre activities. Conclusions in this thesis are therefore based on the speculation of experts and personal decisions as to the validity of the new directions within the present arts climate.

This thesis does not set out to examine specific areas of score and libretto in detail, though some examples have been included to facilitate comprehension of material unpublished as yet. The author is interested in the artistic intentions of the many collaborators who work towards the realization of new developments within the genre and whether these new directions are sufficiently practical to ensure their survival. As a librettist, singer/actor and director, the author is seeking new motivations, new performers, new spaces and a new aesthetic.


1. To interview personnel involved in the creative processes of generation, production and performance of new contemporary Music Theatre.

2. To observe the work of traditional opera companies in order to ascertain attitudes towards the commissioning and production of new Music Theatre.

3. To observe traditional music training institutions to ascertain attitudes towards the inclusion of contemporary Music Theatre in performance curricula.
4. To seek institutions offering specific courses of training for corporate Music Theatre generation.

5. To visit a selection of 'broad-spectrum' arts and contemporary music festivals in order to ascertain commissioning policies for contemporary Music Theatre.

6. To interview media personnel regarding possibilities for specifically crafted works of Video Music Theatre.

7. To interview administrators of contemporary music ensembles to ascertain attitudes towards the inclusion of Music Theatre works in their programming.

8. To interview publishers to establish the volume of new works of Music Theatre being written by their respective composers and to discuss the problems inherent in securing performances for these works.

9. To attend workshops and seminars to learn of new developments in Music Theatre and the practicalities of production within the current arts climate.

During the research year, visits were also made to some other centres in Europe for specific events relevant to the study. (See appendix A)
PART ONE

Australian Contemporary Music Theatre
(January, 1984 - January, 1985)

"He has, in fact, written a good old-fashioned opera, complete with motifs, tunes and continuity. If echoes abound, they are not the usual echoes of atonality, percussion and Sprechgesang which haunt the modern opera scene".

John Cargher (The Bulletin, Sept. 11, 1984) (1)

The above statement, in reference to the most recent work of one of Australia's well-known composers, offers a disturbing insight into the desire of many Australians involved in the Arts for new operatic works not only referential to the past but which deny explorations outside of the conventions of the past.

There seems little point in generating new works within an old tradition. In the opinion of the author, the traditional operatic repertoire came to a logical close with "Wozzeck" (Berg). It needs to be preserved and exhibited as fastidiously as a gallery preserves its works of art. Explorations need to be undertaken to find new forms of Music Theatre which display an awareness for the artistic expectations and the economic viabilities of this century.

The establishment of this premise prompted a research programme
to investigate Australian Music Theatre programmes offered during 1984. Four main outlets for the genre were selected for study (the small contemporary music ensemble, the training institution, the music festival and the traditional opera house) in an attempt to compile a set of questions pertaining to the practicalities of the generation of new works. Selected programmes within these venues were reviewed to compile a second set of questions pertaining to the artistic considerations of the new works.

1.1. Selected Contemporary Music / Music Theatre Ensembles.

The Seymour Group, a small contemporary ensemble, maintains a high profile in presenting Music Theatre material, although this is not its main consideration. The group commissions a high percentage of new Australian works as well as making attempts to keep the Music Theatre public up to date with overseas trends and ideas. Despite the latter, there is still a significant waiting period for the production of new works from overseas.

1984 was an outstanding year, in that three programmes out of four contained Music Theatre offerings. H. G. Gruber's "Frankenstein II" (1978), received its Australian premiere six years later than its first productions in Europe. Maxwell Davies' "The Lighthouse" (1979) received its first performance in Australia despite five years of acceptance in the Music Theatre repertoire all over Europe. These two productions underlined the
effects of cultural isolation which is still a problem for those working with new ideas in Australia.

The only piece of Australian Music Theatre to be commissioned by the group in 1984 was a scene from the opera, "Chloe", written by Moya Henderson which was presented as one third of a triple bill together with Alison Bauld's "One Pearl" (1973) and Edward Cowie's "Kate Kelly's Roadshow" (1983).

"Chloe", set in an upstairs room of a pub, revealed a young Melbourne girl exposed to her first pornographic modelling job. Although it was difficult to judge the merits of the piece from the one scene presented, it was obvious that the subject matter, vernacular language and realistic production would lead to a 'verismo' style of Music Theatre. Henderson has worked extensively in Germany with Kagel but her ideas to explore the personal and social identities of a cross-section of Sydney's career women did not, in this first instance, reveal the influences of European Music Theatre developments based on the Performance Art tradition.

The Seymour Group affords opportunities, although sporadic, for contemporary Music Theatre repertoire to be exposed not only in a premiere situation, but to be reviewed in successive performances. Innovators of any kind of performing art need opportunities to see their work professionally realized and critically assessed many times over.
Question 1. Is there a need in Australia for a specialized contemporary Music Theatre ensemble to concentrate on the promotion of Australian works of this genre as repertoire pieces?

**Opera Mode**, a singers' co-operative, was set up to try to meet the needs for an ensemble specifically designed to generate, perform and promote contemporary Music Theatre repertoire. The inaugural season in 1984 opened with Gillian Whitehead's "Tristan and Iseult" (1978) followed by "Three's Company" (Antony Hopkins) and "Bluebeard's Castle" (Bartok), with a production of "The Consul" (Menotti) as a finale. The problems of funding such a venture led to a reduction in artistic standards most lamentably so in terms of the musical realization. There seemed little point in presenting a work of the musical stature of "Bluebeard's Castle" with only the aid of two pianos, organ and percussion.

Question 2. Should unsubsidized companies be responsible for the performance and promotion of contemporary Music Theatre works?

**Action Programme**, a Melbourne-based ensemble, presented Harrison Birtwistle's "Bow Down" (1977) and Michael Finnissy's "Vaudeville" (1982) in the new studio space of the Victorian Arts Centre. Unlike "Bow Down", which has enjoyed many performances, "Vaudeville" was found to be unsatisfactory when premiered in
England. Finnissy is currently reworking the piece and it is to be hoped that the details of the Australian performances were relayed to the composer in attempts to assist in the revision process.

Another group to air Music Theatre during the designated year of 1984 was The Australia Ensemble whose "Pierrot Lunaire" (Schoenberg) was interpreted by Jane Manning. This piece was presented within the concert context and thus relied solely on the consistency of Manning's dramatic vocal approach. This work has often been seen to be ambiguous in its demands for staging and costume but, recognized as a seminal work of the Music Theatre genre, it raises questions as to what constitutes Music Theatre for audiences of the Nineteen Eighties.

1.2. Selected Training Institutions.

Past generations of opera students at The Sydney Conservatorium of Music have not been exposed to a great deal of contemporary performance material. The recent appointment of Myer Fredman and the consequent changes in the curriculum have readdressed the balance between a concentration on traditional operatic repertoire and the building of a contemporary sensibility amongst the students.

"The King of the Other Country" (1984), a chamber opera composed
by Gillian Whitehead to a libretto by Fleur Adcock, was commissioned by the Opera School of The Sydney Conservatorium of Music according to a set of strict conditions. It was to be a work specially tailored to the vocal needs of particular students of the final year, but with the two leading roles written for professional singers. The orchestration was to be limited to the forces of a specific professional chamber music ensemble, Flederman, and to student composers/performers at The Conservatorium.

Presented as an allegory, the work drew on pagan elements of many European myths and included "the ideas of the parallel country under the hill, which may be fairy land or Hades, the abduction of the bride and the supernatural lapse of time in fairy land, echoes of Persephone and Pluto and of the wives of Bluebeard and so on --". The language of the libretto was essentially poetic rather than dramatic and the piece emerged as a slow-moving tableau without dramatic focus. The choice of subject matter offered little opportunity to explore issues of a contemporary nature and was surprising within the context of an era of outspoken feminism. A limited production budget imposed limitations on the realization of the work, keeping it within the 'fairyland' dimension.

Question 3. Should a training institution commission and attempt to realize new works given its limited resources?
A survey of programmes presented by other training institutions in
Australia revealed Queensland Conservatorium of Music as the
only other school of opera to present a contemporary Australian
Music Theatre work - "Bony Anderson" (Barry Conyngham).

Question 4. Do vocal training institutions avoid the issues of
contemporary Music Theatre repertoire?

1.3. A Selected Music Festival.

During 1984, The Adelaide Festival took the lead in encouraging
Australian contemporary Music Theatre. Although the main
contemporary events proved to be the Australian premiere
of two works "Lady Macbeth of Mzensk" (Shostakovitch), and "Kate
Kelly's Roadshow" (Cowle), these were supported by two pieces by
Australian composers. Robyn Archer's "Three Legends of Kra", a
strongly feminist saga, evolved as an example of community
pageant theatre. The score was the result of collaboration between
Archer, who devised the overall structure, and three music
co-ordinators. Audience involvement in the performance was
maximal.

Question 5. Is 'opera for the people' the only way to achieve
accessible contemporary Music Theatre?

A second offering, "Close to the Scaffold" was advertised as a
late night entertainment by The Singers Company of Adelaide. It was a collaborative piece which presented the ideas of director, Christopher Bell, and writer, Kate Brennan, together with those of the performers. The content was intended to examine the basic issues affecting operatic art from a singer's point of view.

The Adelaide Festival did encourage these two Fringe events, but in not commissioning or producing a major Australian work, the festival further promoted the idea that contemporary Australian Music Theatre should be a small scale, peripheral event, fit for late night entertainment or community participation, but not worthy of mainstream attention.

The Adelaide Festival is a 'broad-spectrum' festival and its management needs to consider many areas of interest in both the Visual and Performing Arts. There is a need for an Australian single-purpose festival of contemporary music which would gather all that was new in contemporary mainstream composition, including new Music Theatre and provide education and stimulation for both creative artists and audiences.

Question 6. Should festivals accept responsibility for commissioning and presenting new Music Theatre?
1.4. Selected Traditional Opera Companies.

The Australian Opera's history of involvement with contemporary Music Theatre has been minimal and 1984's programming was devoid of contemporary material altogether. However, during the course of the year, the Australian Opera made certain announcements which seemed to indicate a change in programming and commissioning policies. Plans for 1985 included Brian Howard's "Metamorphosis", originally commissioned by The Victoria State Opera in 1983, and Anne Boyd's children's opera, "The Little Mermaid".

As a corollary to these activities, the Australian Opera also announced the first National Opera Workshops in which the works of four selected Australian composers were to be presented by the members of the company. Composers were asked to submit a chamber opera of approximately forty minutes duration and/or a large scale work of which at least thirty minutes of a key section was to be complete in terms of vocal content and orchestration. Restrictions of a practical nature were imposed as to the demands for vocal and instrumental forces. i.e. Category One works were to use a maximum of six soloists and an orchestra of twelve without a chorus whilst Category Two works were not to exceed the demands of a standard repertory work such as "La Traviata". Statements from the management of the Australian Opera underlined - "that the 1985 Music Theatre
programme and activity schedule should serve as a model for planning similar activities in 1986 and subsequent years". (3)

However, in the same year it was also announced that "The Golem", written by Larry Sitsky in response to a commission by The Australian Opera in 1980, was deemed unsuitable for production. The problems, according to The Australian Opera, lay in the dramatic weaknesses of Gwen Harwood's libretto, extremes of vocal writing and excessive demands for a double chorus.

The approval of a work of the scale of "The Golem" and the consequent failure to mount the work as a result of an inadequate consultative process between the composer and the commissioning body, raises questions as to the structure and implementation of a traditional commissioning policy.

Question 7. Do commissioning policies bring forth the best examples of Music Theatre or does this encourage "ivory tower" composition?

Despite the failure of "The Golem" commission, other composers are still being encouraged to write opera and in 1984, Nigel Butterly was awarded The Australia Council Composer Fellowship to compose a two act opera, "Lawrence Hargrave Flying Alone", commissioned by the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music as a major Bi-Centennial project for 1988.
The Victorian State Opera Company has a long history of commissioning Australian composers to write opera and has been responsible for presenting eighteen contemporary Opera/Music Theatre works in the last seven years. The production of "Fly", written by Barry Conyngham and Murray Copland, as part of the inaugural season in the new Victoria Arts Centre, was a reflection of the management's conviction.

However, the General Manager of the company, Ken Mackenzie Forbes, made it clear that the policy of producing one contemporary opera per year for a limited season was a financial and artistic risk.

"Our responsibilities are to the singers and to our audiences, both of whom are not enamoured with Contemporary Opera. Australian composers have in the past not produced scores for audiences but Barry Conyngham has returned to a more lyrical style in recent years which will help audiences' acceptance of the genre".(4)

Despite the huge publicity campaign to introduce "Fly" as an accessible work, only one in three subscribers to the Victoria State Opera took up the option to purchase a ticket even at the low price of $7 in comparison with $125 subscription price for four traditional operas. After the three night season for "Fly", there were no further plans for productions in other state houses.
Question 8. Are traditional opera houses the most suitable venues for the performance of Contemporary Opera given that they are historically the 'bastions' of conservative taste?

1.5. An Australian Premiere - "FLY" (Conyngham).

"Hargrave --- still pursuing the idea of an albatross's wings as he surrounds himself with the husks of his former hopes."

Roger Covell.
(Sydney Morning Herald. 28th August, 1984.)

1.5.1. Background to the Work.

"Fly" (1981), written by Barry Conyngham to a libretto by Murray Copland, was the only new Australian Opera to be premiered during the study period. In Interview, both collaborators admitted a commitment to an Australian subject and chose to present Lawrence Hargrave, the Australian aviation experimenter, not only because he was a little known historical figure but because he exhibited traits which they considered were still evident in Australian culture today. Hargrave is for them the archetypal Australian, isolated from his colleagues, preferring to stay 'out of the race'; a man embodying that peculiar Australian
characteristic - "the self-defeating waywardness which stood in the way of his longing for fame and recognition and which is most often seen today as a fear of success". (5)

Conyngham and Copland have collaborated on a previous work, (Bony Anderson) and were comfortable in their understanding of the collaborative process. Initial concerns were the self-imposed parameters of the overall structure - a small cast and orchestra, the absence of a chorus and the limited use of electronics. The entire work was not to exceed sixty minutes.

1.5.2. The Textual Intention.

Despite the intention of the libretto, the autobiographical and biographical source material was not used as a stepping-off point for a discussion of a sociological nature but instead, the opera was devoted to 'the life and times' of the main character. This narrative approach together with a realistic approach to production (Copland also directed the opera) firmly placed "Fly" into the 'verismo opera' category and the focus shifted from the exploration of a man's obsessions to that of Hargrave, unsuccessful Australian.

The libretto was held together by the gradual unfolding of the lines of a poem (Milton's "Lycidas") each of which became the motivic material which sought resonance in the score.
1.5.3. The Musical Intention.

The score, in attempting to be accessible to regular subscribers of the operatic repertoire, reflected a traditional motivic approach. It concentrated on a lush orchestration which seemed to accompany, using many static ostinati, rather than develop the musical material. What resulted was - "an atmospheric opera with orchestral colour creating moods". The structural binding of the musical material was left to a series of poly-modal themes overlayed and juxtaposed throughout the two acts.

Some electronic material was used in a section entitled, 'Nocturne'. An echo machine was used to help create a surrealistic atmosphere for Hargrave's inner conflicts but remained rudimentary in its intention and presentation. The score did allow for a certain amount of flexibility especially in terms of orchestration where, according to Conyngham, he had intentionally overscored with a view to achieving an acoustic balance between singer and orchestra during rehearsal. The traditional emphasis on 'the voice' as the prime motivation for the opera and the consequent importance of a large lush vocal production, capable of filling the opera house, limited the possibilities for experimentation with the role of 'the voice'.

The success of the collaborative process was in evidence during the entire rehearsal period as Conyngham and Copland consulted
each other on textual and musical changes which, when ratified, became immediate.

This work raised questions as to the kinds of artistic decisions that contemporary opera creators should be making. A second set of questions is compiled below in addition to the set dealing with the more practical elements as set out within sections 1.1 to 1.4.

1.5.4. Artistic Considerations.

a) Should the subject material reflect contemporary universal issues?

b) Are there new ways of generating libretti other than those concerned with narrative?

c) Is there a new contemporary musical language better equipped to express the concept development inherent in dramatic works?

d) What is the place of new technology in stage works?

e) Is there a new profile for 'the voice', the traditional 'raison d'être' for the operatic genre?

f) Are there new mediums for Music Theatre other than the traditional theatre stage?
g) Does a bid for accessibility negate musico-dramatic innovation?

h) What are the relative merits of the collaborative process of generation as opposed to the composer as the sole generator of the work?

1.6. A Personal View.

In addition to the questions raised by these specific activities, the author was concerned to confront the general lack of a "spiritual core" within the approaches towards the generation of Music Theatre. Just as the "legitimate theatre" needed a re-appraisal of its origins and motivations, highlighted in the work of such innovators as Artaud and Grotowski, so new forms of Music Theatre need to be cognisant of Artaud's fundamental magic notion of theatre -

"---that the essence of the theatre is found neither in the narration of the event, nor in the discussion of a hypothesis with an audience, nor in the representation of life as it appears from the outside, nor even in a vision - but that theatre is an act carried out here and now --- that theatrical reality is instantaneous, not an illustration of life but something linked to life only by analogy---". (7)
NOTES.

1. Reference to "Fly" (Conyngham) premiered by The Victoria State Opera, August 25th, 1984.


4. Ken Mackenzie-Forbes in a personal interview with the author. (6. 8. 84.)

5. Murray Copland in a personal interview with the author. (10. 8. 84.)

6. Barry Conyngham in a personal interview with the author. (9. 8. 84.)

PART TWO

English Contemporary Music Theatre
(May, 1985 - May, 1986.)

"In current conditions, it is either a matter of full-scale new works at the major opera houses or nothing. Medium scale enterprises --- from which new talent can emerge away from glare of publicity and financial risk are sadly notable by their paucity".

Rodney Milner
(Opera Magazine, Sept, 1985.) (1)

The study of Music Theatre programmes offered during the above period was organized in accordance with the sections outlined in Part One. The considerations of the practicalities of the generation of new works were developed from a comparison with similar outlets for works of the genre in England (the small contemporary music ensemble/ music theatre ensemble; the training institution, the music festival and the traditional opera house). The questions posed in Australia were reinterpreted within this more culturally active environment.
In attempting to find answers as to where and how Music Theatre should be generated, the author selected two small Music Theatre companies and one emerging company to ascertain whether small ensembles could survive financially or whether budget constraints reduced the artistic viability of their work as witnessed in the case of the fledgling Opera Mode in Sydney, Australia.

Northern Music Theatre, formed in 1981, is - "a group of musicians dedicated to the performance of music which explores the possibilities of visual composition; works which are certainly not 'operatic' or fully theatrical but which develop the dramatic potential of language and sound". The Artistic Director of the group, Vic Hoyland, is a composer who has a sixteen year history of working in fringe theatre, collaborating with actors and dancers. During this period, he formed some very strong ideas about what he felt was necessary for the continuing development of the Music Theatre genre. The company was set up according to the principles of presenting specially commissioned work alongside European repertoire rarely seen in Britain.

The company attracted substantial funding in its first few years of existence from the Arts Council of Great Britain and various music funding bodies such as The Hinrichsen Foundation and The Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust. The German Embassy helped with the many productions of the work of Mauricio Kagel.
The fifty-member group included established composers and performers as well as post-graduate students, all of whom worked in many different aspects of this co-operative. The ensemble was involved with many festival programmes including the Musica series at The Institute for Contemporary Art in London and the Huddersfield Festival of Contemporary Music but also mounted its own performances in London and in York. With a wide ranging repertoire including Berio’s "Laborintus 2", Kagel’s "Kantrimiusik" and "Phonophonie", Stravinsky’s "L’Histoire du Soldat", Stockhausen’s "Kleine Harlequin" and Birtwistle’s "Down by the Greenwood Side" supplemented by commissions from Vic Hoyland ("Michelagniolo"), Philip Grange ("The Kingdom of Bones"), and David Sawer ("Oi"), the ensemble seemed to be fulfilling its promise "to establish Music Theatre as a viable, challenging and virile performance medium". 

However, true to historical precedence, this ensemble no sooner established itself than it was financially abandoned and its performances at the Bath Festival in June 1985 proved to be the last. Hopelessly underfunded and consequently under-rehearsed, the programme offered a conglomerate "Songs and Vaudeville by Ives and Satie" and Stravinsky’s "Ragtime", "Pribaoutki" and "Renard", none of which fulfilled expectations raised by such previous accolades as, "enough professionalism to plant itself firmly on the map and enough energy and versatility to make Music Theatre more than a period curiosity". 

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With the demise of Northern Music Theatre, another small group calling itself The Modern Music Theatre Troupe emerged. Under the auspices of "The British Opera in Retrospect Festival" of 1985, Paul Barker's new work "The Marriages of Zones 3, 4, and 5" was fully staged and funded ($6000 Aust.) by The Greater London Council in April 1985. Despite mixed revues as to its artistic viability, the work was then used to press home the necessity for an ensemble to fill the gap in the opera scene as commented upon by Rodney Milner in Opera Magazine (September, 1985) - "in current conditions, it is either a matter of full-scale new works at the major opera houses or nothing. Medium scale enterprises such as this from which new talent can emerge away from the glare of publicity and financial risk are sadly notable by their paucity". (5)

Noting the existence of an already well-established network promoting and presenting contemporary music and sometimes including forays into Music Theatre, the new group expressed faith in their ability to provide a platform for the exclusive performance of new Music Theatre works. In so doing, they set out to - "reaffirm the partnership between music, words and drama as a primitive, energetic and meaningful force of artistic expression". (6)

It was the consensus of opinion among the members of the group that the greatest single problem for inexperienced composers wanting to write Music Theatre pieces was the lack of a constant
experimental environment such as that which Mozart or Haydn had enjoyed. They saw the pressure to produce a first work which was deemed successful for the composer, audience and management alike as excessive and counterproductive. The aim of The Modern Music Theatre Troupe was therefore to create an environment for composers, conductors, directors, performers and most importantly, audience members, to see, hear and assess new works of Music Theatre.

Confident that the structure of this new ensemble would attract financial grants, the personnel set about implementing a two-pronged programme for 1986. A double-bill was planned for two one-act operas to be produced as part of the 1986 Camden Festival. The first of these, another work by Paul Barker entitled “Phantastes” after the book by George MacDonald, was to include a large children’s chorus to fulfill the groups’ commitment to attracting young audiences for Music Theatre. As a part of the same educational policy, school tours of this production were planned in which participation of the school children was envisaged.

The second half of the double-bill was open to composers in the form of a competition with strict constraints relating to cast (not exceeding six), ensemble (not exceeding ten), and a duration specified to be one hour. Composers were invited to submit a finished work or an outline of a project. A small commission fee was offered to help with the finishing of the project.
When interviewed regarding the results of the competition, the Artistic Director of the group, Paul Barker, was encouraged by the response in which thirty percent of the thirty works submitted were judged to be worth considering as pieces for future production if not suitable for this preliminary double-bill. He acknowledged the pitfalls of this method of generation of new work, admitting that not many composers had written Music Theatre works without a commission and given the time required to produce such a work, that not many composers would be willing to commit themselves with only a possibility of performance. He felt that this type of activity could attract funding but with the projected demise of The Greater London Council, it was not financially viable for a group such as theirs to actually commission works.

The actual fulfilment of the hopes and aspirations of this ensemble fell far below expectations. Limited by budget and the lack of artistic guidance from experienced Music Theatre personnel such as Northern Music Theatre had enjoyed, the programmes were rejected by audience and funding bodies alike. The parallels to the Australian problem were clear. Small fringe companies are not suitably equipped to generate new Music Theatre. They cannot survive without affiliation with a larger institution which can offer financial support and without which, artistic standards will remain poor and commissioning policies will falter.
One small fringe company did attach itself to a financially viable institution. In 1984, the independent Opera Factory joined with The London Sinfonietta in a joint venture to promote Music Theatre. Opera Factory, founded by David Freeman in London in 1981, is an experimental theatre ensemble looking for a new basis for Music Theatre. Central to performances of Opera Factory is the emphasis on the values of ensemble performance and the abilities of the performers themselves as singers, actors and dancers rather than those of elaborate productions and 'super-star' singers. Opera Factory is an attempt to develop a new form of Music Theatre experience in which the voice is but one of a number of expressive adjuncts.

The London Sinfonietta, formed in 1968, has an enviable reputation for commissioning new works. To date, the ensemble has given the world premieres of one hundred and seventy one works of which sixty five were specially commissioned. Moreover, this ensemble has been responsible for many activities which have as their aim the education of audiences for contemporary music. Already supported by The Arts Council of Great Britain, The London Orchestral Concert Board, The British Council, The British Broadcasting Corporation and The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, The London Sinfonietta was able to raise further finance for this joint Music Theatre venture through two new schemes.

The London Sinfonietta became the first recipient of a 'challenge sponsorship' ($Aust.200,000), given equally by I.B.M. United
Kingdom Trust and The Arts Council to be spread over a period of three years. Secondly, a private sponsor, Automatic Holland BV, was recognized by an award under the Minister for the Arts Business Sponsorship Initiative Scheme, which is administered by the Association of Business Sponsorship of the Arts. Such a joint venture as *Opera Factory London Sinfonietta* was definitely on a firm financial footing as it began its most recent project and seemed to have the confidence of audiences and critics alike in respect to its artistic aspirations and capabilities based on its first offerings.

"Altogether, it is a most auspicious start to the collaboration of orchestra and opera company; with luck it could become the permanent third force in British opera that is so badly needed." (7)

Such glowing accolades were to be followed twelve months later after the world premiere of *Opera Factory London Sinfonietta*’s first commissioned work with some of the most negative reviews ever recorded -

"Rarely can such flimsiness of text have been married to such flimsiness of music - the opera achieves a near-perfect balance in this respect." (8)

"The tragedy is that David Freeman's suburban Australian notion of what might shock and entertain an audience might just about stretch to a
ten minute skit in a student review. Inflated to
operatic length it is an extravagant abuse of the
considerable talents of his collaborators". (9)

The production of "Hell's Angels" revealed flaws in the way the
commissioning policy had been implemented. The Artistic Director
of The London Sinfonietta, Michael Viner, had taken it upon
himself to match up David Freeman (director and librettist) with
Nigel Osborne (composer), in an ill-fitting collaboration. The
situation was made worse in that Freeman, a controversial figure
of wild imaginings and a leaning towards sensationalism in his
directing techniques, was encouraged to write the libretto as
well. Nigel Osborne is by contrast, a restrained academic whose
music is well-imagined and minutely calculated. It was obvious
from the fruits of this collaboration that Freeman went ahead
with his plans to debunk the Roman Catholic Church without the
slightest concern for what the concept offered Osborne.

The libretto juxtaposes two episodes in the history of the Roman
Catholic Church; that of the corrupt court of the Borgia family and
the alleged murder of Pope John I. In each case, God and Satan
make a pact to punish mankind because of the activities of the
Papacy. The plagues of Syphilis in 1894 and Aids in 1984 are
to be visited on the earth in an effort to drive mankind back to a
superstitious awe of God.

Freeman acknowledges his sources as Oskar Panizza’s play,
"Das Liebeskonzil" (1893) and material taken from Italian press clippings plus well-documented utterances of the Pope. This consequent attention to realism of the text in the scenes on Earth, together with the colloquial style adopted for the heavenly sequences ensured a conversational tone in the libretto which was better suited to a play format.

Ex.1.
Jesus: "I'm sick to death of being slurped up by those lousy parasites. They sin away until they can hardly walk and then they turn to me". (Act I, Scene 8, Heaven).

As in the case of the Australian work, "Fly" (Conyngham), the libretto did not allow for the music to establish itself in its own right and it became incidental to the piece.

Osborne confessed to his disappointment with the score in an interview before the premiere with Nicholas Kenyon. - "It's a very unworthy piece; perhaps it will be thought light-weight though not spiritually, I hope". (10)

Much of the text was left as speech with no more than electronic drones as a backdrop interspersed with moments of percussion. A nine-piece orchestra positioned at the side of the stage helped provide atmospheres derived from plain song but the score failed to provide any moments of aria even when the libretto paused in its conversational tone to express some emotion as in the verses from "The Song Of Songs". (11) These were treated
sometimes with arioso but more often with a kind of truncated recitative which added to the incoherence of the piece especially in the moments of transition to speech.

This unsuccessful venture underlined the problems of limited collaboration. It is perhaps a dangerous practice for one artist to be responsible for the direction of his own libretto. There is no room to view the work dispassionately.

The decision of creative artists to work together in an innovatory unity of music, words, gesture and pacing as this genre demands, needs to be taken as a result of a commonality of philosophy and ideas and a desire to allow the work to evolve as it answers the respective demands of all aspects of its creation.

Of the small contemporary music ensembles active in England, a few specialize in presenting a small percentage of Music Theatre repertoire throughout their programmes. Such companies as London Sinfonietta, Endymion Ensemble and The Fires of London, included classics of the Music Theatre genre such as "Mahagonny Songspiel" (Kurt Weill), "Bow Down" (Harrison Birtwistle), and "The Blind Fiddler" (Peter Maxwell Davies) during the research period. The commissioning policy of The London Sinfonietta has already been discussed but other ensembles such as The Endymion Ensemble are not active in commissioning Music Theatre because of the lack of funds. In 1985, their Music Theatre programme was cancelled because of financial difficulties.
The history of *The Fires of London* is so inextricably bound up with the music of Maxwell Davies that it is limited in its commissioning policy to very few pieces for the theatre outside of this composer's work. Maxwell Davies has moved away from his period of prolific composition of this form recently and so the repertoire of *The Fires of London* remains static. When works are performed it is with the least amount of theatrical flair. This is not only the result of working to a small budget but the fact that the compositional intention of these works lies in a musical dominance over theatrical elements. This approach allows 'costumed' concert pieces to go on satisfying and justifying the label of Music Theatre.
2.2. A Training Institution Project - "Music and the Mask".

In addition to traditional music training institutions, England has a tradition of summer schools whose priority is the generation of contemporary music. The Dartington International Summer School has a deeply rooted tradition in the area of contemporary music. During the time that Peter Maxwell Davies was its Artistic Director, many new works were commissioned and performed.

Harrison Birtwistle has been associated with the Summer School over a long period and during 1985 returned as Composer-in-Residence and as the director of a collaborative Music Theatre project. This chapter is devoted to an in-depth study of the problems encountered during the explorations of the specific creative processes of the Music Theatre genre.

2.2.1. Background to the Work.

The project entitled "Music and the Mask" was clearly to be an intensely personal contribution by the composer; one in which he would share his fascination for the theatrical medium of the mask, which has been an inspiration and motivation for much of his music, and make definitive statements about his own approach to Music Theatre creation. The author was one of the group of twenty composers, musicians, actors, writers and dancers who were invited to apply for inclusion in this ensemble production. This exercise was to be an experiment in the 'theatre of memory'.
The following scenario was chosen by the composer: A group of old people living in an isolated village on an island off the north coast of England reveal both individually and collaboratively a violent incident from the past. (It is never made clear whether this is a recent past actually witnessed or a regurgitation of a story handed down as part of the island's history).

It was envisaged that the text would grow out of composite knowledge overlayed with personal interpretation. The contradictory statements and the repetition inherent in this scenario would provide the dramatic tension especially as the textual source material contained elements of pagan ritual. As a starting point, actors were to be given many versions of the old ballad "Sweet Sir Hugh" and over a period of time were to assemble and memorize an individual story kit. The action was to develop as the chorus of old people felt moved to divulge their version of the enticement and death of "Sweet Sir Hugh".

The music was to grow out of a necessity to make a musical statement and not to become incidental to the action. Composers were to be included in all preliminary exercises involving script construction and character organization in a spirit of total collaboration.

Staging possibilities were discussed within the confines of the mask tradition. It was considered that artificial characters were able to present a more vivid and concentrated image than was
possible in realistic theatre. This artificial world could best be realized through stylization of gesture, language and music and would necessitate the elimination of all naturalistic elements of production.

2.2.2. The Working Process.

(a) The Textual Intention.

In retrospect, it is clear that Birtwistle had come to a stage in his work with Music Theatre that necessitated an exploration of his own levels of skill in script construction. After having worked with a variety of librettists in varying degrees of collaboration, Birtwistle recognized that he needed a method of working that enabled simultaneous manipulation of the textual and musical material. The text for "Punch and Judy" was presented to Birtwistle by Stephen Pruslin after lengthy discussion with the composer but it was a finished product to which Birtwistle remained faithful. It was apparent that just as chance plays a large part in his musical organization, so chance should also shape the stage activity and text of his pieces.

During the preparations for "Yan Tan Tethera", Birtwistle experimented with the collaborative process and asked librettist, Tony Harrison, to provide a loosely constructed text rather than a formal structure. This allowed a less predictable approach and gave Birtwistle a chance to explore text within the context of
background and foreground material. The text became an integral part of the musical scheme; malleable and able to sidestep "the elaborate schemata of the initial idea". In conversation with his biographer, Michael Hall, Birtwistle underlined this point.

"In the process of composition you make contexts which are not necessarily concerned with it. Other things are thrown up which have a life of their own and are just as important -- situations occur when the music creates a counterpoint to the drama in ways I have not predicted -- the context of the moment is unique and must exert an influence, a strong influence.".

Aware of these desires to come to terms with an organic process from both a musical and textual standpoint, it was clear to the members of the group that Birtwistle wanted to apply his compositional devices to script construction in efforts to produce a totally integrated Music Theatre piece.

One of the oft-quoted Birtwistle maxims was that all elements should be based on "one central organizing principle". This translates as a logical process interpreted by the juxtaposition of illogical chance elements. Decision-making is thus reserved for high-level matters and the chance elements give rise to a wealth of spontaneous and fresh material. Taking a variety of versions of one ballad provided the group with a set of
rational linear progressions. When these stories were interpreted and segments of other versions were inserted during improvisational exercises, the element of chance provided a whole range of composite material. This led to experiments with juxtaposition and superimposition of verses upon a selected version, the fragmentation of verses and experiments with repetition patterns all based on the actor's intuitive interpretations. Just as isorhythmic processes do the routine work for the composer, so the development of interesting textual material progressed through the application of similar processes.

Performers were able to select material from 'mobiles' and order the delivery of lines according to random interference. Two examples of Birtwistle's previous musical manipulation of this device spring to mind. "For O, for O, the Hobbyhorse is Forgot" (1976) is an outline to be filled in by players in rehearsal or performance. Secondly, Birtwistle's "Pulse Sampler" (1981), gives a pulse 'mobile' to the claves player which consists of four rhythmic cells to be varied at will provided that the order is preserved.

Birtwistle's fascination with the notion of perpetual recurrence, as expressed by the isorhythmic device, led to an invention of an archaic world, in this instance, where each retelling of the tale by the ancients accompanied by disruptions and collisions in the material built an atmosphere of timelessness and negated all feeling of linear progression. In this respect, the finished product
could have been categorized as that of "Theatre of the Absurd".

Past, present and future activities within the ballad versions were juxtaposed in a random fashion as independent entities and as attempts to present a theatre of concrete images rather than a theatre of sequential events. In some respects, there was also a borrowing of film techniques in the use of frozen, slow or accelerated motion to convey subjective time; something less continuous, less predictable and less flexible than the time of the real world.

Perhaps the most obvious parallel with compositional devices in the construction of the text was in the use of varied ostinati. "All the root of my music is ostinato, varied ostinato --- when I create these contrapuntal ostinatos, one piled on another, I feel like a dry stone waller. You know that when the dry stone wallers pick up a stone they always find a place for it in the wall."(15)

During Improvisational exercises, text verses were piled one on top of the other as in the stone wall analogy. However, in the formalization process, many of the 'stones' were unfortunately discarded and the dimensions of the repetitive patterns were reduced.
Textual material for linking verses was developed along the same lines as the music of the hill in "Yan Tan Tethera" (1986). Instead of a straight repetition of the verse selected, the lines were manipulated each time they were used so that relationships were developed with adjacent statements.

The overriding consideration in the script construction was that of form. The "journey" involved a discovery of the means to present the story and the separation of "the rational and intuitive processes" involved. The answer was found in this instance in the manipulation of patterns for the generation of material and the exercising of choice and thus control over chance elements. "The problem is how to make use of ideas, how to proliferate them, and this needs more than intuition". (16)

(b) The Musical Intention.

Birtwistle's experiences at the National Theatre had led him to an opinion that unless the music was a total integration with the dramatic moment there was no real point in allowing it cosmetic space. Exercises were devised to help strip away preconceived ideas of incidental theatre music and to try and reduce musical utterances to bare necessities. In fact, composers were not called upon to write music until much time had been spent in stylized mime activities. The use of the mask necessitated a sparse musical response as well as sparse body gesture. Only after work within the context of 'the bare essentials' had been
undertaken could the group come to grips with the specific
tensions of working for Music Theatre.

One of the first problems to arise was therefore that of 'musical
redundancy. In matching the dramatic context to sounds and vice
versa, the musical exercises presented were found to be 'about' the
drama and not 'of' the drama. It was necessary therefore, to
isolate the functions of music as follows:

(a) music that is simultaneous.
(b) music that is reverberation.
(c) music that is an impetus to dramatic activity.
(d) music that allows silence.
(e) music that interjects.
(f) music that comments.
(g) music that contradicts.

Given a simple scenario, composers were asked to use only four
sounds which would amplify the dramatic content. Each scenario
was then analysed. Some sounds were foreign to the action which
in fact altered the motivation of the actors to the extent of
changing the whole sensation of tension. Other attempts revealed
sounds foreign to the musical texture whose jarring effect,
although contradictory, had not earnt the right to be so.

The problems of commenting on actors' entrances and exits were
also highlighted and the following questions raised:
(a) Was the music about the character coming on stage?
(b) Was the music about the environment?
(c) Was the music about the emotional state of the character already in focus?
(d) Did the music comment on the exit of a character?
(e) Did the music comment on the effect that the exit was having on the focussed character?

The actual interpolation of the sound came into question.

(a) Can a sound grow out of silence?
(b) Is there a technique for sound to be present in some preparatory way under dialogue so that statements have a base line?
(c) Does the sound need to accompany the entire dramatic "journey" or can it make its presence felt anywhere along the continuum?

Once such questions had been focussed upon, preparations were made to compose a score for the ballad of "Sweet Sir Hugh" which would make attempts to solve them. Cognizant of Birtwistle's preference for simple musical means, instruments were chosen which reflected the non-western influence of works such as "Bow Down". Composers concentrated on simple drum beats, hummed chords, drones and sparse writing for solo instruments which heightened a kabuki-like style.
Each composer was given the choice of isolating a contradictory element in the storyline and expanding it into a functional musical form. This, together with the fact that each composer added his own individual miniature, added to the overall contradictory nature of the work. Obviously problems arose in finding link material and in fact a unification of work only took place when two composers made a synthesis of individual materials and interpolated this quite heavily into the piece.

As Birtwistle helped to shape the musical form, the group was given a clear insight into Birtwistle's idea of "the multiple object". Instead of random numbers providing the chance element, random situations were based on individual preferences of composers whose varying levels of skill, experiences and expectations threw up a disparity of musical styles comparable to any computer-generated set of numbers. Form, then, grew out of Birtwistle's 'central organizing principle'; the script, despite its own contradictions, became 'the rational process' and the chance applications of musical miniatures, 'the irrational process'. The latter, however, only achieved a degree of autonomy and it was left to Birtwistle to demonstrate his intuitive manipulation of these elements into a workable structure.

Having satisfied one of the recurring themes of Birtwistle's work, that of the problems of 'transcending time' with a non-linear text construction, it was essential that the score also came to terms
with such things. Echoes and pre-echoes of material were found to be necessary. If events were returned to again and again and presented with distortions from other characters' points of view, then the musical repetitions also needed treatment.

As the work progressed, the problems of dramatic pacing became apparent. According to Hall, Birtwistle had come to terms with this problem by accepting the fact that whilst he wanted a greater fluidity for alternating between extremely fast gestures and motionless notes, an almost floating sensation, "in opera, control is paramount". Hall goes on to say that - "If his drama were to be paced, pulse would have to be re-instated". This required a synthesis of the regular and irregular, pulse plus organic additive rhythm. With these methods in mind, the group attempted to create atmospheres of tranquillity alongside violence and handled the whole concept of pace and dramatic temperature by altering the proportion of rhythmic cells.

Whilst recognizing that the aria and recitative had no place in this work, the whole question of the use of the voice was brought into focus in the following questions:

(a) Why sing when speech is more suitable?
(b) What extra elements can the singing voice bring to the dramatic context?
(c) In what context is ensemble vocal work valid?
(d) Should text be entrusted to a sung vocal line or should some type of sprechstimme be used?
(e) How can movement between dialogue and singing be fluid and natural?

The answers to these questions varied as composers made decisions based on their former experiences and expectations. The final result included many techniques:

(a) the simple sung ballad.
(b) complex rhythmic speech.
(c) the voice as an instrument to produce colour in sound clusters, harmonics and drones.
(d) vocal canons.
(e) accompanied and unaccompanied tunes.
(f) vocal montages of all these elements.

The emphasis on narrative of the ballad obviously suggested speech as the prime element and much time was spent investigating natural rhythms and pitch inherent in the patterns of the actions.

(c) The Production.

Not content with exploring the techniques of text construction, Birtwistle placed himself in the director's chair in efforts to fully realize an integrated piece. This obvious delight in the total
control of a piece of work underlined the usual confrontation between composer, librettist, and director. Birtwistle was able to keep the compositional elements of both text and score fluid as he manipulated atmospheres and activities on the stage. Incidents were pointed, re-focussed, subjected to spatial separation, fragmented, disintegrated and all within a context of immediate response by the members of the group.

The general atmosphere of the piece reflected Birtwistle's preference for the mystical, for the elements of pagan ritualism, and for contexts which have the weight of tradition behind them. The opening lines of the piece "Dark and dark, this drizzling day" were delivered with a sense of inevitability which set the gloom of the community of old people in direct response to the weather patterns and gave the narrative a supernatural aura.

It was obvious from the outset that the use of masks would require the elimination of naturalistic movement and the development of a concept of movement which mirrored the purposeful artificiality of the forms, language and music. The efforts to keep the visual elements consistent proved problematic. It was agreed that changes in pace would require characters to step out of community roles to actually act out the characters in the ballad. The following questions were raised:

(a) Could an old woman of the community become the little boy of the story with accompanying youthful gestures?
Would the audience accept movement between the world of the island and the world of the story?

Could the community be presenting an annual ritualistic telling of the tale?

These questions became more difficult to solve when the notion of dance was introduced. The age of the community had reduced all possibilities to a slow and intense dramatic temperature and solutions had to be found within these confines. The possibility of unison, stylized gestures for chorus movement was discussed as was the necessity for each character to have a specific repertoire of gesture that enabled audience recognition in the light of the mask convention. In fact, a great deal of time was spent in establishing each character from the mask and all activities and all utterances randomly suggested were accepted or rejected in the light of the developing mask.

The actual spatial organization of actors grew out of the need for single characters to step in and out of the community groupings. This resulted in many moments of stasis for the chorus and lowered the temperature of the piece even further. Although a dance element was introduced it became a ritual 'winding-sheet' activity, something which the women could feasibly have performed during their keening funeral preparations. This, at least provided movement interest with its intricate stepping patterns and the expanse of a white sheet within the context of a dull set and costuming provided an effective visual contrast.
Because the action was confined to a small stage area upon which limited groupings and effects were possible, it was agreed that some visual layering technique was necessary. The group referred to the ideas of the "Theatre of Cruelty" where total theatre involves the use of many elements from a variety of circus, music hall and cinematic sources. A gauze screen was constructed as a backdrop and huge grotesque effigies, disembodied heads and apparitions were set against the frozen poses of the chorus at given moments. Clever use of lighting effects enabled the screen area to act as a reflection of the thoughts and fears of the community. It became an eerie supernatural comment which intensified certain climactic moments and presented a more extreme version than was possible on stage.

Because of the lack of performing space, it was decided that the musicians would sit in a casual group to the right of the stage. Despite obvious parallels to Japanese Noh theatre practices, there was no interchange of roles between actors and musicians.

2.2.3. Reactions to the Project.

Having drawn parallels with "The Theatre of the Absurd" in relationship to form and structure of the piece and the influence of "The Theatre of Cruelty" in the staging, the group had worked very much within Harrison Birtwistle's personal idiom where Music Theatre deals with things outside of the real world, with things that are not readily put into words.
John Russel Taylor, in his definition of "The Theatre of Cruelty" says that it ought - "to liberate forces in audiences' subconscious --- by giving direct expression to their dreams and obsessions". (21)

Although subscribing to both these categories, the piece failed to fulfil its dramatic potential and remained a tableau depicting a frightening event; that of the ritualistic murder of a little boy. It never developed beyond a sequence of poetic images and whilst these were juxtaposed skilfully, dependence on 'form' as the overriding consideration for the construction of a work of Music Theatre did not provide sufficient dramatic content to maintain interest. The Birtwistle maxim - "It is how we tell it that is important" did not appear to ring true. (22)

Looking 'out' from the mask, one felt reduced to the level of one of Birtwistle's musical sections which he calls "objects", moving across one of his musical "landscapes". Given Birtwistle's ability to adapt the visual to the aural, it did not necessarily follow that a dramatic piece would emerge from this skill alone.

The reaction of the group, as a whole, was one of disappointment with this insubstantial plot which was more pointed because of familiarity with Birtwistle's work in this genre. Discussions with members of the group revealed expectations of allegorical material, role exchanges, events to symbolize moral, spiritual or psychological issues, conclusions which symbolize renewal,
conflicts between the ego and the collective unconscious and portrayal of offending individuals within an ordered community. From a personal point of view, the most disappointing aspect of the finished product was the absence of a climactic point of recognition and a consequent reversal of intention.

Moreover, the ideas generated by "The Theatre of Cruelty" and "The Theatre of the Absurd", did not receive the depth of treatment or extension necessary to promote any form of audience identification. This kind of theatre, usually seen to be a social manifestation, should, in fact, provoke participation. At no point could the piece be seen to involve the audience in anything more than passive observation.

The working process gave some fascinating insights into the solutions that Birtwistle has found for the Music Theatre genre. His ideas of ritual versus realism, the stylized gesture versus naturalism and the use of a Greek chorus convention, are his direct response and aversion to the influences of cinema and its naturalism, on theatre practices of today.

Throughout the project, it was obvious that a chorus community needed individual character depth to sustain interest. There was great difficulty in characters moving in and out of the chorus to express their individual thoughts. At these moments, naturalistic gesture crept in and was at odds with the mask. The community wanted to build relationships and this also induced a kind of realism not in keeping with the initial premise.
Despite attempts to reduce personal experiences and feelings in favour of formal structures, there seemed to be a need to express the personality of the character. It is interesting to note that despite the formality induced by both libretto and music on "Punch and Judy", the recent production by David Freeman and Opera Factory presented a naturalistic outworking of Punch's dilemma through realistic means. "A Tale Told Too Often" (the reworking of "Sweet Sir Hugh") needed a realistic exploration of elements of its story to provide an extra layer of meaning for the audience in preference to the one-dimensional world of the masked ancients.
2.3. Selected Music Festivals:

Two broad spectrum festivals were sampled in order to ascertain the extent to which a festival such as The Adelaide Festival should be commissioning or specifically encouraging the production of contemporary Music Theatre.

The Bath Festival has a history of presenting Music Theatre and has in recent years presented "The Martyrdom of St. Magnus" and "The Lighthouse" (Maxwell Davies), "Down By The Greenwood Side" (Birtwistle), "The Knot Garden" (Tippett) and "Renard" (Stravinsky).

According to Richard Evans, The Administrative Director, most of these contemporary works received a small but enthusiastic response bringing in 200-300 people for each of the two performances scheduled. The lack of a suitable venue and budgetary constraints restricted the encouragement of the genre to small pre-packaged productions and during the 1985 Festival, the management invited Northern Music Theatre to present a limited programme.

The Brighton Festival invited The Fires of London to mount a production of "Mr Punch" (Finnissy) and "Le Jongleur de Notre Dame" (Maxwell Davies) but The Artistic Director, Gavin Henderson, stated that - "the festival policy is more concerned with community-based opera which involves spectacle and the
collaborative activities of many of the local groups". (23)

However, specific contemporary music festivals do exist in England, three of which, MUSICA at The Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Almeida International Festival of Contemporary Music and Performance and The Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival were very much concerned with the promotion of Music Theatre.

MUSICA has been responsible for the British premieres of "Kantrilmusik" and "Mare Nostrum" (Kagel) and "Antigone Legend" (Rzewski) but no productions were presented in the 1985 series, nor planned for in 1986. When questioned about this, The Artistic Director, Adrian Jack, responded with the following -

"a lack of funds, the lack of a constant performing company and the consequent lack of coherence in the organization of personnel has limited the success of the ventures. If we had a permanent ensemble attached to the I.C.A. we could start to develop an annual Music Theatre contribution." (24)

Perhaps the most vital encouragement to the genre during 1985 was The Almeida International Festival of Contemporary Music and Performance which featured the European premiere of "Kopernikus" (Vivier), a programme by Electric Phoenix entitled "Operas for Electronics", "Music for Marsyas" (a piece of vocal theatre
assembled by the Roy Hart Theatre). The latter aimed at highlighting the voice in its attempts to "regain its primordial place". (25) This work, written by three members of the group presents "a crossroads where diverse influences - traditions, modernity, improvisation - meet in an unclassifiable but nonetheless homogeneous musical world". (26) The opera, on the other hand, was a meditation on a number of poetical thoughts which consequently excluded a narrative structure and inferred expression as symbolic ritual.

Pierre Audi, The Artistic Director of the Festival, was passionate about the role of the contemporary music festival in promoting Music Theatre -

"The Almeida's policy is to mount a new work each year and where possible, to commission a collaborative piece to evolve through the work of composer, librettist and director from conception to production." (27)

Audi sees the 'totalitarian' composer as the greatest problem of the genre. He is of the opinion that most composers are limited in their knowledge of the theatre and their own libretti are generally a reflection of the Greek or Shakespearian Theatre tradition which is their only reference point. This usually infers a ritualized/stylized material for their own operas. Audi considers that "opera is a love affair between two art forms and that if the partners are mismatched the result is a disaster". (28)
He underlined two major areas of concern. The importance of a collaboration involving a constantly evolving libretto and score and a finished product which was a reflection of this centuries' theatrical ideas.

The problems of funding such ventures even within a festival situation appear to be insurmountable. In the case of Vivier's opera, judged to be an artistic success, the 400 people who attended the two performances could never offset the 6,000 man hours spent on production alone. Such a project is always a financial drain on the total festival budget.

Despite its unlikely setting, The Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival has become a major forum for new music and exhibits an inquisitive attitude towards all forms of experimental Music Theatre. The 1984 Festival was dedicated to Music Theatre repertoire and featured the type of theatre which grows out of musical performance and which was found in such works as "Con Voce" (Kagel), the United Kingdom premiere of "Dressur" (Kagel), "Les Guetteurs de Sons" (Aperghis), "Dumb Show" (Hoyland), "Le Jongleur de Notre Dame" and "Vesali Icones" (Maxwell Davies) and an exploratory ensemble work by the group, Gemini.

The 1985 festival featured a newly commissioned piece of Music Theatre from what was primarily a theatre company. As part of the festival brief, the company were expected to hold open rehearsal/workshops where the working process was discussed
with interested members of the public. This gave opportunities to the author to match the aims of the company with their results as overviewed below.

2.3.1. A Festival Commission - "Tempest Now".

**T.N.T. Theatre Co-op** was founded in 1980 by a group of actors trained in the Grotowski tradition of theatre. A great deal of their early work grew out of their interest in the Commedia dell'Arte style and this flexible style led to exploration of the Music Hall medium. This, in turn, fostered a desire for a theatre style where music and drama were totally integrated. In 1984, **T.N.T.** began its collaboration with musicians and composer who felt that "contemporary music needed to engage a wider audience without sacrificing musical integrity".(29) This attitude tends to support the notion that Music Theatre could be a vehicle through which audiences come to a greater understanding of the complexities of the modern music idiom through heightened visual perception.

In planning for the work, "Tempest Now", the following requirements were considered essential:

(a) a flexible script at the outset to allow both the score and script to evolve and develop together;

(b) a positioning of instrumentalists as part of the action;
(c) the co-operation of actors to play and instrumentalists to act;

(d) a rigid equality of musical and theatrical elements.

"Tempest Now", according to the programme notes, is a response to Shakespeare's play rather than a version of it. The company were attracted to it "because it is both the most musical of Shakespeare's works and one in which he, himself, responds to the challenge of the discovery of the New World of America".\(^{30}\) The company were also interested in Shakespeare's use of tragi-comedy and his integration of music and magic into a believable world where characters express real emotion.

In aspiring to be a true ensemble company where scripts are developed through improvisation and music written as a response to the rehearsal process, the company lost focus on the finished product. A skilled director was needed to oversee the assembling of the piece at all stages and to ensure that while working towards equality, the product was not, in fact, weakened by compromise for the concept. Furthermore, the commitment to the interchanging of roles between the actors and musicians, seriously limited the piece and although there were sufficient expert musicians to allay the inherent frustrations for the composer, the musicians were totally out of their depth in the delivery of sometimes pivotal dialogue.
The idea of imbuing the instrument with a theatrical character and placing the instrumentalists in the midst of the scene raised many questions:

(a) Is it intrusion or illumination?

(b) Can dialogue and the instrument successfully feed off one another without destroying the physical focus?

(c) Will the inherent counterpoint of dialogue and instrumental line destroy the aural focus?

The actual performance of "Tempest Now" revealed the company's sincere attempts to come to grips with integrative Music Theatre. However, by committing themselves to a rigid equality of musical and theatrical elements, they produced limitations and confines in both areas which weakened the piece. This project was of interest because it offered insights into how the theatre world view Contemporary Music Theatre. The tradition of the composer as the sole generator of the work and the consequent dominance of musical elements has led to much work in the past which is devoid of theatricality. Perhaps there is merit in experimentation in Music Theatre from a theatrical viewpoint, away from the historical weight of operatic form.
2.4. Selected Traditional Opera Houses.

It was obvious that small regional opera companies were not sufficiently financially secure to have a commissioning policy or a production policy for contemporary works. Kent Opera seemed to be making some headway in this regard in its recently commissioned opera for children, entitled "The Black Spider" (Weir), which was presented in 1985, as well as their touring of a provoking production of "King Priam" (Tippett). Opera North did mount a production of "The Midsummer Marriage" (Tippett), but one surmises that this flurry of contemporary activity within the small traditional opera companies was more in line with the "Sir Michael Tippett 80th Birthday Celebration" than with a change in attitude towards a contemporary Music Theatre policy.

Glyndebourne Festival Opera did present their commissioned works, "Higglety Pigglety Popl" and "Where the Wild Things Are" (Knussen) during 1985 and plans for the future include a commission for a collaborative work from Nigel Osborne (composer), Craig Raine (librettist), and Peter Sellars (director), which is entitled "The Electrification of the Soviet Union" and based on Pasternak's novel "The Last Summer". (At the time of writing, this project had not met its deadline and had been 'shelved' for the new season). Glyndebourne Festival Opera has to be extremely careful of the choice of its repertoire in line with the profile of the company which promotes opera within the elite trappings of the Romantic tradition. Ticket sales indicate an
Interest in contemporary works only when the more traditional repertoire has been sold out. It seems that it is still 'the Glyndebourne experience' which is the important consideration.

The minimal commitment to new works displayed by The Australian Opera was also evident in the policies of The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Despite the recent joint commissioning of a work with The Savonlinna Opera Festival from the Finnish composer, Aulis Sallinen, ("The King Goes Forth to France"), and the British Premiere of "Donnerstag" (Stockhausen) during 1985, this company remains tied to its traditional policy of spending the majority of its budget on international singing stars and a lavish production style.

It is left, in the main, to The English National Opera to provide a home for new works of the genre within a company policy which sets out -

"to make understandable, enjoyable, thrilling, entertaining, provocative opera which is within the reach of everybody".\(^{(31)}\)

The company projects an innovative image through its policy of 'adventure':

"... because opera cannot survive by just resting on its laurels. For this you must not be gun-shy, lack courage. We reserve the right to fail".\(^{(32)}\)

Peter Jonas, Managing Director of the company, is realistic about
the economics of opera. Grant increases (A$13,000,000 from the Arts Council for the 1986-1987 season topped up by more than A$2,000,000 from Westminster City Council) have not kept pace with inflation. "The Arts being labour intensive and not benefitting from the microchip means that our inflation rate is rather higher than the national average". He reckons the inflation rate of the company to be 16% as against the national average of between 6% and 7%. The rise in grants to the company in the last two years represents a 6% increase leaving a 10% shortfall. "Despite all the economies, administrative and artistic that we've made, the situation is still parlous".

In order to try and increase audiences whilst not leading the company away from more serious works, The English National Opera have begun to implement a series of new policies unusual to the traditional opera house. This is in line with its aim to do more new works, fewer revivals and create an atmosphere in which the burden of responsibility with each new production lies in its artistic validity not on its status as a crucial investment in the company's future. The management is seeking a new rhythm of work which is both financially flexible and allows for an increasingly varied repertoire.

One of the new concepts recently put into practice was a series of low-budget productions (one per season) of interesting large-scale rarities staged for a single run of performances and never revived. So far, "Rienzi" (Wagner), "Mazeppa" (Tchaikovsky)
and "Moses" (Rossini), have been produced, and the enforced simplicity of these productions was felt by many critics to have strengthened the dramatic structure of all three works. Obviously, this approach takes pressure off the company by waiving the normal obligations of lengthy rehearsal (the chorus read from scores and were not integrated fully into the action) and expensive designs ("Mazeppa" in particular was produced with a 'poor theatre' approach). Moreover, the overwhelming success of this venture has raised questions as to the ritual of traditional operatic presentation.

In discussion with David Poutney, Director of Productions, as to the best way to commission new works, he expressed the opinion that the pitfalls of commissioning opera were many and that "the only real answer would be to rekindle the vital relationship that once existed between composer, theatre and public". He sees the company approaching this problem by instituting a new policy which involves the commissioning of a series of five new works. The cost of these new works is to be offset by offering the rights to a variety of television companies. The conditions and restrictions placed on the composers appear to be quite stringent.

"The idea although cynical in some terms is also extremely practical in that these works are to be written without chorus, not to last more than two hours of music, to have simple sets and no extraneous costly pieces of electronic equipment or eighty five bongo players - eventually, we
Poutney also plans to have the pieces performed in a studio format with piano accompaniment at least one year in advance so that composers have a chance to see potential problems. It will be interesting to see if the imposition of these stringent conditions and precautions ensure acceptance and survival of these works as economically viable repertoire pieces.

For Poutney, collaboration is essential and he plans to appoint directors to all five pieces as soon as details of the selection of composers are completed. These directors will be responsible for making sure that what eventuates is viable for the theatre. Moreover, he believes that a director should stamp the work with his own individuality because many contemporary composers, in his experience, are theatrically inept. In the case of Poutney’s recent production of “The Midsummer Marriage” (Tippett), he imposed an extremely intellectual style on a highly spiritual work.

“I don’t think that what Tippett envisaged is anything to do with what can be done on the stage. I don’t think he thinks that either.”

These forays into innovative yet cost-effective works, exist alongside a policy of economy in the reliance on ‘home-grown talent’. In this, the company attempts to fulfil the aim of a true
'Volksoper' and to create an homogeneous result in the quality of production, design and musical performance.

During the 1985-1986 season, the company presented 21 different productions within 204 performances. Of these, 8 were new, 2 were re-staged productions of operas not seen for some seasons and 11 were revivals. In addition to grants received from The Arts Council and The Greater London Council, The English National Opera amassed almost $Aust.1,000,000 in private sponsorship for the season. The year of study proved that this company was making sincere efforts to keep opera a viable expression of the twentieth century.

Of interest to the author were the British stage premiere of "Doctor Faust" (Busoni) only recently reconstructed by Antony Beaumont from sketches found in West Berlin and the production of "Akhnaten" (Glass) which enabled the American work to be seen within the context of British audience response. Further, the world premiere of "The Mask of Orpheus" (Birtwistle), allowed a comparison of the new directions of both the American and British schools of contemporary operatic composition as discussed in detail in Parts 3 and 5 of this thesis. Part 4 deals with the premiere of a representative of the European school, "Donnerstag Aus Licht" (Stockhausen) produced by Covent Garden, thus giving further opportunities for comparison.
Notes.

1. The comment by Rodney Milner that led to the setting up of The Modern Music Theatre Troupe during 1985.

2. Vic Hoyland, Artistic Director of Northern Music Theatre, in an personal interview with the author. (24. 10. 85.)


5. Rodney Milner op. cit.


11. "Hell's Angels" libretto - p. 34.


15. Hall, M. op. cit. p.149.


18. Ibid.


20. Ibid. p. 29.


23. Gavin Henderson in a personal interview with the author. (15. 3. 86.)

24. Adrian Jack in a personal interview with the author. (2. 1. 86.)


26. Ibid.

27. Pierre Audi in a personal interview with the author. (24. 10. 85.)

28. Ibid.

30. Ibid.


32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. David Poutney in a personal interview with the author. (29.5.85.)

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.
PART THREE

A Bid for Accessibility.

The London Premiere of "AKHNATEN" (Glass).

Philip Glass has evolved an approach to Music Theatre which places high priority on the accessibility of the product and in so doing, confronts many of the problems raised by the Australian examples researched. His main concerns centre on:

(a) the balance between the musical and theatrical elements,
(b) a musical language equipped to handle a large dramatic form,
(c) the reflection of the issues of our time.

With such accolades as "Glass Zeroes in on Opera as Theatre"(1), "Akhnaten Revives Mummified London Opera"(2), the work is seen by some to be breathing new life into the operatic tradition and thus "reuniting serious music with interested, emotionally committed young audiences". (3) On the other hand, the majority of London critics dismissed the work as simplistic pandering to those unable to cope with either the emotional world of the grand opera tradition or the complexities of modern music.

"Do let us continue to side with maximal music and indeed with the intellectual effort required to cope with it". (4)
3.1. Background to the Work

This preference for 'Intellectual music', as noted in this preamble, is the very attitude that Glass has been fighting since his days in Paris studying with Nadia Boulanger. Rejecting the twelve tone system, he sought a language which would bring emotional content to his work and make it immediately accessible to his public. He rejected pitch as an important element and concentrated on the building of chains of modular rhythmic patterns out of smaller units of two and three notes. He found the simplicity he admired in the additive rhythmic structures of the music of Ravi Shankar, the Indian sitarist.

Armed with this simple structure, Glass immersed himself in the Oriental practices of meditation. He was interested in writing music that reflected this trance-like state, i.e. music that was static in quality and free from the tension and release mechanisms of traditional Western music. The results of these experiences heralded a completely new meditational mode of perception, and ultimately, composition. Instrumental scores took on a 'non narrative' aspect and seemed to exist in another time frame. The way forward for music for the theatre seemed to develop naturally out of this new way of thinking and Glass began to experiment with slow-moving, pageant-like opera techniques.

This personal development was taking place within a community of painters, dancers, sculptors, designers, theatrical innovators and composers in Manhattan in the Sixties and early Seventies. Most
of Glass' early pieces were written for an avant-garde theatre company, Mabou Mines, and the title 'minimalism' used to represent his style came directly from the New York school of painting of that name. John Rockwell, commenting on this phenomenon explains that "the plethora of sixties paintings with analytically reductive, repetitive structures and simple, even childlike formal elements, all fed into a common pool of inspiration in lower Manhattan".(5)

When his 'childlike' music was rejected by the serious music world, Glass and his collaborators found venues for their expression in art galleries and dance lofts, thus linking their musical ideas to the newest ideas in related art forms. During this time, thought by some to reflect the activity of Paris in the 1920's, there was a firmly held belief that an artist need not be confined to a single area of specialization. Laurie Anderson worked as a sculptor before evolving her distinctive combination of music, narrative, film and slides. Robert Wilson, an innovative theatre director, experimented with a presentation "The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin" in which elements of painting, music, ballet and pantomime were explored over a twelve hour time span. Glass himself served as music director for Mabou Mines as it explored new means of expression for both dance and theatre. This total immersion in a community of artists remained for Glass an essential inspirational model.

His first opera, "Einstein on the Beach" (1976) was a collaboration with designer/director, Robert Wilson, and with its emphasis on
multimedia techniques, dance and pantomime, the piece that emerged was more akin to Performance Art than to traditional Opera. "Akhnaten" is a continuation of this process of cross-fertilization of related arts in both its content and compositional procedures.

3.2. The Textual Intention.

According to the libretto introduction, "Akhnaten" follows the Gandhi-inspired "Satyagraha" (1980), in aiming to be "not a story opera but an episodic symbolic portrait of a historical personality whose visionary ideas dramatically changed the world around him". The libretto consists of stage suggestions interspersed with the words for the minimal number of vocal ensembles and arias. The texts are culled from ancient inscriptions, prayers and hymns written in the original Hebrew, Egyptian and Akkadian (the extinct language of Babylon) with narration and other passages in the language of the audience.

The scenario is credited to the composer, designers, and director, as well as the historian/philologist who served as librettist, in line with Glass' collaborative thinking. The texts which are scattered throughout the work, without attempt to provide dramatic point or narrative shape, 'suggest' the rise and fall of Akhnaten. The intention to set the sequence of scenes within a timeless context finds its parallels in Stravinsky's use of Latin to set the myth of Oedipus and more recently in Birtwistle's "The
Mask of Orpheus" where an Orphic language is generated for its emotive power alone.

Examination of Glass' previous two operas reveal similar time frames. "Satyagraha" was sung in the original Sanskrit and taken from the Hindu epic "Bhavagad Gita". It depicts Gandhi's early career in South Africa but the story is revealed not by its dialogue or by direct narrative but by mime accompanied by analogous excerpts without concern for audience comprehension. "Einstein on the Beach" takes this notion one step further in that the libretto consists of abstract syllables and numbers seemingly unconnected to the danced or mimed incidents. The libretto for "Akhnaten" infers ritual with its attendant processions, dances and pantomime but makes no effort to present the story in clearly defined terms. Action is disallowed by its very meditative nature.

The choice of subject matter for all three of Glass' operas seems to suggest a strong belief in the medium as an expression of social issues. The fact that all three historical figures chosen as his heroes (Einstein, Gandhi, and Akhnaten) were all men proposing new perceptions within their fields of endeavour gives scope for suggestions for a contemporary readiness for and tolerance of change. Glass feels that people who command attention in the opera theatre "tend to be people who make compelling statements of a social kind - who affect the way we see the world". (7)
The organization of the subject material includes a prelude, three acts of three scenes each and an epilogue. A minimal amount of information is passed to the audience by a narrator. The opera opens with the funeral of Amenhotep III and the coronation of his son, Amenhotep IV later to become Akhnaten, the revolutionary pharaoh who discarded the traditional ways of Polytheism and introduced Monotheism in his worship of the one god, Aten. Akhnaten builds a city of the Horizon of Aten and loses himself in the worship of his god and the delights of family life. His rejection of the world outside leads to his eventual overthrow by the old priests of Amon. The opera concludes with the spirit of Akhnaten returning to haunt the ruins of his lost city.

There is an obvious relevance in this subject matter for Philip Glass and his new perceptions about music. He chose to write about a man who questioned the traditions of his past and radically overturned the culture of his time. No doubt Glass' rejection of the Boulez/Stockhausen traditions and his extreme reactionary ideas for opera based on an accessible popular style find parallels.

In a discussion with Paul Daniels, conductor of the London production of the work, these parallels were underlined - "Reactions to the work of such men as Akhnaten have often been extreme and nearsighted. As a composer, Glass has often been misunderstood, and we must be aware of the wide implications of his work". One suspects these implications to which he refers are the re-focussing of the directions of Music Theatre away from
the conventions of the past and towards a new style of theatrical event. Daniels continues this line of thinking in an article for "Opera".

"Nowadays, when it is fashionable to consider time spent thinking as time wasted, when the limits of language have usurped rather than complemented the infinite bounds of imagination, when audiences are increasingly spoon-fed by being assaulted with the dead-end 'art' of illustrative acting and illustrative producing, it will be a great adventure to watch and listen to this opera with new eyes and ears". (9)

3.3. The Musical Intention.

In coming to terms with the problems of the integration of musical and theatrical elements within this work, a curious paradox is uncovered. Whilst Glass sees a certain parallel in his rebellion against the 'establishment' contemporary music scene and that of Akhnaten's rebellion, his musical style cannot at any point register the dramatic changes within the work as Akhnaten rejects the old and embraces the new. If the score reflects a state of 'being' and not 'becoming' in the Oriental tradition, there is no scope for the music to reflect the stage pictures. Instead, these elements remain independant.
According to Paul Griffiths, writing in "Classical Music", this independence renders the effect of this kind of Music Theatre null and void.

"Stage activity and sound are linked only in that they occur at the same time, and by disregarding causality both disregard intelligibility too. and though art has always contrived to expand what is known, it has always contrived to do so in ways that can be understood. In the twentieth century these ways have become notoriously more difficult to find, but I know of no artist who has so abruptly cut himself off from the comprehensible than Glass". (10)

The subject matter of "Akhnaten" seems to offer an ideal opportunity for Glass to break out of the minimal 'straight jacket' and move towards a much more personal style. This opera is firmly entrenched in Glass' formulae of the Seventies in that all the scenes conform to rhythmic and harmonic criteria and elucidation or resonance of the text remains a secondary consideration. It is a work upon which the musical processes of 'minimalism' are imposed as the end in themselves.

The dramatic elements are never allowed to suggest a suitable musical treatment. This disparity of words and music tends to suggest that the score falls into the category of incidental theatre music rather than integrative Music Theatre.
"Akhnaten" is written for a conventional orchestra but Glass eschews the violin section. The percussion section is enlarged to accommodate celeste, synthesizer, tubular bells and tom toms. The orchestra is responsible for large portions of exposed performance and it is in this respect that the difficulties arise. A piece as rhythmically repetitive as "Akhnaten" needs performers who can generate a common pulse. The trance-like state of the performers of Steve Reich's "Music for Sixteen Instruments" provides a good example of this discipline. The difficulties of a pit orchestra, no matter the quality of the individual players, become obvious when required to play within this mantric world and follow a conductor's beat. What results is a generalized feel for the pulse quite out of place within the strictly structured unison rhythms.

The three principal singing roles of Akhnaten (counter-tenor), Queen Tye (coloratura soprano), and Nefertiti (mezzo-soprano) are often joined in duos or trios but the counterpoint is rudimentary. Instead, a great deal of the musical material is written for rhythmic and melodic unison or parallel movement. There is an instrumental approach to the vocal writing with much singing on vowels to add colour and atmosphere. Only at the close of Act II during the Hymn to Aten does Akhnaten sing an aria which could be described as lyrical.

The whole emphasis on the voice as a primary element to the opera has been discarded in favour of atmospheric partnering of vocal and instrumental sounds. The three sub-principals, Horemhab
(baritone), Aye (bass), and Amon High Priest (tenor) function as a small ensemble as do the six daughters and the small chorus of eight priests. A large chorus of mixed voices is also used both on and off stage. The musical palette is consequently varied by the group configuration rather than intricate counterpoint.

The inclusion of a narrator in the original concept underlines Glass' firm belief in a spoken dialogue solution to the problem of recitative. To avoid the cliche of a 'chatty opera' the important dramatic points are made during spoken passages. These are sometimes spoken in silence, sometimes accompanied. The nature of the music with its slow unfolding process and the arrangement of the spoken material into verse, allows the speech and song to flow directly in and out of each other. The score serves as both background and foreground. Glass' next opera, based on Doris Lessing's "The Making of the Representative for Planet 8", will contain thirty percent dialogue. Obviously, as Glass moves into the literary tradition he will need to come to terms with the problems of giving information and in this respect "Akhnaten" is a transitional piece. It will be interesting to see if the new work more closely resembles the American Musical tradition than its precursors evolved from the Performance Art tradition.

According to Alexander Roth, Glass has "tuned in to man's most primitive and elemental impulses - the beat of the human heart and the bodily cycles of breathing and movement". These impulses are evident in his use of a constant metre, ostinati, pedal bass drones and cyclical rhythmical processes.
In conversation with Glass, he admitted that the basis for his work was still repetition but that he is now experimenting with his own form of polytonal or polymelodic writing. He is of the opinion that there is still much to be explored within the tonal system and that his best scores are yet to come.

3.4. The Production

The task of realizing this work has fallen on two directors to date whose two approaches have given opportunities to examine in some depth the space left by this 'compilation' opera for imaginative production. Such differences in the two production styles of Achim Freyer and David Freeman and the theatrical viability of each, seems to suggest that this new approach to Music Theatre also infers a work that is constantly evolving; whose score and text are simple enough to provide the scaffolding for completely new works each time they are produced.

Perhaps this heralds a movement away from the traditional operatic work where score and libretto often limit a producer's interpretation and disallow his individual creative input. A word from the composer at the beginning of the libretto states - "this printed libretto represents the conception of the opera as originally intended by its creators. It is possible that different productions will depart in some detail from the descriptions contained herein". (12)
3.4.1. Achim Freyer's Realization.

When the work was premiered in Stuttgart, Achim Freyer, a student of Bertold Brecht, chose to emphasize the political aspects of the work. Within his interpretation, the story of Akhnaten becomes a reflection of contemporary German history and Akhnaten himself as the use and abuse of power.

As an artist, Freyer was interested in the work primarily as performance art. Characters were not developed but became integral to the visual rituals portrayed. Startling visual images such as the magical black box which engulfed the funeral procession of Amenhotep and whose mirrored face cracked open at the coronation of Akhnaten in the first act provided the audience with a total theatre experience. The cruelty and brutality of Fascism was played out against the obsessive nature of much of the score. Much of the imagery was sub-textural and the juxtaposition of the military uniforms and the Egyptian costumes added to the timelessness of the paralleled consequences of history. Even those sections of the work which called for action outside of the ritual were interpreted according to visual arts concepts. i.e. the building of the city was presented by the Narrator as he wheeled in a tennis court marker and under ultra-violet light proceeded to mark the boundaries of the city. Dancers entered and with the help of iridescent poles and ropes began to construct an abstract design.
It is interesting to note the parallels between the Akhnaten revolution and Achim Freyer's production style. During the pharoah's seventeen year reign, visual arts developed away from the traditional iconography and into a more natural representation of the pharoah and his lifestyle. A new spirit abounded and was most evident in the layout of the new city with its huge sun-lit sanctuaries.

This new attitude towards space and freedom for artists to experiment strikes resonances in the modern attitudes towards more visually-oriented productions of opera as espoused by directors such as Freyer. It is not surprising therefore, that Glass' operas have become more popular in Europe where the Performance Art tradition has its roots and not in America or England, so firmly based in a literary theatre tradition. Thus far, Glass has not been commissioned by an American opera house and relies on those of Germany and The Netherlands to provide him with the necessary support.

In Glass' opinion -

"the people who run opera houses need to take a new look at what writing opera is all about today. What I consider the most important and contemporary aspects of my operas is that they are not plays set to music - which is what most opera has been until now. That's where mine make their greatest contribution - not in terms of musical language, but in the fact that they make
certain assumptions about the state of contemporary theatre that most opera producers are ignorant of"\(^{(13)}\). 

He goes on to expound the premise that most people working in contemporary 'legitimate' theatre are drawing their inspiration from ideas, drawings, poems or images and are not interested in working from a script commissioned from a playwright. 

This kind of thinking is not new, present as it was in the work of The Living Theatre almost thirty years ago. Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman and Meredith Monk are all inheritors and developers of this non-literary theatre and their influence on Glass is obvious in his approach to opera. 

3.4.2. David Freeman's Realization. 

For David Freeman, knowledge of this approach to the writing of "Akhnaten" did not result in a production fashioned on ideas and images but one which would meet the expectations of American and British audiences complete with story line and character delineation. He described the opera as "a choral ballet"\(^{(14)}\) and consequently wanted to add action and reaction to the ritual of the work which would underline the personal relationships of the characters and heighten the emotional content. He saw in the work the tragic story of a 'man - child' who transformed the world for reasons that he himself did not fully understand. Unlike Freyer, who used the libretto as a skeleton onto which his own
interpretations of history were placed, Freeman presented the story as close to the facts as we know them. His research provided many sub-textual elements which enriched the bare facts of the pharaoh's life. He concentrated on four main elements: the Oedipal side of the story as outlined by Immanuel Velikovsky; the opinions that Akhnaten was an hermaphrodite; the opinions expressed by Drs. M. Ameline and P. Querey in 1920 that the physical characteristics of Akhnaten and his offspring were due to lipodystrophy; the customs and rituals as described in "The Book of the Dead".

Throughout the work, Freeman fleshed out the static moments with improvised movement sequences. The Window of Appearances (Act I, Scene III) is described in the libretto as an appearance of Akhnaten immediately after his coronation accompanied by his mother, Queen Tye and his new wife, Nefertiti. The music for this static scene did not indicate the kind of ritual to be presented and so Freeman introduced action which illustrated the overthrow of the old regime and the introduction of the first elements of the new culture.

The entire scene was choreographed, based on improvisation by the cast, with a symbolically defiant pattern of stepping which corresponded to the uneven pattern of bars in the score. Tye and Nefertiti join Akhnaten in the dance but the High Priest of Amon refuses to be a part of the dance. There is much crossing of the Nile (a practical river on the stage) by Aye, the advisor to the pharaoh, but who finally succumbs to the hypnotic stepping
patterns. The trio of pharoah, mother and wife circle amongst the trappings of the funeral procession and begin to destroy the old emblems of religion.

Freeman's work in the theatre is characterized by attention to the building of relationships and the uncovering of the psychological layers that make the character interesting to an audience. His production of Birtwistle's "Punch and Judy" delved into the delinquent Punch's psyche although the work had been written as a ritual piece. His approach to the production of Akhnaten was to structure the whole ritual around the infantile, physiologically and psychologically deformed nature of the pharoah. The 'man-child' is depicted clinging to his mother or his wife and spending a great deal of time playing in the sand. This sand-play image was continued as Akhnaten and his followers build the new city of Akhetaten as castles in the sand. When the city is destroyed by the old priests, these images of a child's world are destroyed with an adult's revenge. By developing this theme, Freeman diminished the figure of Akhnaten as both a religious figure and cultural revolutionary and ruled out the possibilities of grand ritual. Instead, he was able to fill out the scenes with details of characterization and the personal relationships thus uncovered.

Freeman felt that he had to find a convention to deal with Glass' musical repetition within large spans of time. He superimposed an image that would control the production in terms of continuity and at the same time focus on the qualities of 'eternal Egypt', unchanged by the ideas of men.
Three repetitive activities were selected and the tableaux of making mud bricks, the winnowing of wheat and the wrestling of athletes were present on stage throughout the whole production. The symbolic engulfing of Akhnaten by these wrestlers at the end of the opera further reinforced the production concept of the futility of man's efforts against the spirit of 'eternal Egypt' and echoed the sentiments of Shelley in his poem "Ozymandias".

It is interesting to note that no production to date includes the 'continuity image' of the funeral procession which occurs in the original libretto at the end of both Acts I and III. This is obviously a highly personal image for Glass who mentions this omission often in conversation. The image is a focus on the understanding of the ancient liturgical text "In the middle of life we are encompassed by death". (15) Glass has expressed an interest in producing the opera himself in order to re-address the balance and re-instate this theme.

Freeman makes comment on this in his statement that "composers sometimes specify images but they are not necessarily the best images for realizing the piece". (16) This desire of the director to make a powerful statement as an artist in his own right is an attitude which is gaining ground especially within the last fifteen years. No longer satisfied to be an interpreter, the modern opera director is seeking works which provide scope for his skills. In this respect, Akhnaten provides a bare scenario for the working out of illuministic magic in the case of Freyer and the invention of a mystical but real society for Freeman.
3.5. An Accessible Music Theatre.

In attempting to uncover the reasons why Akhnaten was sold out a month before opening night when it was staged by the city opera in New York and why English National Opera were recording exceptional numbers of advance bookings it is necessary to acknowledge that Glass has become a 'cult' figure. No other contemporary composer rates this popularity as evidenced by the fact that his most recent record album enjoyed sales of over one hundred thousand.

Akhnaten is definitely not a minority appeal opera. A Philip Glass audience is anything but homogeneous. Glass seems to have straddled the gulf separating serious composers and 'pop' artists, appealing to both classical and rock audiences. His popularity is caught up in the commercial world of record contracts and international touring with his own ensemble. He performs rock concerts for large audiences in such 'establishment' venues as Carnegie Hall and accepts commissions for large scale works from traditional opera houses. All this constitutes a determined effort to make his work financially viable.

For his colleague-composers of 'serious art music', this courting of wider audiences is seen to be an unwelcome divergence from the Romantic ideal of the individual artist working far ahead of the intellectual capabilities of the public. After losing $U.S. 100,000 on his first opera, judged to be an artistic success, Glass realized the amount of work to be done in 'wooing' the
public back to a relationship with the composer. He made
decisions to involve himself in the marketplace, to strive to find
a balance between entertaining yet stimulating forms for Music
Theatre, to try to express issues of universal appeal and above all
to come to terms with the fact that complexity does not equal
excellence. Akhnaten is for Glass an extension of these decisions.

Philip Glass is not the first composer to challenge the direction of
Music Theatre. Strong parallels can be drawn with Stravinsky,
Orff, Janacek and Satie. "Socrate" (Satie) exhibits a re-thinking
of the process of communication in theatre. The musical language
is both contained and lyrical and the means sparse. Glass has
made an attempt to re-focus the developments of Music Theatre
much as Satie did in the Nineteen Twenties and The Florentine
Camerata did in the seventeenth century. Whether he is to
discover a way forward personally or prepare the way for a
Monteverdi is a matter for the music historians. For John
Rockwell, opera critic for the New York Times,

"Glass represents a healthy alternative to the
gnomic self-involvement of too many otherwise
important present-day composers."(17)
NOTES.


7. Philip Glass in a personal interview with the author. (10.6.85.)

8. Paul Daniels in a personal interview with the author. (12.6.85.)


14. David Freeman in a personal interview with the author. (19. 6. 85.)

15. Philip Glass in a personal interview with the author. (10. 6. 85.)

16. Freeman, D. op. cit.

PART FOUR

The Composer as Sole Generator of the Work.

The London Premiere of "DONNERSTAG AUS LICHT" (Stockhausen)

The criticism of "gnomic self-involvement" (1) is one that could possibly be aimed at Karlheinz Stockhausen as he attempts to compose, in Wagner-like proportions, his definitive Music Theatre work, "Licht". This work is an operatic cycle using the days of the week as inspiration for the building of a sacred ritual complete with its own iconography and personal mythology. Stockhausen has been working on the project since 1977 and has so far produced two works - "Samstag" and "Donnerstag". "Donnerstag aus Licht" had its British premiere at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in 1985, tightly controlled in all aspects of production by Stockhausen himself.

This work is an interesting foil to "Akhnaten" generated as it was without collaborators in the tradition of 'ivory-tower' composition. Credits are listed in the libretto as follows - "Music, libretto, dance, actions and gestures by Karlheinz Stockhausen."

There are obvious dangers in presenting purely personal images in a dramatic work. However, Stockhausen magnifies the problem by generating all aspects of the work by serial musical processes without the tempering influences of specialists such as librettists, choreographers or directors to guide these processes.
into some universally comprehensible form. The atmosphere created during the presentation of the work is consequently didactic without the 'feed-in' 'feed-back' processes which ultimately create theatre. It appears that the further Stockhausen moves into the solitary creative process, the more complex the relationships of music, text, gesture and actions become. To find a way through these 'mystical' concepts it is essential to study some of the works written prior to the operas.

4.1. Background to the Work

In an article entitled "Stockhausen's Path to Opera",(2) Peter Britton sets forward the ideas that three works, "Mantra"(1970), "Inori"(1974), and "Srius"(1976) were the forerunners of "Donnerstag". In these works, Stockhausen developed an enthusiasm for the melodic line which inevitably allowed him access into the dramatico-musical world. In "Mantra", he devised a row as a set melody with clearly definable characteristics and then investigated the possibilities of the melody determining other aspects of structure. "Inori" developed this technique even further by allowing a series of prayer gestures to evolve from the melody along with controls over tempi, dynamics and timbres. The word "Formel" was then applied to this melody 'control' which in turn became the factor able to control the entire broad sweep of the work. Further work in "Srius" explored the many ways these melodies could be transformed and resulted in the inspiration to
compose "Licht" according to the "Formel Blueprint" as summarized in the following "Tone von Licht". (Further details are provided in Appendix B.)

Ex. 1.
4.2. The Musical Intention.

It is obvious from the example that the whole cycle is controlled by the melodies of the three main characters - Eva, Michael and Luzifer. "Donnerstag" is Michael's day and his melody is dominant. The other two melodies allow for cross-fertilization as they react to and act upon the principal melody. Moreover, each melody character has three manifestations - an instrument, a singer and a dancer. Michael is represented by a trumpet, a tenor and a dancer as he develops from childhood, is 'rejected of men' during his many travels and finally returns to Heaven. His 'aura' is always bright, coloured as it were by dynamic decorative elements. Examples of these fluctuations in intensity occur most notably in the passages of virtuosic trumpet performance for Michael's Examination II (Act I, Scene II). As the jury makes encouraging noises, the trumpeter improvises around the extended performance techniques of toneless tremolo, hissing without tone, hissing through the mouth-piece and using unusual mute techniques.

Eva plays the dual role of Mother and lover. Her lessons are those of inspiration and creativity and her soprano manifestation teaches Michael about dance and song. As Mondeva she teaches him about love. Michael responds to her in this context as she manifests herself as a basset horn. Fluctuations in pitch provide this character with decorative elements as in the mother's extended vocal techniques (Act I, Scene I) when she attempts to teach Michael to speak. Often notes are preceeded by glissandi,
trills and wide interval acclacatura. The basset horn exhibits much decorative work in its bird-sound improvizatory passages (Act I, Scene II).

A bass baritone, a trombone and a dancer represent Luzifer. His manifestations infer a duality between his role as Michael’s father and the devil. His ‘aura’ of formalism and aggression finds expression in a school masterly father, obsessed with facts, hunting and warfare. The ‘formel’ designates him silent in Act II but he emerges again in Act III to challenge Michael to a battle to the death. His obsessive nature is translated into rhythmic decorative elements including irregular sprechstimme patterns and repeated counting of prime numbers (Act I, Scene I).

Despite the complexities of the overall ‘formel’ for the opera, it is clear that every relationship and transformation of relationship between these three characters has an internal logic within the structure. All dramatic elements grow out of purely musical considerations engineered by the composer and one must ask the question as to whether these musical games might overtake his sense of theatre.

The score is totally controlled by Stockhausen from a mixing console which allows him to alter dynamics, the physical placement and the reverberation of the sound, throughout the performance. The pre-recorded electronic drone which opens the piece and continues to offer coherence throughout the work, is
based on the pitch centres for Michael, Eva and Luzifer as set out by the 'formel' for the entire cycle. This taped drone is a recording and mixing of a trumpet focusing on Michael's top 'C', a basset horn on Eva's 'Bb' and the 'C#' of Luzifer played on trombone. Dynamic and timbral variations provide the interest.

Another technique which becomes more obvious as the work progresses is the sound of the taped invisible choir which is used to reflect and expand ideas put forward in 'real time', eg. the tongue click of Michael (Act I, Scene 1) takes on new powerful colours when repeated 'en masse' by the chorus on tape.

The two tapes provide a backdrop against which the amplified sounds of the soloists are manipulated. This reliance on amplification requires the co-operation and specialized skill of a new breed of opera singer, a performer who is interested in fulfilling the concepts of the composer and not afraid to give up the total control of their sound.

4.3. The Textual Intention.

As a result of the non-collaborative nature of the project and the fact that the libretto emerges as a reflection of the musical processes, a great deal of background reading and preparation is necessary for audience members. There are interesting parallels with Birtwistle's "The Mask of Orpheus" (to be discussed later in this thesis). Both appear complex and unintelligible as they
open with the lessons of speech and song and deal with the magical transaction of inspiration and creation. Both work with extended vocal techniques and use words in a disjointed, association-play fashion. This gives opportunities to reflect on words from different angles and to create new words from interchanged syllables. In the case of "Donnerstag", Stockhausen moves one step further and allows the whole of the text to be caught up in complex word games and in so doing destroys any notions of a balance between the dramatic and musical elements.

The following discussion of the libretto is included to help clarify the degree to which the concepts of the opera are designated by the 'formel' principal and the degree to which their inspiration grows out of a highly personal set of experiences and beliefs.

4.3.1. Libretto Synopsis.

(a) Act I

Scene I deals with Michael's childhood and parallels the unhappy events of Stockhausen's own childhood. (His mother was incarcerated as a mental patient and then exterminated by the Nazis. His father, a village schoolmaster, was drafted into the army and killed in service).

Scene II reveals mother in her madness and Stockhausen expresses this in virtuosic vocal techniques and invented language at figure V. in the libretto.
Ex. 2.

MOTHER: Do you (hisses witch-like) [:tshiu:] (x6) 
(shivers, anxiously looks around).
hiui...
(lips fluttering; breathes loudly in triplets)

FATHER: Do you (whistles voicelessly)
f/u.... [:pui-u:] (x3) - f/u.

As the mother is dragged away by medical orderlies, she utters the pivotal lines of the opera – "Son of heaven, stay always faithful to music". This is a highly personal utterance which directs the audience's thoughts to Stockhausen himself as the protagonist, Michael.

Throughout the libretto there is meticulous attention to directions for stage action and, in fact, even the visual images required. An example of this desire for total control over the presentation of the work occurs at figure VII in the libretto.

Ex. 3.

(Two figures disguised in black bring an enormous photograph of FATHER - in right profile, as an armed officer [steel helmet, knapsack etc] with mouth wide open, in an attacking stance to the right - and place it in front of FATHER. FATHER'S head is visible [also in right profile] inside the mouth of the cardboard soldier. In the following scene, 'MOON-EVE', a second FATHER performer, who has
the same uniform on as the cardboard figure, moves out from behind the right side of the photograph to fight: attack, defence, falling down, standing up. At the same time, a trombone "shoots" occasionally out of the cardboard figure at the invisible enemy to the right.)

Because these directions are so intrinsically a part of the musical structure they must be followed to the letter. There is consequently no space for constructive criticism or re-interpretation of the composer's visual images by the director. In the case of the London premiere, the avant-garde theatre director, Michael Bogdanov, became subserviant to the demands of the work and clearly gave in to the sometimes theatrically naive images.

Scene III acts as a recapitulation of the exposition and development of Scenes I and II. All the libretto material is repeated but this time the recollections of childhood undergo different treatments, as Michael tells the stories from the viewpoint of his mother, his father and himself. The musical attributes of the characters direct the text as he is examined as a singer, a trumpeter and a dancer as the reincarnation of 'three in one' (the dancer is controlled by the other two character elements).

The jury play games based on anagrams of Michael and Eva, and explore word associations with extended vocal techniques on the
words Donnerstag, Thor, Michael, Jove and Jupiter. The examination sees Michael miming the recognizable actions of his father's world whilst playing his trumpet. The vocal line of the father from Scene I is now translated into extended trumpet techniques.

During Michael's final examination, there is total control of the dancer through the musical processes thus negating the need for a choreographer. Different sections of the dancer's body are controlled by the tenor (movements of the head and right hand are controlled by the elements of the vocal line) while the trumpeter controls the movements of the left hand, chest, abdomen, hips and buttocks. Stockhausen extends his serial control over the dancer by determining the spatial placement at all times.

Ex. 4.

"The dancing area is divided from left to right as a chromatic scale of twelve steps and from the front to the back as a scale of 7 degrees of loudness: ppp (at the back) -pp-p-mp-f-ff-fff(at the front). On this grid, Michael dances his youth in precise parallel with rhythms, melodies, volume and timbres (=hand gestures) in three part polyphony."

The level of complexity and the prescriptive nature of the instructions serves to reduce the dance element to a mathematical set of gestures whose ability to reinforce and highlight emotion within the work is questionable. Moreover, the means by which
the gestures are generated is not made clear to the audience who therefore do not share in this highly personal set of images. Moreover, professional dancers in interview, expressed grave doubts as to the feasibility of a faithful interpretation.

The act concludes with Michael’s pronouncement of another pivotal concept of the opera -

"Helpless was I born from the womb of human mother, to be recognized, heard, understood, perhaps lived by you. And when you are moved in your heart through my voice, you love God, the most wonderful musician." (5)

It is interesting to note that pronouncements of this kind occur spasmodically throughout the text without either preparation or further development.

(b) Act II.

The entire act is concerned with Michael’s "Journey Around the World" expressed in a virtuosic solo trumpet line pitted against a small chamber ensemble. The act is devoid of any textual material and the audience is left to surmise that within each of the stopping off points Michael has some kind of 'experience' with the inhabitants. The stage action is limited to the token appearance of folk dressed in national costume who ‘wonder’ at the sight of the lone trumpeter. The only visual image which provides
a focus for the act is the huge revolving globe which carries Michael to different destinations. The theatre becomes a concert platform, the costumes and set adding only a cosmetic theatrical layer.

The seven stations provide opportunities to colour the landscapes with cliches of national music, eg. the third station, Japan, features harmonium, harp, geisha-bell, bongo drum, kaisu and tam-tams to provide a backdrop for the duelling between ensemble and soloist.

Descriptions in the libretto of the activities of the instrumentalists at this point are highly emotive and underline the composer's belief that musical game-playing is dramatically sound.

Ex. 6.

"The globe stops! From now on Michael blows his trumpet into the bell of the tuba, bending over with every note, trill, glissando, fragment of the melody and with every flutter-tongue. The tuba roars, flutters, trills, accentuates and with the last 3 clear top F sharps of the trumpet it bellows horribly in three cascading glissandi - the third throughout its entire range. Then the tuba groans repeatedly in ascending - descending chromatic fragments".\(^{6}\)
The idea of instrumentalists supplying the action is carried even further when during the “Crucifixion” segment it is suggested that the final confrontation between trombones and tubas and horns serves to “nail down” the melodies of Michael and Moon Eva who are heard in the distance.

None of the references to the Seven Stations of the Cross are obvious without in-depth study of the libretto and as the act moves to a close by way of an “Ascension” segment, the only clue as to what is happening to Michael and Moon Eva is the positioning of the amplified sound from speakers high above the audience where the two exchanged formulae are manipulated until they appear to glide and revolve, finally merging into one.

By entrusting an entire act to a single parameter, Stockhausen expresses faith in his ‘formel’ principle. He is obviously convinced by this stage that the audience is thoroughly cognizant of the three character melodies in both nucleus and decorated stages and will be able to perceive and appreciate exchanges of the material.

(c) Act III.

The first scene in Act III opens with the festivities to greet Michael on his return to Heaven. Invisible choirs and on stage choral groups together with the full orchestra welcome Michael in a greeting hymn “Michael, Son of God. Guardian Spirit of Man’s Light”. (7)
The dancer Michael leads the chorus in a gestural greeting and Eva announces three compositions of light. This is the signal for random syllable games by the on-stage chorus based on star signs they have been assigned in the libretto. The invisible chorus echoes random prime numbers reminiscent of the father figure. At this point, an unheralded 'old woman' enters and utters - 'Come back home, all of you'; a toy tank is launched and the devil arrives on the scene. Such cryptic references are not explained and the audience is launched swiftly into a full-scale battle between Michael and the Dragon-Devil played out on the trumpet and trombone. On his defeat, Luzifer's voice is panned around the theatre sounding above the polyrhythmic ritornelli of the invisible choir.

After the festivities of Scene I, the gesture element of the 'formel' is further explored. Stockhausen goes to great lengths to explain the symbols used in the section entitled "Vision" which stem from his first experiments with prayer gestures in "Inori". The dancer uses this highly serialized set of gestures to link the tenor and the trumpet manifestations of Michael and in so doing, clarify the spirit of the sounds and the words. The following example shows the precision with which Stockhausen presents the gestures required.

Ex. 6.

`Hand like, but only the tips of the middle fingers touch each other, hands and arms in a straight line form an angle of ca. 70'. As the arms open out like this, hands bend inwards at the wrist at this angle`. 
This notation has been developed by the composer himself and requires in-depth discussion with him in order to adjust personal interpretations to the original concepts. It is interesting to note that Stockhausen eschews the more universally accepted forms of choreographic notation already in existence. The use of Laban notation to describe his vocabulary of movement may have facilitated rehearsal procedures and given a collaborating choreographer the opportunity to introduce another dimension into the dance element. It is also interesting to note that none of the gesture episodes in the performance of the work appeared to bear any relationship with any other element despite their growth from the musical processes and their referential symbolism.

The act closes with further musical games as Michael relives the vision of seven moments in his life played out as shadow plays. At the beginning of each he sings relevant words whose first letters light up the seven letters of his name.

Ex. 7.

MELODIES of childhood with Mother and Father; INTENSITY of love through Moon Eva; CHROMATICISM of the soul through examination; HARMONY of the languages in his journey; AUDIOGRAMMAR of the emotions in the Crucifixion; ECSTASY of polyphony in the Ascension; LIGHT of the Resurrection at the return home.\(^{10}\)

This is an obvious recapitulation technique which stretches the plausibility of the subject matter, but allows Michael the final
explanation of the opera.

"---As child to come from a human mother's womb to grow, to learn, to strive, childlike to invent games with sounds, which even in their human form move the souls of angels: that is the meaning of THURSDAY from LIGHT". (11)

Perhaps the true nature of the concept for the entire work is revealed in the phrase "to invent games with sound --- that is the meaning of THURSDAY from LIGHT". Such a simple admission seems to negate the philosophical basis for the opera which Stockhausen insists is apparent as he searches for an ideal of human happiness.


However we view the work, questions must be raised as to whether a Music Theatre audience is interested in viewing the musical scaffolding as an end in itself and whether this form work is devised in such an idiosyncratic fashion, without the benefits of collaboration, to the extent that it is rendered unintelligible for all those members of the public whose background does not enable them to share in the musical wizardry.

Moreover, such a work written in a highly personal idiom ultimately brings production problems, which in turn affect the cost factors. Stockhausen has made provision for this in
surrounding himself with a small ensemble of soloists, including three of his own children, whose commitment to the work ensures the many hours of rehearsal that this complex work requires but which would prove financially prohibitive in any repertoire-based opera company. Stockhausen also claims that the involvement of his children is integral to his working process. In this sense, they replace the concept of a creative collaborative team with a performance-oriented collaboration, by inspiring his work with their artistry and providing living proof for Stockhausen of man's capacity for renewal. Perhaps he sees them as a transformation and growth of a complex human harmony which finds its expression in the complex textures and patterns of "Donnerstag".
NOTES.


3. Ex. 1. Ibid.

4. Libretto of "Donnerstag" figure V14.

5. Libretto of "Donnerstag"- '3rd Examination' I.

6. Ex.5. Libretto of "Donnerstag" - 'The 6th Station'.

7. Libretto of "Donnerstag" - 'Festival'- 1st Scene.

8. During the vocal explorations of 'Leo', the old woman walks up the aisle from the audience and delivers the lines.

9. Ex. 6. Explanations of some of the symbols used in the section entitled 'Vision'.
10. Ex. 7. As each of the words are sung, their first letters are illuminated to form the word Michael, in neon.

11. After the 7th Shadow Play, the 3 Michaels address the audience.
PART FIVE

Monumental Music Theatre

The London premiere of "THE MASK OF ORPHEUS" (Birtwistle)

Such an overview of new works for the operatic stage as previously discussed, especially in terms of Philip Glass' "Akhnaten" and Stockhausen's "Donnerstag", seem to support the opinion of Bayan Northcott that new directions for the Music Theatre genre lie in "ritualistic, anti-subjective operatic spectacles of vast slowness and length". (1) "The Mask of Orpheus" appears to fall neatly into this category but examination of the background to the work shows it to be, in fact, a 'source opera' for these new directions.

5.1. Background to the Work

"The Mask of Orpheus" has had a long gestation period. The actual work of composing "The Mask of Orpheus" began in 1970 when Peter Hall commissioned it for Covent Garden. The first two acts were completed between 1973 and 1975 but Covent Garden had by this time abandoned the project as had Glyndebourne. Birtwistle's style had obviously undergone considerable change during this time as evidenced by his concert pieces. Alongside the hard-edged formal blocks of "Verses for Ensembles" there appeared the softening lyricism evident in such works as "Nenia,
the Death of Orpheus (1970). The latter, together with another 'orpic' piece, "The Fields of Sorrow" (1971), gives rise to the opinion that Birtwistle used these pieces as studies for the main work. The composer denies this oversimplification of his working procedures and states categorically that these were works of "instrumental theatre" in their own right. However, it is a fact that these works displayed the overwhelming interest in the subject matter that was to be the final operatic product and were inextricably bound up with it.

When urged by English National Opera to complete the work, Birtwistle was loathe to pick up the threads of a ten year old work. The third act was finished between 1981 and 1983 during his period at The National Theatre and whilst he was writing the music for a production of "The Orestia". The generation of a rhythmic accompaniment to speech patterns for the latter, enabled him to explore his interest in Greek mythology and the relationships between speech and music, and provided the solutions he had originally set out to find in "The Mask of Orpheus". Furthermore, he, by his own admission, had "lost his (my) theatrical innocence". There was great difficulty in coming to terms with Acts I and II and in welding the past to the present.

During the prolonged period away from the work, Birtwistle completed more than twenty other works. "The Triumph of Time" (1972) and "---agm---" (1979) are obviously the work of the same composer but there is a definite change in emphasis which is
paralleled in the dense orchestral textures and elaborate vocal writing of Acts I and II of "The Mask of Orpheus" and the economic more highly organized and articulated work of Act III.

The collaborative process began with initial discussions with Peter Zinovieff, an early researcher into computer music who was responsible for the ideas behind the electronics if not the actual realization or execution and was interested in constructing a libretto based on Birtwistle's compositional notions. Birtwistle, in turn, needed someone whose primary interests were the proportions of the work and whose concerns with formal structures would produce detailed schemes. Zinovieff appeared to be such a person. The libretto was tightly controlled by Birtwistle and completed before he began to write the score. According to Paul Driver -

"Peter Zinovieff supplied Birtwistle with the kind of intellectually over-determined and minutely formalized libretto which, on the evidence of his first opera, "Punch and Judy", he needs for compositional stimulus".\(^{(4)}\)

The electronics component of the score was realized by the collaborative efforts of Birtwistle and Barry Anderson at L'Institut de Recherche et Co-ordination Acoustique/Musique (hitherto referred to as IRCAM) in Paris.

Nigel Osborne, in his article "Orpheus In Paris", remarks on the
reciprocal relationship of the collaborators and likens Birtwistle to "the agent provocateur, the designer of imaginary instruments, the composer of protocols" and Anderson to "the instrument maker, performer and extemporiser". (5)

Barry Anderson, a pioneer of British electronic music and a composer in his own right, firmly believes in the adage that "new media demand new ways of working". (6) His total commitment to providing the electronic means to satisfy Birtwistle's explicit demands resulted in material thought by many composers at IRCAM to stretch the boundaries of available technology and portray with great authenticity the musical language of Birtwistle within new parameters.

Originally, Birtwistle had planned only small episodes for electronics but as the work progressed, especially using the "Chant" programme developed by Xavier Rodet and Yves Potard, the taped voice of Apollo became the central issue of the piece rather eclipsing the background 'auras' and the dance accompaniment interludes.

5.2. The Textual Intention.

Given that the original brief to the librettist was to write material in blocks which would then be subjected to various forms of transformation and repetition without historical reference or precedence, it was clear that the libretto would be the servant of
the musical form. When read separately, the libretto provides few clues as to the directions of the opera but instead, concentrates on the provision of meditative poetic groupings of words seemingly unrelated to each other or to the thread of cyclical mythical material.

Ex. 1.

"The 11th arch is of weather of temperament. It flakes. To control. It destroys the simple hillside. The arch of terror. It pulls moons into memory. I see the paper dawn. Limb flakes. Dry spiders".(7)

This does not infer that the choice of the images was random. On the contrary, all material grew out of a strict adherance to the rules of the "orphic" structure. Both composer and librettist felt that as the audience was already familiar with the story of Orpheus, they would approach the work open to the multiplicity and layering of the material.

Research for the libretto takes into consideration every aspect of the Orpheus legend known today. Zinovieff endeavoured to include all of the following stories:

(a) the birth of music, science, art and theology;

(b) the teachings of Orpheus against Dionysian religious practices and the acceptance and worship of one god - Apollo;
(c) Orpheus' power through his music;

(d) Orpheus' journeys with the Argonauts;

(e) the loss of the mystical poems which contained the meaning of life and the universe;

(f) the story of Orpheus' love and loss of Euridice;

(g) the many versions of the death of Orpheus;

(h) Orpheus' ultimate rejection of women;

(i) Orpheus as a prophet and near-god;

(j) the skull of Orpheus as the oracle at Lesbos;

(k) the jealousy of Apollo in silencing the remains of Orpheus and the transformation and transition from a man to a god.

The emphasis on 'Orphism' and its characteristic dualism of Apollonian and Dionysian forces, is found in many stories of Greek mythology. The stories of Lycurgus, the king of Thrace, and Pentheus, the king of Thebes as sung about by Orpheus in Ovid's "Metamorphosis", become episodes which are used as adjuncts to the main story of the opera. They are presented as mimed events outside the main action and occur at random intervals throughout
the work. No attempts are made to make them integral to the piece.

Zinovieff further points out that -

"the orphic inheritance is used to express a constant dialogue between the lyrical and violent, love and hate, man and woman, the future and the past and the real and the unreal". (8)

This duality is expressed in the libretto by a change from speech to song and as a gradual transition of man to myth or in real terms, from singer to puppet version of the character. There is a consequent movement towards greater stylization as the work progresses. Simple words are exchanged for an invented language. The word 'recitative' encompasses the recognizable man-like speech patterns and 'aria' is used for sounds more distant in time or more distorted. There is no attempt to structure the libretto using the conventions of traditional opera. On the contrary, great care is taken to generate material from the imposed structures.

Another outcome of the research into Orphism is the generation of an "Orphic" language used by Orpheus in his magic songs. This invented language is based on phonetics derived from the words 'Orpheus' and 'Euridice' and is also used in the electronic creation of the voice of Apollo, reinforcing the notion of Orpheus and Apollo as manifestations of the same identity.
If there is any linear development within the work, it is the gradual process of evolution of music, as personified by Orpheus, and his final destruction. This theme is the overall envelope in which sub-structures function.

The libretto is supposedly true to Orphic symbolism in that it is highly trinitarian. There are three scenes within three acts and three main characters, each of which is represented by three stage personae (man-singer, hero-myth, mime-puppet). The lesser roles of the women, priests and furies are all grouped in threes and even the sound sources (orchestra, singers and electronics) fit into this triadic organization. The supporting stories from Greek mythology are arranged into three sequences each of Dionysian "Passing Clouds of Abandon" and Apollonian "Flowers of Reason".

The internal organization of the libretto adheres to a strict formalism in that each significant event in the opera is given a specific name. There are one hundred and twenty six names divided into forty two groups of three. These are timed exactly to fit in with the Orphic structure. They may be songs such as The Songs of Magic or moments of drama as in the three Whispers of Change and signify the moments that should be noticed in performance. They are also the only guide for the director as to the emotional climate of the scene at any given time.

Each act is dominated by a sub-structure which determines the action. In Act I it is the sub-structure of "Ceremony" that controls
the piece. The marriage and the funeral are performed by The Troupe of Ceremony and are echoed again in Act III as Orpheus is sacrificed and eaten. They are Dionysian ritual dances.

Act II is controlled by a form consisting of seventeen Arches crossing a valley. This allegorical structure represents the nightmares of Orpheus as he dreams he is descending to the Underworld to retrieve Euridice. Zinovieff points out that -

"the dimensions of the arches (which narrow as they cross the valley), the materials from which they are made, their colours and the images seen through them, determine the nature of the dreams which Orpheus has and give rise to very precise musical and verbal timings". (9)

Words, music and action are disparate elements within the act held together by the Arches. (A chart appears in Appendix C).

The third act is controlled by another conceptual structure entitled "The Tides". The words spring from emotional associations made from six symbolic objects lying on a beach. These objects are covered and uncovered in accord with the moon's effect on the frequency and rise and fall of the tides, eg. a footprint, a fossil shell. The uncovering of an object sparks off one of the many versions of Orpheus' death. (The chart of the tides is included for reference in Appendix C).
The Intentions for the realization of the work were laid down in a rigorous fashion both in the instructions within the score and in the specially prepared introduction and synopsis written by Zinovieff. Included are charts and illustrations to provide clues as to directional procedures. The librettist is adamant that all aspects of the work's logic are derived from what is known of Orphism.

"this can be seen in the words and action where each gesture, adjective or suggestion and, in the music, where each event from a pause to a major ensemble is tied into the specific plan. For "Orpheus" to be successfully performed it is vital that the visual representation allows the unfolding and clarification of this plan to become obvious and the symbiosis of what is seen and heard to become apparent". (10)

5.3. The Musical Intention

Birtwistle sees himself as the generator of 'total theatre'. During the Dartington International Summer School project (as previously discussed) he developed a libretto himself based on his compositional techniques and is planning to extend his control to the actual staging of his works. With these facts in mind, it is difficult to see the music and the libretto of "The Mask of Orpheus" as separate entities. Birtwistle's input into the structure of the libretto ensured a formalism which he was able to reflect in the music in minute detail.
It is a well-documented fact that "The Mask of Orpheus" began life as a musical concept in search of a story line. Primary considerations were with the Faust legend but when Birtwistle's overwhelming interest in Greek mythology asserted itself, it was an easy task to interchange the subject matter of the work leaving the form intact. - "It is not important what we tell but how we tell it".(11)

Birtwistle describes his approach to composition for the theatre in an interview with Michael Hall.

"The way that the theatre speaks has to match the way that the music speaks. Essentially, I'm concerned with repetition, with going over and over the same event from different angles so that a multi-dimensional musical object is created, an object which contains a number of contradictions as well as a number of perspectives. I don't create linear music, I move in circles; more precisely, I move in concentric circles".(12)

The myth of Orpheus is multi-dimensional and rich in contradictory material which strikes at the very core of Birtwistle's approach to composition - his adherence to the philosophy put forward by Boethius - "music is number made audible".(13)
In past Music Theatre pieces, Birtwistle has maintained links with traditional musical forms albeit in a transformed state. Chorales, toccatas and gavottes provided the formality in "Punch and Judy" needed to hold the work together. In the new opera it was the composer's intention to re-interpret the old forms of 'aria' and 'recitative' in a way that would totally sever links with operatic form. The traditional moment of emotion expressed became the singing component of the Orpheus character while the movement of the action forward became the province of Orpheus mime. The third perspective, Orpheus puppet, was intended to supply yet another dimension and in fact, take over the other two as the work increased in formality.

Birtwistle also intended an overall structure where the orchestra worked at odds with the action on stage. It is only in the climax of Act III that the two come together to work an apotheosis. The composer likens this development to the Noh plays of Japan where the orchestra plays a dual role, responding to stage events but possessing an exclusive and formal sub-structure of its own.

His commitment to the exploration of time, visible in many works, finds another outlet in "The Mask of Orpheus". Peter Zinovieff states that the opera is concerned with three aspects of time -

"unending time, manifested time and unborn time. In "The Mask of Orpheus", time is expressed through memory, as echoes and distortions--- the
music, words and actions repeat previous sections or anticipate future ones. There are echoes and pre-echoes that persist throughout. The first words are almost the same as the last.\(^{(14)}\)

Once this preoccupation with time is understood, then the motivation for the music and its subsequent reliance on time-generated structures begins to make sense.

Decisions regarding the orchestra were taken by Birtwistle in accordance with his preference for wind and brass instruments. These were supplemented by three electric instruments - the mandolin, guitar, bass guitar and an invented instrument, the 'Noh harp'. The score requires seven percussion players to cope with the huge battery of effects and a vocal chorus of sixteen which functions as a part of the orchestra. Pre-recorded, computer-generated tapes provide tapestries of sound.

In accordance with the triadic structure, three kinds of electronics are used. The first kind of material was generated within well-established parameters. By using the 4A digital synthesizer designed by Guiseppe di Guigno, Birtwistle and Anderson built up resonant sound spectra or 'auras' entitled Summer, Spring, Bees and Tides. The effect of these 'auras' is that of a slowly evolving sound which provides a backdrop to the orchestral colour and invokes atmospheres.
The second process used involved the sampling of the attack segment of harp sounds at different pitches and configurations and the reduction of these to their smallest components. Birtwistle then supervised the mutations of this material to create the segments for the mimed myths which interrupt the main action and Apollo's 'angry harp' segments which appear as the composer's 'wild card' throughout the score.

Perhaps the most arresting element of the music, that of the voice of Apollo, owes its genesis to chance. Birtwistle was able to harness the explorations of Jean-Baptiste Barriere and the 'chant' programme at IRCAM, after hearing some examples of the work over the communal system. By taking a computer-constructed model of the human voice and feeding it words constructed by the logic of 'Orphism', the voice of Apollo took on a supernatural power which would have been impossible to create by any other means. Throughout the work, the words "OFOFARIF" (remember), "DREID" (speak), "RUFI" (love), command Orpheus' attention and provide articulation points for the musical form.

The use of many new vocal techniques reflects the interests of composers in exploring the whole range of vocal capabilities and the breaking down of the lyrical line associated with traditional operatic form. Because one of the main themes in Orpheus is the birth of language and song, the opening of the opera provides a perfect environment for experimentation with vowels and
consonants of speech patterns as well as the usage of Sprechstimme and song fragments.

Ex. 2.

```
I remember the snuffling

The king stands alone (king) The mast (still mast) still, (him self) snuffling

Rohm: 1

The reason (ab) i i i i (ill) m

(h) i s m

(k) n n n (g) (s) t t (ill) t (oo)
```

(15)
5.4. The Production

Ritual within the theatre demands a visual approach that is spectacular; one that will fill in the gaps left by a static acting style and provide a rich sub-text to feed the audience's imagination. Jocelyn Herbert, the designer, had provided the masks for "The Oresteia" and Birtwistle was satisfied that she shared his design concept for the new work.

The use of mask was intended to explore two major areas. Firstly, it was intended as a device to distance the players from the audience and allow a contemplation of the action rather than a pursuance of it. Secondly, it was to create a non-naturalistic set of characters existing within a ritualistic and stylized environment and in so doing attempt to recreate the elements of Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty". The masks grew in size from the half mask of Orpheus Singer to a full mask for the mime representation and finally, a huge extended mask for the puppet manifestation. All other details of the costumes for these three personae were identical, thus reinforcing the libretto concept of 'three in one'.

Herbert's stage designs for "The Mask of Orpheus" were sparse but striking and attempts were made to parallel the primitive, austere, enigmatic quality of the music in both sets and costumes. The majority of the intricate stage directions, as set
down by Birtwistle and Zinovieff, were passed over in favour of an almost naive set dominated by a golden disc on the cyclorama and a length of blue cloth which unfurled to represent a river. Costumes for the characters of the main action evoked an African/Island primitivism and contrasted with the classical Greek tunics of the dance troupe who appeared as if from a set of Attic vases.

David Freeman, the director, is renowned for his naturalistic stage direction and a concentration on the portrayal of intimate human relationships as previously discussed in relation to his direction of Philip Glass' "Akhnaten". The problems for Freeman, in the realization of such a work as "The Mask of Orpheus", lay in depicting huge ritual blocks of action against a vast tapestry of sound.

The instructions that Zinovieff and Birtwistle had laid down were seen to be impossible within the English National Opera's budget. Zinovieff calls for - "a variable sun, four sets of black rocks, a thunderbolt, symbolic snakes, a Golden Carriage of Mirrors in which metamorphosis take place, puppet heads as high as the proscenium arch ----".(16) Although he mentions that these requirements are variable and may be substituted with other "tokens", it is clear that the approach to this piece is firmly entrenched in the techniques of "The Theatre of Cruelty" which are diametrically opposed to the production techniques of Freeman.
In an interview conducted with the director, he admitted that he was concerned only with achieving a primitive, violent content within a sophisticated form and that he had resisted the urge to try and fulfill any of the stage directions notated, especially those dictating the spatial division of the stage.

On examination of these instructions, it was clearly out of the question to represent the stage in the following terms -

"divided into an upper and lower level, each level subdivided by rivers which can be moved along horizontal and vertical co-ordinates". (17)

5.5. Monumental Music Theatre

Any work of this size and complexity raises questions as to its financial viability in these times of economic crisis within The Arts. Given that contemporary opera attracts a minority audience possibilities for productions are limited to heavily subsidised traditional opera houses. The paradox of this situation lies in the fact that traditional opera houses are the least suitable venues for staging Contemporary Music Theatre in that they lack both the physical attributes and the artistic personnel for a realization of works which stretch contemporary idioms.

The work stands as an example of creating a new work within an old tradition and as such, runs the risk of becoming an economic
'white elephant'. William Colleran of Universal Editions was frank in his discussions as to the $(Aust)500,000 music bill that Orpheus had amassed. The copying of parts of this monumental score had soaked up the resources of the publishing house for many years to come. With little chance of an imminent repeat performance, due to the massive cost of production, he saw little chance to recoup any of the monies spent by the publishers.

Moreover, The English National Opera were only able to consider the production of "The Mask of Orpheus" when an anonymous grant of $(Aust)300,000 supplemented their normal Arts Council subsidy.

Traditional houses such as the Coliseum are not geared for works requiring electronics of such sophistication and the subsequent hiring in of the necessary equipment took much of the production budget. One wonders if the visual spectacle envisaged but not realized was a casualty of the $(Aust)150,000 electronics cost to a house ill-equipped for these purposes. As it happened, the budget did not allow for every member of the orchestra to be amplified as planned, which seriously altered the acoustic balance and sacrificed the artistic standards to financial considerations.

The internal organization of a repertory opera company such as The English National Opera, precludes the experimentation and constant revision of a new work so necessary during the rehearsal process. In these times governed by economics and
scheduling logistics, the composer must 'live' with his mistakes once committed to paper. A cryptic work of the scale of Orpheus requires time to restructure the elements of dramatic pacing; to provide orchestral articulation of points in the drama; and to allow for a close collaboration between director and composer during production preparation time, arguably the most crucial point of a Music Theatre work's development.

Rehearsal structures of the company dissallowed the luxury of pre-recording the orchestral score which would have benefitted both director and composer. Freeman had not heard the entire orchestral sound until well into the rehearsal period. His direction therefore was often at odds with the score. Birtwistle, in turn, was unable to make informed decisions as to the balance of the various musical elements prior to the stage rehearsals. Valuable rehearsal time was spent in trying to marry the unwieldy electronic tapes of "auras" and the voice of Apollo with the orchestral score.

A further problem associated with the venue and company was the Union rule regarding performances which over-ran the specified time limit for orchestral players. The score was over four hours long and as a consequence of union rules, much of the score had to be cut. The work was effected quite dramatically in Act III when the Tide structure was cut into in many places. It was impossible to make any judgement as to whether the intact
Tide structure would have allowed the drama to unfold in a more coherent fashion than that which was presented.

The freelance conductor, Elgar Howarth, a contemporary music specialist, was called in to co-ordinate the piece together with Paul Daniels, a resident conductor with the opera company. Two conductors were necessary to keep the polyrhythmic sections together especially when vocal segments were at odds with the metre of the orchestral mobiles.

None of the permanent chorus of The English National Opera were chosen to sing in this production. Instead, members of the B.B.C. Singers were hired especially to cope with the score notated for singers used to contemporary vocal techniques and amplification. The principals and secondary principals were mostly drawn from Opera Factory sources or were free-lance singers familiar with contemporary musical language.

The only regular members of this opera company to be involved in this work were the dance and mime troupe which was further boosted by some professional mime specialists. It was obvious in performance that the level of skill of the resident dancers was not sufficient to allow exposure of this importance on stage. Moreover, there seemed little co-ordination of choreographic/mime style. Edges were continually blurred and as a result there was no strong movement statement. Within the group there
existed 'Marcel Marceau' type mime together with classical ballet pose and Laban creative movement. This mixture of styles robbed the work of a hard-edged, artificial and ritualistic movement profile that was to be its core.

In retrospect, *The English National Opera* was not a suitable company for this work. However, the responsibility for the viability of new directions within Music Theatre lies with the composer. If he continues to write 'monumental' Music Theatre with little forethought as to the logistics and economics of realizing such works, he places the future of the genre in jeopardy.
NOTES.


3. Harrison Birtwistle in a personal interview with the author. (4. 8. 85.)


10. Ibid. p.2.


12. Harrison Birtwistle- Interview with Michael Hall recorded in the programme notes for "The Mask of Orpheus".


17. Ibid. p.18.
PART SIX

Changing Perceptions of Music Theatre

6.1. Video Music Theatre Possibilities

In Australia during the 1984 study, there was a notable reticence within the Arts to exploit new areas of technology, especially in areas of integrative Video/Music Theatre. This personal viewpoint was corroborated by an Arts Council Committee who presented a report in October 1985. Three main reasons for this failure to take up the challenges of the new technology were put forward as follows;

(a) a shortage of capital to invest in technology which in turn resulted from the dependence on restrictive government grants rather than profit;

(b) the lack of exposure to technology in Arts training;

(c) and the instability of the Arts industry in general.\(^{(1)}\)

Discussions with selected personnel in the United Kingdom brought forward similar findings. John Drummond of the British Broadcasting Corporation expressed surprise that composers were not writing Music Theatre specifically for television and that those who had made attempts were either firmly entrenched in theatre practices or were only aware of the visual gimmickry that television offered because of limited education and exposure to
the medium. Their limited knowledge of techniques disallowed real exploration of the elements of character interiorization and the consequent intimacy achievable for audiences. Knowing the great costs associated with video projects, he was very much in favour of the British Broadcasting Corporation setting up seminars where Television directors and Music Theatre composers could come together to learn and collaborate.

However, he intimated that the British Broadcasting Corporation was still rigidly adhering to traditional opera commissioning policy. All of the major opera houses had been given a commission for the current year but this appeared to be more in the way of a public relations venture rather than a serious attempt to involve television in the compositional process. Drummond admitted that the British Broadcasting Corporation would only take up a few of the options to film opera but this would be in the traditional practice of televising an already-established theatre piece.

There is, of course, merit in presenting new Music Theatre in this fashion in order to enlarge audiences but the injustice often done to the form when viewed almost for the entire length of the programme through one 'stage-encompassing' camera surely negates the advantages. When attempts are made to single out 'close-up' activities, problems arise with audiences coming to terms with 'close-ups' of the singers' mouths and often relevant detail happening elsewhere on stage is lost.
There is a growing trend to transform staged opera into the medium of film. Naturally, this process is much preferred to a straight documentation but also has its own set of problems. Jonathan Miller discussed the problems from an opera director's point of view -

"With opera there are very specific problems in that this art form is self consciously and quite justifiably an artificial one which, to some extent fights against literal naturalism; in the theatre there is a subliminal sign to the audience that they are in the presence of an artificial form. With television, you can't commit yourself to a literal realism, but there is something which imposes a more pictorial quality on what you do".(2)

The camera, in his opinion, needs to be thought of as both a spectator of the theatre and a member of the audience. Without the visuals of the orchestra in the pit, and the recognized stage business of entry and exit through wings, the viewer is left in a semi-realistic world belonging neither to theatre or film. He believes the answers are not found in the total realism of opera removed from the theatre space. -

"You take Shakespeare into the forest of Arden and the whole thing looks ridiculous. The forest is made out of words".(3)
Other practical problems stem from these practices. When singers mime to a playback situation of their own voices out in the open, the perspectives of the sound appear incongruous. Miller prefers to use long shot techniques in the theatre to solve this problem. Furthermore, these techniques appear more restful than many cuts, they allow the music to dictate the camera action and allow ensembles to function. His final defence of the long 'artificial' theatre shot is that a picture of the entire body stance of the singer is presented rather than an unflattering close-up shot of the mouth and in so doing he believes that the sound is ultimately conveyed more expressively.

The solution is not to be found in activities which attempt to fit 'round pegs into square holes'. There needs to be a new genre explored; that of the Music Theatre piece created specifically for the medium of Television.

Although not composed as a television opera, Michael Tippett's "The Knot Garden", filmed by Derek Bailey of Landseer Film and Television Productions Limited, gave strong credence to the viability of contemporary Video Music Theatre.

"The Knot Garden" is an exploration of the intimate details of human relationships under strain, analysed in a musical score of great intensity. The interiorization of character was handled sensitively by Bailey, aided as he was by the lack of traditional
arias, set pieces and ensembles in the score and a non-narrative plot.

Bailey was of the opinion that Tippett's opera proved that opera stripped of all its traditional trappings would survive as a powerful and immediately communicative art form.

"... here is an opera which, almost uniquely could be ideally suited to the even greater intensity of television." (4)

Bailey was also responsible for the production of a television version of Birtwistle's "Punch and Judy" which was transmitted by the independent Channel 4. Directed by David Freeman, it remained to a large extent a documented version of the Music Theatre piece although some television techniques were used to heighten dramatic moments such as in the use of repeated jump cuts as Punch kills his victim and a subtle direction of the audience's attention to the reaction of other characters on stage.

The piece worked extremely well for this medium because its theatrical posturing and scenario were maintained and because it was a small, confined and well-defined stage area. Moreover, the original stage interpretation had dealt with Punch as the "delinquent Everyman" and the viewer/audience was therefore invited to enter the mind of Punch and work through his childish dilemmas.
Such intimacy with the main character was encouraged by setting the whole piece from a child's point of view, thus involving the audience in personal childhood memories. The style of this compact piece seemed to be perfect material for a complete reworking for the television medium and to suggest that Birtwistle might produce a work specifically written for the medium.

Plans for such a project were undertaken when the British Broadcasting Corporation commissioned Birtwistle. In response, he wrote "Yan Tan Tethera", a small-scale mythical work telling of the mystery of the sarsen stones in Wiltshire. The story revolved around the numbering system used by Northern shepherds to count their sheep and the jealousy of a local shepherd for the magic spells cast by these numbers. Despite it possessing all the small-scale intimacy attributes of television material, the piece was refused when a change of policy altered the risk-taking nature of the British Broadcasting Corporation's contemporary music department. Undoubtedly, the directors felt unsure of such theatrical gestures as sheep talking/singing and magic hills opening up and whether they would, in fact, make viable television.

Channel 4, a smaller station whose aim is to attract minimal but select audiences and which operates outside of the pressures of commercial television, took up the option. Despite the fact that this work was written specifically for television, it was
considered ill-advised by Channel 4 to produce it as such. On interview, Fiona Maddocks, the Commissioning Editor for Music discussed the financial constraints on commissioning television opera. She admitted that the television industry had not recovered from "Owen Wingrave" written for the British Broadcasting Corporation by Benjamin Britten as a specific television opera. The piece was not considered a success in either financial or artistic terms and its transmission was seen by many to discourage viewers of Music Theatre. Consequently, producers were not willing to take the financial risk of "Yan Tan Tethera", without the benefit of seeing a stage performance first. This attitude seems to completely negate the idea of Video Music Theatre as a new direction for the genre.

The work itself was produced by David Freeman for Opera Factory London Sinfonietta and was performed as part of the Summer Scope Festival in August 1986. Channel 4 have planned to televise the piece as part of a mini-series about Harrison Birtwistle. The 'square pegs and round holes' were reversed as this small-scale, essentially cinematic work was produced in an enlarged theatre version.

This lack of interest in Video Music Theatre as a viable form not only points up problems inherent in the medium but also those problems which already haunt the operatic world.
The collaborative process becomes an essential rather than advised method of creation, generation and realization of the work. The highly specialized areas need to cross-fertilize and encourage an experimental approach. To date, 'the theatre director' seems more adept at leading such ventures than 'the opera director'. The latter tends to focus on the creation of stage pictures using large masses of people and on large emotional gestures involving a broad sweep of the eye. He is generally less concerned with intimate characterization and relationships. These concepts tend to be more the province of 'the theatre director' who traditionally works with smaller forces without the problems of dressing the stage with a chorus. His subject matter is generally more psychologically oriented and he is therefore used to an intimate sharing of emotions with an audience. However, both still require a film maker fully cognizant of the 'grammar' of television to bring their ideas to fruition.

Barrie Gavin, a freelance film and television producer, discussed his collaborative experiences on several Music Theatre pieces. He chose to work with a theatre director, David Alden, in the realization of Kurt Weill's "Seven Deadly Sins" because he felt this director could bring fresh insight into the medium. The work was taped and then mimed. The only singer used was Elise Ross who played the leading role and was self-sufficient as an actress. All other cast members were actors whose vigorous movement and dramatic integrity, instigated by Alden, gave the
piece credence. Gavin's personal ideas about characters singing were shared with Alden and together they evolved a style whereby the voice functioned firstly as a representation of the character's thought process and then gradually moved to a physical representation.

Since this production, Gavin has formed firm opinions that the image of a person singing should never exist by itself. "There should be a gradual process whereby the audience is drawn into this peculiar kind of mystique". In this respect perhaps, there needs to be a period of normality for the audience beginning with speech, moving to sprechstimme and finally to the singing voice overlayed with tape effects so that the sound does not appear bare or calculated.

This collaboration between film-maker and theatre director proved doubly successful in that theatrical effects were re-interpreted in post "Star Wars" terms. It is essential to realize that what evokes horror, excitement and fear in a modern audience has been altered forever by their exposure to advanced cinema and video techniques. The old operatic devices need to be reassessed within the television idiom.

According to managerial sources, costs of collaborations of composers, directors, and film makers in the creation and production of Video Music Theatre would be prohibitive. The music
publishers are not in favour of encouraging their composers in this kind of work because of the fact that a 'one-off' performance on national television does not earn the same fees as a theatre season and consequent productions both within the United Kingdom and international outlets.

Despite these financial problems, the overriding problem seems to be one involved with audience perception and expectation. If contemporary music in its complexity needs another element to aid audience perception, then the visual image would seem to be an ideal answer to the problem. However, the visual image is a much more powerful focus than the aural image and there is a great danger in the music content becoming merely incidental music to aggressive and arresting imagery. A balance is needed and this infers affecting change in audience expectation.

Programmes featuring contemporary music have been undertaken by Channel 4 in attempts to alter audience expectations about the role music can play over and above the background 'musak' offered by most television programmes. Attempts are being made to examine six major twentieth century compositions in innovative ways with the help of The London Sinfonietta and avant-garde directors in order to open the ears of the viewing public.

"It is important that we get people to listen rather than just treat music as background to
pictures; at the same time they must be constructive in watching what they are hearing".\(^{(6)}\)

The opposite approach is being taken by Barrie Gavin working in collaboration with composer, Edward Cowie. Gavin protects the dominance of the music by asking that the piece of music be written first in a personal response to a subject. He then allows the music to suggest images to him. The third step is a matching of images with the thought processes of the composer at specific points in the music. The success of the whole exercise depends on a balance of visual and aural strength and whether the narrative thread involved is sufficient to hold the concentration of audiences accustomed to programmes of strong narrative content and arresting visual images.

Perhaps the greatest problem highlighted by this new medium is that of the unsuitability of the traditional opera singer. There is a need for a new breed of singer/actor whose vocal skills are balanced against dramatic integrity and dynamic presence. These performers must be prepared in new ways involving a probing production method not usually demanded by establishment opera producers. There must be a willingness to dissect the technically constructed aria and work towards the communication of meaning through subtle gestures both vocal and choreographic. The Romantic notion of 'the voice' must be exchanged for honesty of intention exposed as it is in this most immediate of mediums.
6.2. The Role of the Voice.

The vocal content of the three major Music Theatre works previewed in London during this study suggests that there is a new perception of what the voice can offer to new developments in Music Theatre. The use of hieratic, invented or distorted language, new vocal techniques and electronics required to reinforce these, seem to point to a search for a new mystical chant form akin to that of primitive man's song utterances.

Many composers now reject the traditional role and sound of the voice because they consider it has been refined to a point where it no longer expresses the physical, the physiological and magical effects of its origins.

Wilfred Mellers, in discussing this issue, points out the similarities of the cry of a human infant and that of a beast. He goes on to explain -

"Both speak a language pre-existent to consciousness, which consciousness must and does obliterate. Nonetheless, we can never totally forget this language which links us holistically and holly to nature or if we do so, it is to our great peril".\(^{(7)}\)
This peril he speaks of is perhaps the fact that operatic vocal expression no longer moves the younger generation and has been, in fact, responsible for a distancing of audiences away from Opera.

An overview of the history of vocal tradition places this present day predicament within a wider context. Wilfred Mellers cites two primitive cultures, the Australian Aboriginal and the bushmen of the Kalahari desert, in an attempt to outline the beginnings of vocal art.

The Australian Aboriginal epitomizes primitive man's use of pre-articulate symbols to evoke natural phenomena and these magic vocals shouted against the drone of the didgeridoo and accompanied by the rhythmic beating of sticks dramatise the basic physiological aspects of his life. When the Kalahari desert bushmen create music by emulating sounds of birds and beasts they become their totemic creatures in sound and movement. "The music they make is an oral mask that complements the visual mask they may wear". (8)

There is a strong parallel with Birtwistle's concept of 'Music and the Mask' and the mystery that he wants to evoke through this use of 'sensual speech'. (9) It seems that whenever man sings, even in this primitive way, he enters a different dimension. His main purpose is no longer to convey a message. Song tends to deny the
linear and infers a circular progression with something outside of the singer, whether it be God or community.

A communal sharing leads to an oral tradition using repetition, refrains and borrowings from previously established song to reinforce the "collective experience". Moreover, a dualism of magic and a growing comprehension in a communal society distinguishes man from nature. The riddles of "Punch and Judy" so intriguing to Birtwistle, are evidence of this early duality. The riddle seeks a magic and cheating answer to the duality which is comprehension. Riddles affect magic through incantation, usually involving regular periodic alterations of pitch, and in this respect we may relate them to the evolution of syllabic chant which is still man's oldest unbroken music/poetic tradition.

When the Aboriginal names a god in a chant, half way between speech and song, he creates an incantation dependent on repetition, which in turn, induces trance and rapture. This process is extended in the religious chants of Antiquity and of Christian Europe. It is to this element that Glass, Birtwistle and to some extent, Stockhausen, have chosen to return; a chant element where there is an equivocation between the word as comprehension and the word as an act of 'holistic union'; the use of a dead hieratic language wherein the pre-articulate serves to heighten moments of consciousness.
Moreover, the dance/songs of primitive peoples are dependent on the rhythms of the human body and on the 'sensual speech' that relates us to nature. Religious chants throughout history have always related consciousness in the word to the rhythms of breathing and speaking. This oneness with the whole body is the crux of many experimental Music Theatre projects including the Roy Hart programmes and even the work of The Grotowski Theatre in Poland.

Whereas the Aboriginal had been a vehicle through whom God spoke, the Renaissance man came to think of himself as divine. Because of this, the communication of one individual to another became essential and song assumed a new role. The singing voice became an enhanced speaking voice where words articulated melody and meaning.

The development of a 'bel canto' style was in direct response to this need to reflect god-like elements. Vocal perceptions of the seventeenth century reinforced this god-like element with the division of vocal work into aria (ethereal, meditative) and recitative (whole body involvement). These two disparate elements were brought together with arioso in the operas of Mozart.
There is, according to Mellors, a continual movement back and forth throughout history in terms of man's perception of himself and his world. Subject matter for operatic works consequently fluctuates between reflecting an heroic world consciously a myth as in the Grand Opera tradition and the deification of the common man as displayed in Puccini's verismo style opera. A climax in this self-deification is revealed in the Music Dramas of Wagner where gods actually fail and the portrayal of a god-hero who cannot sing in Schoenberg's "Moses and Aron".

During this whole period of development, the role of the voice has adjusted to meet changing perceptions of man's relationship with the 'spiritual' and in this respect, Wagner's demand for inflation of vocal tone to meet the power of the human ego destroyed 'bel canto' style. We have inherited this 'overblown' vocal production of the nineteenth century which continues to be held up as the most acceptable vocal medium for works of the Music Theatre genre.

Contemporary composers of Music Theatre are making attempts to reinstate the true power of song; its contact with and experience of a spiritual unity with that which seems to lie apart from ourselves. Stockhausen's "Donnerstag" reveals the role of the voice as the expression of the incomprehensible and in Glass' "Akhnaten" as the mode by which trance is induced. Birtwistle's
"The Mask of Orpheus" is concerned with a vocal role totally subservient to its incantations of magic.

Despite these new directions in composer's vocal thinking, the perceptions of the opera-going public as to what the voice and in fact, what opera should be saying, are the cause of much concern within this area of the arts. The fact that some European opera houses are questioning the viability of the traditional repertoire to attract new audiences, as highlighted by the international seminars held in France and Italy in the last two years, points to a realization that there is a deficiency in an art form which has ceased to search for spiritual or magical experiences and which holds up vocal styles of the past as the method by which the consciousness of the contemporary community should be raised.

Indicative of this nineteenth century perception of the role of the voice is the resistance to new vocal ideas within many of the training institutions of the United Kingdom. It is as if the last twenty five years of vocal exploration had never been; as if Cathy Berberian and Berio's Sequenza III had not opened 'Pandora's Box' for the singer.

In essence, a singer's idea of himself and his music is still governed by received models which are applied to the mainly
eighteenth and nineteenth century repertoire taught in these centres and to the sounds and techniques considered most suitable for its interpretation. Reasons for an avoidance of contemporary techniques and repertoire within the opera training centres seem to be threefold. Singing teachers, in general, cling to the training methods by which they themselves were trained and do not feel confident to teach contemporary techniques. This ignorance of skills leads to a fear of the damage these techniques may cause to young voices. Most importantly, it is assumed that the student will need to learn a certain number of traditional roles if he/she is to survive as a professional in the operatic world. There is hardly sufficient time to devote to this activity during a limited training period without the added burden of learning contemporary roles which may only be useful once in a career.

Such productions of contemporary works that are presented ie. The Royal Academy's "Knot Garden" (Tippett) and The Guild Hall School of Music and Drama's "The Rising of the Moon" (Maw) caused great concern amongst the respective singing staff to the extent that some students were not allowed to perform. Guild Hall's executives, when interviewed, expressed a reticence to schedule further contemporary Music Theatre works.

With the advent of more authentic early music performances, there is a growing awareness that a technique developed from and for
the main stream operatic repertoire is not the only appropriate singing style required for a professional singer. Hopefully, this development of a smaller, more agile and more controlled voice will help to develop a vocal style for contemporary vocal repertoire.

A corollary to the problems of Romantic vocal style is the continuation of the Romantic ideal of the voice as the focal point of opera; an ideal which negates the concept of the total performer. 'The voice' is often spoken about in hushed terms as if it were an entity in itself instead of a mere tool. Traditional singing teachers are still concerned with developing the voice to its fullest potential rather than encouraging vocal talent to explore and perfect techniques necessary for the performance of much new music. Sounds required by contemporary composers are often diametrically opposed to the ideals of lyrical production and call for the use of the voice as an instrument capable of exploring the whole range of ugly and misplaced sounds as adjuncts to this lyricism.

The task of developing techniques has been transferred to small contemporary vocal groups such as Vocem and Electric Phoenix who search not only for new kinds of vocal interpretation but also for a rationalization of the large number of techniques needed to cope with contemporary scores. As with early music, the
technique is generally a product of the music but specific skills of a particular performer may be incorporated into the music. Ie. Cathy Berberian's "dental tremolo" which has featured in several of Berio's vocal pieces, is often used by other composers and it has become a recognized, legitimate technique which can be quantified and taught.

Stockhausen's score for "Donnerstag" contains many new vocal techniques which the traditionally trained opera singer would normally not have been equipped to perform and there is a need for such personnel as sing with contemporary vocal ensembles to bring their skills to the training institutions. Greg Rose, of Sing Circle, did in fact lecture within the contemporary music department of The Guild Hall School of Music and Drama but it was interesting to note that his course was not an official part of the opera school course and opera students did not even attend his vocal classes out of interest.

This separation of opera students from all things contemporary was also in evidence at The Royal Northern College of Music where discussions with the head lecturer in composition revealed that composition was seen as an academic study while the opera school operated as a separate performance entity. There were never any joint projects undertaken and as a result, the composition students were not encouraged to write Music Theatre pieces. In
this respect, it is no wonder that there are a large number of Music Theatre pieces which contain unsingable passages, unsuitable setting of text and impractical situations for singers, composed as they are without sufficient experience in writing for the voice.

An interesting project was undertaken In Sweden at The National Music Drama School in Stockholm where they began to explore new ways of making Music Theatre. One Important part of the study was devoted to musical improvisation led by composer, Lars Johan Werle. He succeeded in loosening up the students' vocal prejudices and removing the conditioning which had been imposed on them by their singing teachers. Through group work they developed a musical structure according to the principles of free association. With the help of the leader-composer who indicated some profiling of voices, some simple instrumental additions and the use of text elements, a full thirty minute performance evolved.

The importance of this experiment lay in the fact that the voice had been a generating element of the Music Theatre piece. The sounds produced were suitable to the ideas presented by the group because the very colours, shades and nuances of the vocal sounds were the students' own. There was a total assimilation of language which permitted the performance to be immediately personal.
The challenge of today is surely the question of how we approach the generation and performance of repertoire in a way that permits the singer to be personal, to make the material his own, to reproduce it out of his need or desire instead of the direction of others. If singers want to keep some control over material that is composed for them, they must be prepared to leave the nineteenth century limitations behind.

Over the last few years, Electric Phoenix has taken the lead in the extension of vocal techniques not only in an acoustic sense but also by electronic means. It has been responsible for the premieres of much new Music Theatre and works constantly to bring new vocal techniques into the repertoire of all singers. At a seminar during The Brighton Festival 1985 the group was introduced to a number of composers interested in learning to write in these new idioms and this seminar brought singers and composers together in a sharing of vocal possibilities. The members of the group presented many techniques from the infinite variety used in current vocal music and showed composers some of the standardized notation. These included such skills as the reinforcement of upper partials as required by Stockhausen ("Stimmung") and the technique of singing on the sub-octave, a standard ingredient of many American 'extended vocal technique' pieces. The combination of these two effects was explored to produce a genuine multi-phonic sound whereby the singer was able
to drone on the sub-octave while reinforcing the harmonics over the top.

Attempts to standardize these vocal procedures have been undertaken and two sets of comprehensive inventories have been produced. In 1974, The Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble of San Diego, (which originated as a vocal resource for The Centre for Music Experiment at the University of California), recorded and classified over seventy sounds as a tape lexicon. In England, Trevor Wishart produced a "Book of Lost Voices" (1979) as a by-product of his piece entitled "Anti-Credos". Both attempts at classification illustrate the problems of transcribing and describing vocal phenomena.

The lexicon is a research document and each sound is given a brief description which may be objective as in "cross-register ululation" or subjective and onomatopoeic as in "car crash". Because Wishart's document grew out of research for an actual composition, his method of notation is more comprehensive and of greater practical value for singers and composers. However, neither Birtwistle or Stockhausen availed themselves of this notation in their recent Music Theatre works and resorted to highly personal descriptions of the effects they required thus negating these attempts to find a universal notational language and in so doing, reducing the efficiency of the interpretative process.
6.3. The Use of Electronics

Paralleled with this development of vocal techniques is the new emphasis on the electronic modulation of the voice. Traditionally, singers have had total control over their sound. The use of electronics not only involves the addition of processing but almost always the addition of a third party to control the sound. Obviously, the singer is not always in a position to be able to hear the end result of his efforts and a new repertoire has evolved in which the singer is dependant on a sound engineer for the finished vocal product.

The relinquishing of total control over sound by the singers in Birtwistle's "The Mask of Orpheus" was a significant breakthrough for the demands of contemporary composers. Moreover, the singers were required to alter their traditional luxuriant vocal production and emphasize a light, agile tone which would give priority to clarity of diction and facilitate the amplified sound.

The group, Electric Phoenix, has also experimented with singer-controlled electronics for concert vocal pieces which even though not directly usable for staged works nonetheless influence composers' perceptions of the voice. With an 'effects box' including a ring modulator which breaks up the voice, a filter to take out various frequencies, an oscillator to produce harmonics
and a delay and reverberation factor, the individual singers within the group are able to alter their sound source. This willingness to experiment with vocal tone that is outside of traditional expectations, allows composers and public alike to open their minds to new vocal possibilities and this, in turn, allows for a perception of 'the voice' as one of many elements in the composition of Contemporary Music Theatre.

The use of electronics in Music Theatre has also been influenced by Pierre Boulez's centre in Paris, IRCAM, which was ten years old in 1985. This centre was set up to try and break down the physical limitations of composition and to explore a new sound world made possible by technology. This expansion of choice for the composer was to be undertaken in a shared environment where the discoveries of individual composers were to belong to all. It was envisaged that a composer working at IRCAM would inherit the bank of data already established and a rapid progress would be ensured.

Moreover, this progress was to be ensured by bringing composers into close collaboration with scientists. A 'technician' intermediary would act as a guide to both scientists in their acoustic experiments and to the composers in their lack of knowledge of the technology available. Within this environment, a
composer was free to impose his musical intuition on the output of the machine. Early compositions to emerge from IRCAM were encapsulated as a permanent record on tape and had no relevance for Music Theatre in that they were presented in a darkened concert hall with little communication with the audience. With the advent of Electro-Acoustic developments, there seemed a greater possibility for Music Theatre usage. Real time performance and synthetic time performance running parallel can add extra dimension and texture and new levels of perception for Music Theatre audiences.

However, it is in the latest developments that opportunities for the stage become limitless. With the composer’s ability to transform sound during real time performance, the focus remains on the human element. This element can once more ‘move’ the performance without a slavish obedience to the machine and allows a virtuosic interplay between the machine and singer/performer. The spontaneous and intuitive elements of performance are maintained and yet enhanced.

The computer becomes the extension of the actor/singer. It can analyse sounds fed into it and respond in ways dictated to it by the composer. This response is now possible in one or two milliseconds after the sound is emitted. Because the sound originally emanates from a familiar source, the dehumanizing
element, so common to early electronic music, is avoided. It is easy to imagine that as composers explore more unfamiliar Electro-Acoustic territory, they may find a new psychic perception for Music Theatre and return it to its supernatural origins.

These new electronic developments need to be explored for possible amalgamation within the Music Theatre genre. Jonathan Harvey, in his article, "Electronics In Music - A New Aesthetic" (12) proposes a centre for Britain in the way of a "Theatre of Technology" where adventurous and experimental theatre directors could work to meld the newest techniques of electro-acoustic music, video projection, and new lighting techniques into an exciting new medium.

"Many directors and choreographers are now much more intensely aware of the role of sound in their productions and might welcome the offer of resources and expertise. Cross-fertilization of the Arts is once more at an exciting new stage because of the electronic breakthrough".(13)
NOTES.


3. Ibid.

4. Derek Bailey in a personal interview with the author. (3.3.86.)

5. Barrie Gavin in a personal interview with the author. (30.1.86.)

6. Fiona Maddocks, Commissioning Editor for Music, Channel 4, in a personal interview with the author. (21.2.86.)

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.


13. Ibid.
CONCLUSION.

The traditional opera house, deeply inhibited by an era of 'post culture', is not a suitable venue for new forms of Music Theatre. It follows then, that the commissioning policy of such an institution is not the best method of generating new works. Such policies encourage the notion that the composer is the dominant or even sole creative force in the generation of work, a legacy of nineteenth century thinking. Further, the lack of control exercised by personnel of opera houses over large-scale, economically unviable works allows a continuation of the notion that the composer exists apart from the concerns of the remainder of the population in that his work need only satisfy himself.

Within these straightened economic times, no-one can avoid the issues of moral and financial accountability. Giles Swayne, a composer now considered to be a part of the conservative backlash speaks out against the academicism and remoteness of much of the musical language of contemporary composers. He feels that -

"the very language of most 'serious modern' music bears no relation to that of the vernacular, and quite often this rootless language and the enormous complexity that often goes with it, is used as a barrier behind which to hide, rather than as a way of reaching out". (1)
In agreeing with Swayne, one must question such a communication breakdown between the people and the artist and surmise that the gap between 'high art' and 'popular culture' is the fault of the composer. It is essential that he discovers ways to present accessible Music Theatre without compromising the integrity of innovative composition.

Nicholas Till, in an article entitled "Crisis? What Crisis?" underlines the fact that -

"nineteenth century opera was perhaps the last great popular communal art-form. ------ as the channels of communication and distribution of the arts have opened up and made them potentially more accessible to a wider number of people, artists in the traditional arts have consistently withdrawn from the proffered arena".\(^{(2)}\)

The fact that Video Music Theatre is only recently a consideration points up the validity of this argument. Unfortunately, the vacuum created by this withdrawal of the artists has been filled with elements of 'popular culture' that is anti-creative and unimaginative in anything but superficialities.

More than at any other time in musical history, the collaborative approach is necessary to open up the boundaries of what is possible for Music Theatre. This does not refer to the style of
collaboration of librettist and composer, such as the partnership of Strauss and Hofmannsthal, but to an ensemble method of collaboration where many different theatrical and musical elements can be explored and put into practice. Such experiments have been undertaken by The Banff Music Theatre Studio Ensemble within The Banff Centre, School of Fine Arts (Summer and Winter Programmes), Dartington International Summer School and Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. These attempts are isolated but point the way for the continuation of the genre through sincere attempts to promote a greater understanding of the communicative process; of the 'collective imagination'; and the ways of tapping its power.

It follows that if Australian concerns for Music Theatre development exhibit the same sincerity, then the establishment of such ensemble projects needs priority. (See Appendix D for a report on The National Opera Workshop, 1986.) Obviously, the ideal would be a permanent ensemble. This ensemble would need to be sufficiently financially viable to attract composers, librettists, designers, directors, dancers, actor/singers, choreographers, electro-acoustic personnel and film and video experts to focus on the new perceptions and possibilities for the genre. The ensemble would function as a 'breeding ground' for a new style of performer to cope with the enlarged responsibilities of 'total theatre' works. In this respect, a new profile for the voice would be established away from the debilitating influences of traditional training institutions. In addition, such a group would need to be equipped
to embrace the expanding 'real-time' technology now at a usable stage of development for the theatre.

It is unlikely that this type of activity would be undertaken by a traditional opera company. The most suitable environments, and those which may be able to provide financial security, would be a University campus where research and educative processes traditionally go hand in hand or a School for Creative Arts where a cross discipline approach within the arts would ensure that the establishment of such an ensemble would not lead to an intellectual 'ghetto' for research. In this respect, it is important that this ensemble be attracting artists from the commercial world as well as those involved in 'high art' in attempts to make products that are realistic and relevant to developments across the whole spectrum of the Performing Arts. Perhaps we could look forward to the time when works were proved successful by audience acclamation and financial support thereby removing the notion of 'ivory-tower' composition and its inherent expectation of public support.

Myer Fredman, Head of The Opera School of The Sydney Conservatorium of Music agreed that this suggestion would be a viable solution if the combined resources of a number of training institutions were utilized. He suggested that perhaps The Australian Opera could make a positive contribution to the generation of new work in handling aspects of publicity; that The National Institute of Dramatic Art could supply designers and
production personnel; and The Sydney Conservatorium of Music could offer rehearsal space. This sharing of financial overheads could make the survival of such a group feasible. In the absence of such an ensemble, Fredman is prepared to continue a traditional commissioning policy through The Conservatorium of Music despite the redundancy of this practice and the limited resources of his institution.

Another alternative venue for this ensemble might be the 'legitimate theatre', traditionally less concerned with spectacle and more concerned with reflecting the values of today's society. The theatre has always encouraged innovative thought and may be just far enough removed from the prejudices of traditional opera, where music dominates the incidental drama, to provide a fresh approach. There would be a greater chance to re-adjust the balance between dramatic and musical elements in a process of building a new profile for hitherto incidental music.

If we subscribe to the argument that contemporary musical language is not suited to the maintenance of 'the goal oriented' forms of our Music Theatre and that audiences need other layers of perception to aid comprehension, then it seems important that composers find a new language which is multi-levelled. This language needs to function in the first instance as an accessible key to the drama and on further experience reveal depths of new material. This 'something for everyone' approach seems to be the only way to begin to draw audiences back into the theatre and
begin to rebuild their appreciation for a 'popular communal art form' that is both challenging and a spiritual necessity in their lives.

There is no place for narrative in Music Theatre. The mere setting of a good novel is an irrelevancy. Instead, there is room for a theatre of ideas; one which reflects issues that are both universal and contemporary; one which deals with the human condition within our complex society; one which uses the motivations of the Performance Art tradition.

Interest in the theatre over the past few years seems to have become increasingly voyeuristic. People rarely need to go to the theatre to find out what it is saying about their own lives. It is a sad fact that as police were closing in on striking miners in Britain, audiences were sitting through "Daisy Pulls It Off", "On Your Toes" and "42nd Street".

In addressing the problems of audience interest in the new directions of Music Theatre, Nicholas Till goes so far as to suggest that what the audiences need -

"--- is to be presented with the immediacy and urgency of great issues and emotions treated with passion and force; to be taken out of the daunting culture palaces; and, perhaps to be performed by the people for whom they were written". (3)
This 'Opera for the People' concept is one that is based on the view that people may not only perceive the realities of their own lives but discover the imaginative means to affect change through participation. In this respect, the process of creation is more important than the product. Whilst agreeing with a concept of community arts, it is essential that we generate a body of works which may become repertoire accessible yet indicative of the innovative thinking of our time.

If we agree with Harrison Birtwistle in his summation of the primary motivation of Music Theatre -"It is not what we say but how we say it" (4) - then we deny that there is a spiritual relevance in searching out new ways for Music Theatre to confront the self and that which is outside the self. Language that infers both the comprehensible and the incomprehensible needs to be employed in attempts to return the theatrical event to a magical experience. "Theatre can reinstruct those who have forgotten the communicative power or magic mimicry of gesture" (5) and in the words of Camus “open the prisons and give voice to the sorrows and joys of all".
NOTES.


3. Ibid.


## APPENDIX A

COMPOSERS AND LIBRETTISTS INTERVIEWED:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BARKER, Paul</td>
<td>08. 10. 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRATT, Richard</td>
<td>17. 12. 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAULD, Alison</td>
<td>03. 12. 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIRTWISTLE, Harrison</td>
<td>30. 07. 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARPENTER, Gary</td>
<td>12. 01. 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONYNGHAM, Barry</td>
<td>09. 08. 84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPLAND, Murray</td>
<td>10. 08. 84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUMMINGS, Conrad</td>
<td>11. 06. 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DENCH, Chris</td>
<td>23. 01. 85</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDWARDS, Stephen</td>
<td>30. 07. 85</td>
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<tr>
<td>FINNISSY, Michael</td>
<td>31. 05. 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GILBERT, Anthony</td>
<td>21. 11. 85</td>
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<tr>
<td>GLASS, Philip</td>
<td>10. 06. 85</td>
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<tr>
<td>HARVEY, Jonathan</td>
<td>12. 04. 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOYLAND, Vic</td>
<td>14. 10 85</td>
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<tr>
<td>MARTLAND, Stephen</td>
<td>13. 11. 85</td>
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<tr>
<td>NICHOLSON, George</td>
<td>23. 05. 85</td>
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<td>OLIVER, Steven</td>
<td>19. 11. 85</td>
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<tr>
<td>RUNSWICK, Darryl</td>
<td>22. 05. 85</td>
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<td>SAWER, David</td>
<td>15. 11. 85</td>
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</table>
COMPOSERS (cont.)

TIPPETT, Sir Michael 08. 03. 85.
VINE, Carl 29. 10. 86.
WEIR, Judith 19. 05. 86.
WESLEY-SMITH, Martin 01. 10. 86.
WISHART, Trevor 06. 02. 85.
WOOLRICH, John 06. 12. 85.
ZINOVIEFF, Peter 16. 05. 86.

CONDUCTORS INTERVIEWED:

BARLOW, Steven Opera 80. (5. 9. 85.)
CLEOBURY, Nicholas Aquarius. (23. 5. 85.)
DANIELS, Paul English National Opera. (12. 6. 85.)
DE LA MARTINEZ, Odaline Lontano. (30. 5. 85.)
ELDER, Mark English National Opera. (26. 4. 85.)
FREDMAN, Myer Sydney Conservatorium Opera School. (12. 1. 86.)
FRIEND, Lionel English National Opera. (1. 5. 85.)
GREENE, Andrew Victoria State Opera (1. 8. 84.)
HOPKINS, John Victorian College of The Arts (6. 8. 84.)
HOWARTH, Elgar Freelance (15. 5. 86.)
DIRECTORS INTERVIEWED:

BAILEY, Lucy  
National Theatre (2.8.85.)

BENTHAAK, Bernt  
Freelance (1.6.84.)

COPLAND, Murray  
Freelance (10.8.84.)

CRAIG, Douglas O.B.E.  
Sadlers Wells (20.3.85.)

FITZGERALD, Brian  
The Australian Opera (28.10.86.)

FREEMAN, David  
Opera Factory (19.6.85.)

KEHR, Peter  
Stuttgart Opera (21.6.85.)

LLOYD DAVIES, John  
English National Opera (21.4.85.)

POUTNEY, David  
English National Opera (29.5.85.)

OLSEN, Denis  
Freelance (29.4.85.)

TILL, Nicholas  
Opera For The People (20.4.86.)

WARNER, Keith  
English National Opera (25.4.85.)

PUBLISHERS INTERVIEWED:

BEEDLES, Maureen - Oxford University Press (10.12.85.)

BOYLE, Robin - Chester Music (7.12.85.)

COLLERAN, William - Universal Editions (18.10.85)

CAVENDER, Sally - Faber and Faber (18.11.85.)

EASTERBROOK, Giles - Novello (22.10.85.)

GROVES, Sally - Schott and Co. (13.11.85.)

HEYTNER, Graeme - Peters Edition (6.1.86.)
PUBLISHERS (cont.)

LAW, Andrew - Universal Music Publishers (13. 12. 85)
McCRINDLE, Sheila - Chester Music (22. 10. 85.)
SUSSKIND, Janis - Boosey and Hawkes (12. 11. 85.)
WRIGHT, Rosie - Chester Music (22. 10. 85.)

SINGERS INTERVIEWED:

ANGEL, Marie 31. 05. 85.
BALDWIN, Tony 16. 05. 85.
BELK, Alan 03. 02. 86.
CARDIN, Joan 20. 07. 84.
DONNELLY, Malcolm 21. 07. 84.
EDWARDS, Terry 22. 05. 85.
FIELDS, Helen 29. 04. 85.
GARRETT, Leslie 26. 04. 85.
GINSBORG, Jane 19. 08. 85.
KIMM, Fiona 12. 11. 85.
KING, Mary 22. 05. 85.
MANNING, Jane 26. 10. 85.
RAFFELLS, Tony 25. 04. 85.
ROBSON, Christopher 20. 06. 85.
RODEN, Anthony 28. 07. 84.
SIDWELL, Roland 13. 11. 85.
SINGERS (cont.)

TRELEAVEN, John 02. 04. 85.
WIEGOLD, Mary 10.12. 85.
WINSLADE, Glen 02. 04. 85.
WOOD, John 25. 07. 84.

OTHER OPERA PERSONNEL INTERVIEWED:

BENISON, Ben Choreographer (31. 5. 85.)
DILKE, Zena Mime Artist/Dancer (21. 6. 85.)
FRASER, Anne Designer (29. 7. 84.)
GURTON, Shaun Designer (8. 8. 84.)
KNOTT, Amanda Dancer (28. 11. 85.)
SMITH, Barry Puppeteer (18. 4. 85.)

FILM MAKERS:

GAVIN, Barrie Freelance (30. 1. 86.)
BAILEY, Derek Landseer Productions (3. 3. 86.)
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<th>Name</th>
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<td>ARNOLD, Judy</td>
<td>Fires of London (18.6.85.)</td>
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<td>B.B.C. Radio (27.1.86.)</td>
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<td>B.B.C. Television/Radio (27.1.86.)</td>
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<td>Brighton Festival / Dartington International Summer School (15.3.86.)</td>
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<td>JACK, Adrian</td>
<td>Musica, Institute for Contemporary Art (2.1.86.)</td>
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<td>MACKENZIE-FORBES, Ken</td>
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<td>MADDOCKS, Fiona</td>
<td>Channel 4 Television (21.2.86.)</td>
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<td>MEARES, Stanley</td>
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<td>MOREAU, Annette</td>
<td>Contemporary Music Network (29.3.86.)</td>
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<td>ROSE, Greg</td>
<td>Singcircle (6.1.86.)</td>
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<td>VINER, Michael</td>
<td>London Sinfonietta (29.3.85.)</td>
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<td>WRIGHT, Roger</td>
<td>British Music Information Centre (18.3.85.)</td>
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CONTEMPORARY ENSEMBLES AND OPERA COMPANIES VISITED:

Abbey Opera
Endymion Ensemble
English National Opera
Electric Phoenix
Intermedia
John Harle's Berliner Band
Kings' Singers
Lontano
Modern Music Theatre Troupe
New London Choir
Northern Music Theatre
Opera 80
Opera Factory
Sing Circle
The Cherub Company
The Fires of London
The Kick Company
The London Sinfonietta
T. N. T. Theatre Company
Vocem
PRODUCTIONS VISITED:

A Tale Told Too Often (Collaboration) Dartington Summer School
Akhnaten (Glass) English National Opera
Birthday of the Infanta (Zemlinsky) Covent Garden
Chloe (Henderson) The Seymour Group
Circles (Berio) Huddersfield Festival
Donnerstag (Stockhausen) Covent Garden
Fly (Conyngham) Victoria State Opera
Hell's Angels (Osborne) Opera Factory/London Sinfonietta
Kate Kelly's Roadshow (Cowie) The Seymour Group
Katya Kabanova (Janacek) English National Opera
King Priam (Tippett) Covent Garden
Le Jongleur de Notre Dame Brighton Festival
(Maxwell Davies)
L'Heure Espagnole (Ravel) Guildhall School
Little Harlequin (Stockhausen) Brighton Festival
Mahagonny Songspiel (Weill) London Sinfonietta
Master Peter’s Puppett Show (de Falla) London Sinfonietta
Mavra (Stravinsky) Guildhall School
Mr Punch (Finnissy) The Fires of London
Passion According to Punch (Pouseur) Electric Phoenix
Pierrot Lunaire (Schoenberg) The Fires of London
Renard (Stravinsky) Northern Music Theatre
Revelation and Fall (Maxwell Davies) London Sinfonietta
Tempest Now (TNT collaboration) Huddersfield Festival
The Castle (Cherub Co. collaboration) Edinburgh Festival
The Knot Garden (Tippett) Royal Academy of Music
The Marriages of Zones 3, 4, & 5 (Barker) Camden Festival
The Mask of Orpheus (Birtwistle) English National Opera
The Midsummer Marriage (Tippett) English National Opera
The Rising of the Moon (Maw) Guildhall School
The Trial (Edwards) Dartington International
Visage (Berio) Summer School
Yan Tan Tethera (Birtwistle) Huddersfield Festival
Opera Factory/London
Sinfonietta
VIDEO AND CINEMA VIEWED:

Big H. (Muldowney)
Higglety Pigglety Pop I (Knussen)
Kuonisquatsi (Glass)
Michelagniolo (Hoyland)
Mishima (Glass)
Pastorale (Wishart)
Punch and Judy (Birtwistle)
Reich's Revolution (Documentary)
Seven Deadly Sins (Weill)
Where the Wild Things Are (Knussen)

LECTURES ATTENDED:

"IRCAM is a Total Irrelevancy" - A debate between Jonathan Harvey and Douglas Young as part of The Huddersfield Festival (1985).

Open Forum with Harrison Birtwistle and Peter Zinovieff - Activity of English National Opera Education Department "Birtwistle Unmasked".
Barry Anderson - The Electronics in "The Mask of Orpheus".
("Birtwistle Unmasked" programme) The Royal College of Music.


Luciano Berio - The Use of the Voice. Huddersfield Festival.

Nigel Osborne - "Response" - A weekend activity of The London Sinfonietta.

Oliver Knussen - "Response" - A weekend activity of The London Sinfonietta.

"Writing for the Voice and Electronics" - Electric Phoenix as part of The Brighton Festival (1985).

Pierre Boulez - "IRCAM" - IRCAM in London.

Sir Michael Tippett - Liverpool University. Part of "The Tippett 80th Birthday Celebrations".
EDUCATIONAL and ARTISTIC INSTITUTIONS VISITED:

Dartington International Summer School
Educational Department (English National Opera)
The British Music Information Centre
The Contemporary Music Network (Arts Council of Great Britain)
The Electro-Acoustic Music Association of Great Britain
The Guildhall School of Music and Drama
The Institute of Contemporary Art
The National Opera Workshop (The Australian Opera)
The Royal Academy of Music
The Royal Northern College of Music
The Society for the Promotion of New Music
The Sydney Conservatorium of Music
The University of New South Wales
The Victorian College of The Arts
FESTIVALS ATTENDED IN 1985.

Almeida festival
Bath festival
Bean Feast (London Sinfonietta)
Brighton Festival
Camden Festival
Edinburgh Festival
Huddersfield Festival of Contemporary Music
Leeds Contemporary Music Festival
Response (London Sinfonietta)
Summer Scope  South Bank Festival

MISCELLANEOUS EUROPEAN EVENTS:

"Akhnaten" (Glass) - Stuttgart Opera Production. A comparison study.

"Carte Blanche" - A review of the works of Mauricio Kagel. (Holland Festival).

L'Institut de Recherche et Co-ordination Acoustique/Musique (Paris) Introductions and guided tour by Jonathan Harvey.
MISCELLANEOUS EUROPEAN EVENTS (cont.)

The International Theatre Institute of Amsterdam – A study of video records of various representative Music Theatre productions of the Seventies and Eighties presented during European Festivals.

The premiere of "The King Goes Forth to France" (Sallinen) (Savonlinna Opera Festival–Finland).
APPENDIX B.

(a) The Arches
(b) The Tides

3. An illustration of the allegorical structure of the 17 Arches used during Act 2 as a device to bind together the words, action and music.

Each Arch is made of a different substance. Many arches are cracked or broken in some way (Coherence). Some arches are partly obscured by plants or water flowing over them, (Openness). The Arches contain dreams.
5. A diagram showing the main elements in the Tides. This is used as a structure to determine the contrasts in the action during Act 3.
APPENDIX C.

The Super Formel for "Donnerstag aus Licht".
APPENDIX D.


If the National Opera Workshops of The Australian Opera have achieved anything it is that they have exposed the continuing problems of the Music Theatre genre in Australia. The 1986 programme states that - "by assisting composers and librettists in the development of their theatrical skill, and by helping to build audiences for new forms of expression in the lyric theatre we hope today to be able to shape tomorrow's Australian Opera".

This ideal fell short. The workshops became a forum for the presentation of completed works with little chance for development of theatrical skills. None of the works exhibited any attempts to find new forms of lyric expression. All three were narrative, based on previous literature which already made a powerful statement in its own right; all three were interested in pursuing a traditional operatic structure; all works called for naturalistic production; all works displayed an imbalance of musical and dramatic elements; and in fact, all works pointed towards a continuation of the mainstream patterns of the nineteenth century. All three works were scored for full orchestra but for the purposes of this workshop the scores were reduced for one or two pianos which severely limited the assessment procedures. There was no attempt made by the company to create new audiences for contemporary Music Theatre by publicity.
measures and the performances were attended by interested parties or by those specially invited. Conspicuous by their absence were the large number of young composers, directors and singer/actors involved in the music making activities of the city of Sydney. The profile of this exercise remained low as evidenced by the lack of interest from interstate despite the fact that two of the composers were not residents of New South Wales.

Ross Fides, a largely self-taught composer, presented scenes from "The Proposal", a work based on Anton Chekov's play. He stated categorically that the work was not intended to break new ground, but to create - "something essentially entertaining, approachable and hopefully, worthwhile within established conventions".

The second work, Act Three of "The Heiress" by Donald Hollier, (with a libretto written by the composer after the Henry James novel "Washington Square"), was a fifteen year old unperformed work. The composer confessed his embarrassment at his being chosen - "I feel so distant from it now that much of it feels like the work of another composer".

A work by Colin Brumby was chosen as the third piece to be presented. This was the only work in the process of composition and which the workshop experience could possibly influence.
Scenes 2 & 3 of Act I from "Lorenzaccio", after the play by Alfred de Musset, were presented. The composer made comment about his writing of the libretto based upon a literal translation of the French play and the moulding of the material—"in accordance with his own feeling for lyric (as distinct from literary) diction"—cutting away the sub-plots and reducing a five act play to a three act opera.

It was interesting to note that the two main works by experienced composers reflected the 'ivory tower' composition mentality especially as both were written as uncommissioned works without the necessary practical controls from a commissioning body and without the collaboration of a director in the early stages of development. Both composers were responsible for their own libretto material and this lack of collaboration resulted in conventional 'play' formats instead of the more imaginative assemblage of material which may have resulted. Whilst Ross Fides had collaborated with David Goddard on a libretto adaptation, both appeared in awe of the source material and were unable to rework the material to allow the music to be more than a superimposition upon Chekov's play.

It was obvious to all involved that this activity was not fulfilling the aims of the Australian Opera and a discussion with Brian Fitzgerald, director of the programme, revealed some of the
concerns for its future development.

In 1985, a great many submissions had been received and a programme of two one-act operas and one scene from a completed work were chosen. The budget allocated was minimal and was to cater for a small royalty payment for each composer. As sets and costume were to be selected from stock and the majority of rehearsals were to take place in cheaper accommodation than the Opera House, it was deemed to be adequate.

However, it was thought important that the activity be seen to have a high profile within the Australian Opera organization and so it was decided that actual performances should take place within the Opera house. As a corollary to this, the ultimate responsibility for the programme was to remain with Moffatt Oxenbould, Artistic Director of the Australian Opera, to ensure priority decisions. Artistic personnel were to be drawn from Australian Opera staff and the workshop sessions were organised around specific singers, directors and music staff schedules. There was to be no orchestral commitment. The greatest single cost therefore, was the travelling and accommodation of participating composers. As a result of this, composers only visited twice during the exercise.
This decision, based on budgetary considerations, effected the entire project. It ceased to be a workshop in the true sense of the word. Press criticism in 1985 was levelled at this misnomer. It was thought that nothing had been gained by a major house producing a finished project rather than being involved at the 'nuts and bolts' level of generation of the works. However, the Australian Opera maintained they were not interested in an embryonic work which needed re-fashioning. The limited time allocated and the singers simultaneous commitments did not allow for this. Instead, the contribution they had to make was in producing a finished piece of Music Theatre at a professional standard so that composers could see a realization of their work and make judgements as to the future directions. It was hoped that audiences would contain interested people, such as publishers and Music Theatre ensembles, who would take advantage of this process to view new works available.

The 1986 season was approached with these same ideas in mind. Unfortunately, the response from the composers was extremely poor in this second year of activity and one can only surmise that this approach did not find favour with composers. The fact must be faced that unperformed, uncommissioned works of Australian Music Theatre are not readily available to be submitted. Is it not financial and artistic suicide to write large scale pieces of Music Theatre unbidden and undirected within the present arts financial climate?
Indeed, this type of activity put forward by the Australian Opera must have a limited life span by its very nature.

Brian Fitzgerald reiterated that the Australian Opera was totally committed to the project of generating new Music Theatre but felt that the approach for 1987 needed to be varied. To this end a seminar was held and audience members invited to converse with a panel chaired by Justin McDonell (Arts Administrator), and comprising Jim Sharman (Theatre Director), Roger Covell (Professor of Music, University of New South Wales), Larry Sitsky (Composer), Geoffrey Chard (Singer), Stuart Challender (Musical Adviser to The Australian Opera on Contemporary Music) and Moffat Oxenbould, (Artistic Director of The Australian Opera).

A group of approximately 40 interested people assembled, comprising the three composers, eight members of the workshop team, with the remainder made up of composers, librettists, singers, playwrights and interested members of the public.

Larry Sitsky's opening remarks raised questions as to the viability of this workshop process. He remarked that the performances were in no way indicative of the works. Without orchestration it was impossible to assess the work either in music or dramatic terms. He touched on two other main considerations of this thesis. In asking why a work had taken
fifteen years to come to performance he raised doubts as to the validity of large-scale contemporary musical structures and suggested that composers should be concentrating on writing small-scale chamber opera more in tune with the financial climate. Secondly, he was concerned with the educational possibilities of such workshop activities and made suggestions as to the prospects of television coverage to introduce the latest trends in Music Theatre to a greater audience.

However, The Australian Opera did not see this venture as a promotional one as evidenced by the budget allocation and Oxenbould reiterated that this experience was aimed at establishing relationships with composers.

Jim Sharman commented that similar questions regarding the future directions of the 'legitimate' theatre had been posed almost fifteen years previously. He challenged The Australian Opera in the role of entrepreneur and suggested that they play an active part in the choosing of composers for commissioning rather than a passive role in responding to composers' works within the competition format. However, Oxenbould remained convinced that the workshop experience was an evolving one which would allow The Australian Opera to identify composers and librettists for the entrepreneurial stage of development.
It was suggested that an annual team of composer and librettist should work on a specific project whilst in residence at The Australian Opera and that workshop activity should emerge from this exercise. Oxenbould outlined the problems of priorities in response to this suggestion. "The company is dependant on 60% of box office returns for its survival and there is a consequent need for what might be deemed 'museum repertoire' as against risk-taking contemporary composition". Scheduling of singers, directors and music staff was seen to be the greatest problem for management especially considering the complexity of most contemporary scores. It was obviously an easier proposition to schedule for a four week exercise than to maintain a programme throughout the year which would interfere in the workloads and touring commitments of personnel.

However, it was agreed that lengthier associations were necessary if composers and librettists were to learn of the unique needs of opera and an invitation was made for casual attachments to the opera company in attempts to open up a two way process of familiarization.

It was further suggested that the company needed a dramaturg who could also be a valuable resource for young composer/librettists. In response, The Australian Opera expressed faith in the sufficiency of their directorial staff, thus relegating
the theatrical aspect of new work to its traditional secondary position.

Jim Sharman's question as to the relevance of popular Musical Theatre in the Opera House met with a positive answer but Oxenbould underlined that the electronic factor was a cost that could not be met within the existing facilities and the present budget conditions.

Perhaps the best method of ensuring the generation of new work was proposed by Geoffrey Chard, a singer with a wide experience in Contemporary Opera in Europe. His suggestion of a splinter group working under the umbrella of The Australian Opera and with a yearly commitment to the generation of a new contemporary opera, seemed a positive step towards the establishment of an Australian body of work. He was most anxious that The Australian Opera look to European contemporary works and that they not underestimate audience response to works which are now in the repertoire of many European houses.

This suggestion was countered by such members of the audience as Myer Fredman, Head of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music Opera School. He was in favour of a commissioning body which would offer residencies for chosen composers within the major houses and thus provide education for these composers through the
experience of the realities of opera production and performance.

Librettist, David Malouf, extended this idea to involve six chosen collaborative teams who should be offered a firm commitment of a project by the company but which may or may not lead to an actual performance. The latter would depend on the successful development of the works during the project period, which in turn would be under constant supervision by Australian Opera personnel to ensure that the performance of the work was given full consideration.

Professor Coveil, in concentrating on how Music Theatre should be generated, suggested that there was an imbalance between The Australian Opera's attitude towards contemporary Music Theatre and their traditional repertoire. He suggested that the new works needed to be tested in private rehearsals and then scheduled into the rehearsal process of the company. In this way, the 'Cinderella syndrome' could be by-passed and Contemporary Music Theatre given full weight within the activities of the company.

Surprising opinions were expressed by Colin Brumby, one of the selected composers. He stated categorically that The Australian Opera was not an educational body and the workshop was merely an auditioning programme for composers for future commissions. He further suggested that it was the responsibility of The Australian
Opera to find young composers, match them with librettists and give them guidance. He saw this as the only basis on which the collaborative process could proceed.

In summing up, Justin McDonell reinforced the idea that The Australian Opera should be the major entrepreneurial force in the generation of Music Theatre in Australia and that this activity must be given high priority, managed in fact, by the Artistic Director himself. The best process was thought to be a residency for composer/librettist over a longer period of time than a four week workshop. The creative process should be less formal and certainly more open as far as public performances were concerned. Australian Opera personnel should be available from concept stage to finished product. It was of paramount importance that younger composers/librettists should be attracted to the scheme. It was also suggested that The Australian Opera pursue the involvement of the public so that the end-product workshops or company productions could function as a testing of audience response and serve as a programme of audience education. In this respect, the National Opera Workshops could serve a two-way function of giving advice to The Australian Opera and interesting the public in supporting a greater number of Australian composers/librettists.
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