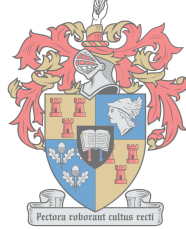


**A reception history of opera in Cape Town:
Tracing the development of a distinctly South African
operatic aesthetic (1985–2015)**

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Declaration

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SUMMARY

In this dissertation an historical narrative is constructed of the reception of opera performances in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015 as reported on in the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*. The study is theoretically situated in reception theory, specifically as articulated in Musicology by Carl Dahlhaus in *Foundations of Music History*. Reception histories are built on the social responses to art, and in the case of this study, opinions and views on opera were gathered from journalistic articles published specifically in the Western Cape daily newspapers, the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*.

In Chapter 1, the current literature on opera history in South Africa is reviewed, and the theoretical framework is discussed. Also in this chapter, is an overview of the South African media landscape, which serves as a contextual framework and perspective from which the primary sources (journalistic articles) were written. The research methodology is also explained in terms of the research design, data collection and the analysis of that data by using content analysis as methodology.

An historical context and framework for this reception history is given in Chapter 2. The researcher revisits the historiography of opera on the basis of three identified historical patterns (addressed in the three parts of this chapter): the political enablers of opera, the professionalization of opera, and the introduction and dominance of nineteenth-century operas in the repertoire performed in Cape Town over a period of about two hundred years.

In Chapter 3, the results of the study is presented as a reception history of opera in Cape Town. Four historical patterns were identified by the researcher, and this chapter is accordingly structured in four parts: the reigning aesthetics of Western European operas, the transformation of the opera industry, strategies towards contemporary relevance and Africanisation, as well as the performance of indigenous South African operas. The reception of opera in Cape Town shows that there had been a move over a period of thirty years towards the creation of a distinctly South African operatic expression and aesthetic, which aimed to preserve the musical and theatrical elements of Western European opera while fusing it with music, stories and settings that have indigenous South African roots.

OPSOMMING

In hierdie tesis word 'n narratiewe geskiedenis geskep van die resepsie van opera-opvoerings in Kaapstad tussen 1985 en 2015, soos oor berig is in die *Cape Times* en *Die Burger*. Die studie is teoreties gesetel in resepsie-teorie, soos spesifiek in Musikologie geartikuleer deur Carl Dahlhaus in *Foundations of Music History*. Resepsiegeskiedenis word saamgestel uit sosiale response op kuns, en in die geval van hierdie studie is opinies en perspektiewe op opera uit joernalistieke artikels versamel wat spesifiek in die Wes-Kaapse dagblaai *Cape Times* en *Die Burger* gepubliseer is.

In Hoofstuk 1 word 'n kritiese analise van die huidige literatuur oor operageskiedenis in Suid-Afrika gelewer, en die teoretiese raamwerk word in besonderhede bespreek. Ook in hierdie hoofstuk is daar 'n oorsig van die Suid-Afrikaanse media-landskap, wat dien as 'n kontekstuele raamwerk en perspektief waaruit hierdie primêre bronne (joernalistieke artikels) geskryf is. Die navorsingsmetodologie word ook verduidelik in terme van die navorsingsontwerp, dataversameling en die analise van daardie data deur die gebruik van inhoudsanalise as metodologie.

'n Historiese konteks en raamwerk vir die resepsiegeskiedenis word in Hoofstuk 2 gegee. Die navorser ontleed opnuut die historiografie van opera aan die hand van drie historiese patrone wat geïdentifiseer is (en in die drie dele van hierdie hoofstuk aangespreek word): die politieke bestelle wat opera bevorder het, die professionalisering van opera, en die oorheersing van negentiende-eeuse operas in die repertorium wat in Kaapstad oor 'n tydperk van ongeveer twee honderd jaar opgevoer is.

In Hoofstuk 3 word die resultate van hierdie studie aangebied as 'n resepsiegeskiedenis van opera in Kaapstad. Vier historiese patrone is deur die navorser geïdentifiseer, en hierdie hoofstuk is daarvolgens in vier dele gestruktureer: die heersende estetika van Westerse Europese opera, die transformasie van die operabedryf, strategieë om eietydse relevansie en Afrikanisering te bewerkstellig, asook die opvoering van inheemse Suid-Afrikaanse operas. Die resepsie van opera in Kaapstad wys dat daar oor 'n tydperk van dertig jaar 'n skuif was tot die skep van 'n unieke Suid-Afrikaanse opera-uitdrukking en -estetika wat gepoog het om die musikale en teaterelemente van Westerse Europese opera te bewaar en te vermeng met musiek, stories en plasings wat inheemse Suid-Afrikaanse wortels het.

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I also need to thank my supervisor, Prof Stephanus Muller, for his support of my ideas and thinking about opera, history and music criticism, as well as the belief that my initially vague concept for a research project could result in this work. Also, thank you to family, friends, colleagues and mentors who have supported this endeavour in many ways.

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INTRODUCTION

The year 1831 saw the first fully South African production of a serious opera staged in Cape Town: Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz*. Ten years earlier, on 18 June 1821, the German composer's opera had its premiere in the Schauspielhaus Berlin. Its reception had been favourable – much to Weber's surprise – and the opera achieved immediate popularity because of its “romantic atmosphere” and “feeling for German nature and myth”.¹ By 1826, when Weber died, the fame of his then five-year-old opera had reached the southern tip of Africa when piano students in Robertson performed an arrangement of the “Hunter's Chorus” from this work, and in May 1830 a violinist named C. White performed “a potpourri of music from *Der Freischütz*” in a recital with piano accompaniment.²

The next year, an advertisement by Cape Town's African Theatre on Boereplein (today the St Stephen's Church on Riebeeck Square in Bree Street) appeared in *The South African Commercial Advertiser*³: “The British Amateur Company ‘All the World's a Stage’ will perform for the 1st time, with new scenery, dresses and decorations, Carl Maria von Weber's Grand Opera (in three acts) of *Der Freischütz*”.⁴ This performance makes Cape Town the city where the history of local opera production in South Africa commenced.⁵

By 1831, one may surmise from the above, opera had been part of the cultural life of music lovers in the Cape for some time; however, the performances of full-scale productions since the early 1800s were mostly by travelling companies from Europe. Cape Town did not have an opera company but overtures, choruses and arias from operas by, among others, Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini (then contemporary composers whose works were famous in Europe) were part of local concert programmes.⁶ It was only on Saturday, 29 October 1831 that local

¹ Osborne, C. 2001. *The dictionary of the opera*. London, England: Michael O'Mara Books, p.339.

² Bouws, J. 1966. *Die musieklewe van Kaapstad, 1800-1850, en sy verhouding tot die musiekkultuur van Wes-Europa*. Cape Town: Balkema, pp.129-134.

³ *The South African Commercial Advertiser* was the country's first independent newspaper and was first published on 7 January 1824.

⁴ No author. 1831. “South African Theatre”. *The South African Commercial Advertiser*, 29 October: Vol. VII, No. 457, p.1.

⁵ No author. *The early history of opera in South Africa*. Available: http://myfundi.co.za/e/The_early_history_of_Opera_in_South_Africa [accessed on 19 October 2011].

⁶ Bouws, 1966: 118.

singing actors took to the stage with a London actor, H. Booth, as director, and the organist of the Lutheran Church in Strand Street, Wilhelm Brandt, leading the amateur orchestra in that historic performance of *Der Freischütz*.⁷

It would seem that the theatre company's decision to perform *Der Freischütz* was probably influenced and informed by the opera's favourable reception in Europe and the local audience, as Jan Bouws puts it, having been "superficially familiar" with the music.⁸ The reputation and positive reception the opera had built since its premiere in 1821 seemed to have continued when it reached South Africa, as this review in *The South African Commercial Advertiser* suggests:

THEATRICALS – On Saturday Evening the English Amateurs perform'd WEBER'S celebrated Opera of "Der Freischütz", the announcement of which had excited more than usual interest, from its being one of acknowledged difficulty. The performance generally, with the exception of some of the instrumental parts, which in many of the passages are extremely difficult, and require very great precision in executing, was rewarded with approbation. The Scenery and contrivances in the "Ballet Scene" were got up with considerable effect and ingenuity, and gave general satisfaction to a [...] audience. In the course of the Evening the Song, entitled "King and the Countryman" was given in inimitable style, and the amusements terminated with the laughable Farce of "Animal Magnetism" which elicited continued bursts of applause. Upon the whole, Cape Theatricals have seldom been more effective than on Saturday evening. Numerous applications, it appears, have been made to the Amateurs, for a repetition of the Opera. – (From a Correspondent)⁹

This review seems to contextualise the opera in terms of what audiences knew and thought of the music and its composer. It gives clues as to the social stature of opera as an art form, and explains how this performance had been received by the audience (and the

⁷ *Ibid*: 153.

⁸ *Ibid*: 153.

⁹ No author. 1831. "Theatricals". *The South African Commercial Advertiser*, 2 November: Vol. VII, No. 458, p.1.

“Correspondent”) within the context of other performances they had seen locally at the time. In essence, it provides an historical account of a cultural event whilst contextualising the event within the cultural life during that time.

The review relates that Weber’s opera was already known in the Cape as a “celebrated” work. The music was believed to be difficult, though seemingly performed with aplomb by the amateur musicians. References to the audience’s “general satisfaction”, “bursts of applause” and the “numerous applications [...] for a repetition” suggest a more than favourable reception in Cape Town. Moving ahead to the more recent historical period covered by this study, 1985 to 2015, it is interesting to note that *Der Freischütz* was only staged once during this time in Cape Town, in September 1990. Why is this? As the music of the opera had not changed over the previous 194 years, the answer probably lies elsewhere in the societal and cultural changes. Over the course of history, these changes must have shifted this opera from occupying a place of considerable cultural value, so much so that it seemed almost an essential work to usher in an era of local opera production, to a work that, at least for the latter 25 years of the period that this study covers, had not been considered by an opera company in Cape Town as a work that would find favour with contemporary audiences. This study postulates that an analysis of journalistic articles written over a particular period on opera, like the above review in *The South African Commercial Advertiser*, will yield answers as to how societal and cultural changes have influenced and shaped the performance history of opera in a certain milieu, in the case of this study, Cape Town.

It was the American publisher Phil Graham, co-owner of the *Washington Post*, who famously said, “[Journalism is the] first rough draft of history”. Indeed, newspapers have been used as primary sources in constructing social and political histories, while music journalism is used as a source in reception histories of musical works. Historical accounts viewed from the vantage point of the press are concerned “not only with what actually happened in any given time or place, but also with what people *thought* was happening, as

revealed to them through the means of mass communication, which may have conditioned their subsequent actions".¹⁰

Most people would agree that this 1831 performance of *Der Freischütz* in Cape Town is historical. But what makes it historical or even part of history? The mere fact that the performance happened, could also be regarded as just one of many opera performances in Cape Town. That this was the first fully South African production gives it an aspect worthy of deeming it historical. But even this does not really justify a significance in history – would the first ever performance of an opera on African soil not have greater historical value? Is any “first” in opera in South Africa necessarily historical? I would argue that the historical significance of that performance of *Der Freischütz* is that it opened the field of local opera production that led, over the next century, to the professionalization of the South African opera industry, the formation of an operatic canon specifically in South Africa, and opera becoming a commodity in the cultural economy of South Africa. Had opera, and local opera production, not flourished as would be shown in Chapter 2 of this thesis (if one should employ the logic of the above argument), the 1831 performance of *Der Freischütz* might only have been a relatively unimportant historical occurrence.

When this study began, it started as an uncomplicated endeavour of archival research – exploring newspaper archives to find reviews and articles on opera production in Cape Town and, by collecting historical data from them, constructing a history of the reception of opera over a specific time and within a specific space. But the two elements of media and opera each contributed their own multiple layers of history, both existing within shared social, political, economic and cultural contexts. These layers of history soon became evident and its importance felt.

The events of the past that historians investigate are seldom events in isolation. Apart from the different contexts, there are reasons why events occur at specific times in specific places. Thus an event in history has a history of its own, something the historian writing about the event should take cognisance of. One could further argue that an event only

¹⁰ Knudson, Jerry W. 1993. *Late to the Feast: Newspapers as Historical Sources*. American Historical Association. Available at www.historians.org [accessed on 27 August 2013].

becomes an event in history because of the significance of the reasons for its occurrence, which only becomes clearer later in history. Certainly not everything that happens in the world becomes history; it only becomes history because of the significance it had at the time of its occurrence. At later points in history, that significance changes because of the manner in which we reflect on it at different points in time. Michael Stanford in *A companion to the study of history* asks whether “the present is the sum of all that has gone before”.¹¹ It seems that this is exactly what the historian investigates – how events in the past accumulate to become history.

Alun Munslow writes that it is the function of historians to “understand, and explain in a written form, the connections between events and human intention or agency in the past”.¹² Historians start their investigations with questions about a past event. In order to understand an event, historians require evidence that relates particularly to the event or individual. According to C.B. McCullagh, the evidence required is texts from the past, from which historians draw inferences about the events to which these texts refer and the circumstances of their composition.¹³ Texts from the past, therefore, are not only evidence of what had happened but also a means of grasping the conditions in which they were written. Munslow explains that the evidence “always pre-exists within narrative structures and is freighted with cultural meaning”.¹⁴ Historians can only make inferences about the meaning of the evidence once they have gathered all the evidence and organised it – meaning is most often not found in a single piece of evidence but rather only once historians have viewed all the related evidence.¹⁵

It is only through the narrative form that historical understanding emerges.¹⁶ By looking at events of the past, Munslow further argues, the reader cannot grasp history; this only comes from a narrative account (therefore the historian’s interpretation) of the subject the event relates to. In this regard, McCullagh explains that “all interpretations are expected to be credible, but only those which purport to describe a particular subject are expected to be

¹¹ Stanford, M. 1994. *A companion to the study of history*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p.11.

¹² Munslow, A. 2006. *Deconstructing history*. New York: Routledge, p.4.

¹³ McCullagh, C.B. 2004. *The logic of history – Putting postmodernism in perspective*. London & New York: Routledge, p.2.

¹⁴ Munslow, 2006:7.

¹⁵ *Ibid*: 8.

¹⁶ Munslow, A. 2013. *Authoring the past – Writing and rethinking history*. New York: Routledge, p.5.

fair”.¹⁷ Historical narratives put events of the past in an understandable and possibly chronological order – this happened, then that. But not only that, they go further in explaining why an event happened and are laden with the assumptions and inferences historians draw from them. Munslow explains that the narrative then becomes “a complex interpretative exercise that is neither conclusively true nor false”.¹⁸ History is constructed through the interpretation of past events as shown in the evidence historians are presented with. How this interpretation is formed into an historical narrative is as important as the evidence on which it is based. Merely relating the story of how events chronologically follow upon one another is only the beginning of the historical process.

Stanford distinguishes between history-as-event and history-as-account, where the former does not change over time but the latter does. In other words, the fact that an event happened does not change, but how we think about what happened changes over time. Essentially, history-as-account is concerned with the experiences of past events and the changes thereof over time. It follows that several histories-as-events could accumulate if the historian finds the connections in the evidence, thereby transforming it into history-as-account. Although events of the past may look isolated, they probably are the accumulation of past events. Connecting these events and giving meaning to them is the task of the historian. Munslow refers to this distinction as the difference between a chronicle and a narrative, where the former only lists events and the latter “describes causal relations between many of the events they narrate”.¹⁹ In his article, “The historical justification of music”, Matti Huttunen makes a distinction between “history” and “chronicle”. The latter he defines as “a list of historical facts which does not show any connections between them”, while “history becomes history only when events and other facts are connected to each other, thus implying causal relations between historical facts”.²⁰

If we think of historical writing as a process it would start with pinpointing the events (or actions, as Stanford calls them) as a series over time. Stanford quotes the American philosopher Louis O. Mink who sees the historian as “standing above a field of events and

¹⁷ McCullagh, 2004: 3.

¹⁸ Munslow, 2006: 12.

¹⁹ McCullagh, 2004: 3.

²⁰ Huttunen, M. 2008. “The historical justification of music”. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 16(1):3-19, Spring, p.9.

perceiving (rightly or wrongly) a certain pattern within that field”.²¹ History does not have much value if we only know that certain events happened and in what sequence they happened, unless there is some connection between them. Such connections are what writers of history try to accentuate.²² In order to make sense of historical events and its meaning in the present and its role for the future – essentially the aim of history – it is necessary for the historian to find these regularities and patterns in history. It is the search for causes, structures, underlying unities and explanatory theories.²³ These patterns are not universally true, nor are they objectively selected; they are based on the historian’s interpretation of the evidence and the inferences drawn. Furthermore, these patterns may change over time as further historical investigation reveals more and more patterns.

Noticing these patterns does not end the process of history. Stanford writes about history as a series of actions (events) which can be understood better if we know its context, “the whole environment – social, physical (or natural) and cultural – within which it occurs” because the contexts “shape and limit the action, but, above all, they help to give it meaning”.²⁴ In referring to historical documents, Stanford writes, “The problem is to grasp not what they mean to us, but what they meant in the cultural context in which they were written”.²⁵ For the historian, it means grasping what the events or actions meant socially, physically and culturally to people at the time.

For long, music histories have essentially been about significant events – a history of great works and great composers. However, too often not much is explained about why such works and composers are considered great, except maybe from the view of the musical text. Writers of music histories have often used the musical text solely as their point of entry to construct history. For example, Donald Jay Grout in the third edition (in 1980) of his textbook, *A history of Western music*, which has been used and internalised by music students all over the world (including South Africa), explains that in writing the book he had viewed the history of music primarily as the history of musical styles. He argues that one

²¹ Stanford, 1994: 99.

²² *Ibid*: 176.

²³ *Ibid*: 241.

²⁴ *Ibid*: 29.

²⁵ *Ibid*: 32.

cannot grasp music history if you do not have first-hand knowledge of the music itself.²⁶ His selection and discussion of music history is based on the availability of works in standard editions and various anthologies. But there is more to music histories, contexts that lie beyond the musical text and the life of the composer.

As a field of study, musicology has shifted this viewpoint that music histories revolve around musical texts and composers only. It has become a field of scholarship with a broader view of what constitutes music history. The *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, quoting the 1955 definition of the American Musicological Society, says musicology investigates “the art of music as a physical, psychological, aesthetic, and cultural phenomenon”.²⁷ A further point of entry to the study of music histories is a focus on “musicians acting within a social and cultural environment”.²⁸ This takes the historian beyond what a composer has notated and views music as a process or cultural commodity that not only involves the composer and his text, but also the musicians performing it and the consumer or listener.

This has already manifested in several publications on music history. In the latest edition of *A history of Western music*²⁹, edited by J Peter Burkholder, “In Performance” sections have been included. These sections trace the careers of major performers throughout the history of Western art music. It reveals the performance practices of the time and how the singers and instrumentalists have had an influence on how music had been performed and in many cases how composers had adapted their music to suit the abilities of musicians at that time. For the reader, it also means insight into, to use Burkholder’s examples, ornamentation, improvisation, and historically informed performance practice. This shift in approach to music histories recognises the performer as one of the central characters in the shaping of history, along with composers and their musical texts. Essentially, this brings reception into play – in performance the musical text becomes an interpretation of the performer’s

²⁶ Grout, D.J. 1980. *A history of Western music*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, p.xi.

²⁷ Duckles, V. & Pasler, J. ‘Musicology’, *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Available: www.oxfordmusiconline.com [accessed on 19 October 2011].

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Burkholder, J.P., Grout, D.J. & Palisca, C.V. 2014. *A history of Western music (9th edition)*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company.

perception of what the composer's intentions were. From here it is one step further to the listener (or audience) whose views are traced in reception histories.

In his six-volume *Oxford history of Western Music*,³⁰ Richard Taruskin brings, among others, conceptions of musical taste (something which resides in listeners of music), musical meaning (a reaction and interpretation of music) and semiotics (how this meaning manifests in the artwork) into play. His volumes prove why "great composers" and "great works" are indeed considered "great". Beethoven, an example Taruskin uses, is perceived as "great" – "which certainly is a historical fact" – but what constitutes his authority? The historian investigating these questions deals in fact with reception, as he is actively collecting perceptions of, for example, Beethoven's greatness. In his introduction to Volume I, Taruskin writes: "statements and actions in response to real or perceived conditions: these are the essential facts of human history".³¹ Reception, he further argues, gives an understanding of cultural products.

In Taruskin's history of music, the agents and social relations that played a role in the production of musical works are also explored. Composers certainly did not write music in a vacuum; often there had been enablers in society pushing for the composition of musical works – kings, popes and teachers. In the first chapter of Volume I, Taruskin mentions no composers but rather the enablers of music production, which gives a "more realistic assessment of the place composers and compositions occupy in the general historical scheme".³² Music histories, therefore, have increasingly taken into account factors that lie outside composers and their musical texts. Although not all of these constitute the elements of a reception history, they do bring elements of social histories into the construction of music histories.

The involvement of the consumer or listener of music in history is essentially the premise of reception histories – and the focus of this study. Reception implies an historical narrative from the vantage point of observers who look at (or in this case, a listener who hear) a work of art. It is therefore the history of social responses to art – be it from an audience, music

³⁰ Taruskin, R. 2005. *The Oxford history of Western music. Volume 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³¹ *Ibid*: xxvi.

³² *Ibid*: xxix.

critics, scholars or performers. Essentially, works of art remain the same, but the social landscape in which they are experienced and the aesthetics³³ according to which they are judged, change over time and in different contexts. This implies that the historian investigating these responses in order to construct history should read those responses with a sense of the era and social context in which they were created. If not, the historian will have only constructed a chronicle of events and not history.

This study investigates responses to opera specifically as reported in journalistic articles published in two selected Cape Town daily newspapers. It opens up the opportunity to take into account also responses by composers, singers, conductors and even audiences, and not only those of music critics or reviewers. However, responses by music critics represent a public view because reviewers' opinions are informed not only by their personal experience, but also their sense of what readers' – their audiences' – reaction would be within particular social and cultural contexts.³⁴ These journalistic articles – evidence in the historical sense – form the foundation on which the historical interpretations of this study are built.

For the researcher, it was fundamental first to give meaning (by accentuating patterns and supplying context) to the historical facts emerging from the writings on the history of opera preceding the period in question. Reception is not a history of facts; it is a history of the impressions and interpretations of historical facts (or events) at the time and while history is developing. One can even say a reception history is a “next-level” history that forms a layer over the historical events, its meaning and contexts. The latter provides the basis for the understanding of a history of reception. Reception becomes an even more intricate historical process of not only interpreting the events, its meaning and contexts, but goes further to interpret the interpretation of a certain *zeitgeist*, in this case as reflected in the media.

The historical patterns I have identified while scouring the historiography of opera – the evidence, or sources of historical writing on opera in the Cape – have informed the way in

³³ Throughout this thesis, the term “aesthetics” will be employed in its traditional, Kantian guise, i.e. as a distribution of the sensible that values art as an object disconnected from habitual conditions, disinterestedly concerned with the revealed presence of the world as it is encountered in our experience.

³⁴ Wasserman, H. 2004. “Revisiting reviewing: The need for a debate on the role of arts journalism in South Africa”. *Literator* 25(1): 139-157, April, p.143.

which this study is structured. Already in the preliminary investigation into opera history, I had chronicled the events in need of further investigation. From this, three significant patterns in the history of opera in Cape Town and South Africa emerged, which specifically relate to and form a basis for the reception of opera over the period this study covers. They are, first, the impact of societal influences and political systems, specifically different strands of nationalism over the course of more than a century, on operatic expression; second, the pursuit of professionalism and the professionalization of opera; and third, the dominance of nineteenth-century operatic repertoire. Only future histories will show whether these three patterns will sustain their significance or whether other patterns in this history indeed exist and will emerge at later stages in the process of historical writing.

This thesis begins, in Chapter 1, with a review of the current literature on opera history in Cape Town, a discussion of the study's theoretical framework, a contextualisation of the South African media and its practice of arts and music journalism, as well as how this research was structured and methodologically executed. The current historiography of opera in Cape Town lacks exactly that which Stanford refers to as patterns in its performance history. The current literature consists mostly of a catalogue of historical facts – events – with not much interpretation of these facts.

Theoretically, this study is situated in reception theory, specifically as articulated in musicology by Carl Dahlhaus in *Foundations of music history*.³⁵ A reception history, which this study constructs around operas performed between 1985 and 2015 in Cape Town, is a history built on the social responses to art. In the case of this study, these responses are gathered from journalistic articles in specifically the Western Cape daily newspapers the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*. Dahlhaus writes that music journalism is used as a source for views, opinions and accounts of performances in reception histories in music.

Understanding the specific contexts in which the publications operated from which these social responses to music are extracted, is essential to comprehend the reception history. The media in South Africa have, at least over the past century, been broadly divided along social and political lines, with *Die Burger* serving the Afrikaans community and the *Cape*

³⁵ Dahlhaus, C. 1983. *Foundations of music history*. J.B. Robinson (tr.). London: Cambridge University Press.

Times the English community of Cape Town. Media ownership, ideology and the newspapers' divergent readership markets have shaped the opinions and views expressed in the different publication's music journalism. Therefore, to engage with this reception history of opera, one should be cognisant of the chosen publications' ideological stances and their impact on the views of opera expressed in them.

The *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* have been purposively selected because they represent different societal sectors, political stances and ideological viewpoints. The period covered by the study – 1985 to 2015 – was purposively selected because it represents a time of many societal and political changes in South Africa. The most significant of these changes are the abolishment of apartheid, the establishment of a democratically elected government and, in the case of opera, the prevalence of debates about Eurocentric art forms juxtaposed with the emergence of black opera singers in the country. For the researcher, this period was of particular interest not only because of these socio-political changes but also because a period of thirty years presents the opportunity to understand how the opera industry changed and how those changes became, in manner of speaking, the “new normal”.

The premise of this historical study is that these varied changes in South Africa, the arts and the opera industry had an effect on the performance history of opera (for instance, the choice of repertoire and the professionalization of the industry), which can be traced in the articles in the selected publications. Gathering historical evidence from these publications over time reveals how opinions had changed and how certain stereotypes and fixed ideas have been sustained, and this forms the basis of reception histories in musicology. By using content analysis as methodology, the researcher was able to trace these views on opera as they manifested in the two chosen publications.

Because histories are layered one on top of another, this study would be incomplete and lacking historical justification if it did not provide a history of the operatic development in Cape Town in the years before 1985. This is the aim of Chapter 2 – to discuss the identified historical patterns that serve as a foundation for the reception history in this study. This chapter gives a background to understanding the research results and the reception history that has been constructed. More than two hundred years of opera history in Cape Town – from the early years of colonialism to the 1800s up until the late twentieth century – is

covered, and in effect constitutes a critical literature study of the current historiography on opera in South Africa. This chapter also represents reception, because it is a collection of views on historical events and an interpretation of those events.

The first part of Chapter 2 explains the impact of the socio-political landscape of South Africa – from colonialism, through apartheid up until democratisation – that served as an enabler for the performance of opera in the country. Already in the early 1800s, European travelling opera companies had aspirations towards establishing a professional opera industry in the Cape. Over the next two hundred years, a number of indicators of professionalization in opera developed. This second historical pattern is discussed in the second part of Chapter 2. In the third part of Chapter 2, the researcher traces the trajectory of the performance history of opera, and shows how nineteenth-century works have dominated the repertoire of local opera companies.

The results of the analysis of this study's primary sources, i.e. newspaper articles on opera in the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*, are presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Like Chapter 2, it discusses significant patterns in the reception history of opera in Cape Town. Collectively these patterns constitute an historical trajectory of the establishment of a distinctly South African operatic aesthetic and the narrative relates how the selected newspapers negotiated with their readers this changing aesthetic within the socio-political context in which opera had been performed in Cape Town. These patterns have been identified through the research methodology of content analysis and, informed by Dahlhaus's theory of reception in music, traces reception in the repeated stereotyped opinions, or *topoi*, presented in these articles. Four patterns were identified that trace the reception of the changing aesthetics of opera. These historical patterns are directly related to the repertoire performed between 1985 and 2015, and show how the chosen repertoire gives expression to these patterns in history.

Chapter 3 consists of four parts, each addressing one of the four historical patterns. The first part of the chapter traces how the aesthetics of Western European opera had been preserved amid debates about the role and standing of Eurocentric art forms in South Africa's changing political and arts landscapes. This is manifested in the choice of "great works by great masters", and an aesthetics that favours large musical forces, a comparison

with European production trends and artists, but also a survivalist rhetoric about the death of opera under a democratic political dispensation aiming to promote African arts. In the second part of this chapter, opera transformation is addressed and specifically how the introduction of George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* played a significant role in the transformation of opera in South Africa, the emergence of black opera singers, and the cultural capital gained through the export of talent to the international arena.

The third part of Chapter 3 focusses on strategies in the Africanisation of opera and the means of ensuring contemporary relevance for opera. By localising the setting of an opera, translating the libretto, adapting the score, and choosing repertoire that thematically resonates with a local audience, opera companies have endeavoured to ensure the local relevance of opera in South Africa. In the last part of this chapter, the performance of indigenous South African operas and their reception will be discussed. It is a chronological exploration of the development of the performance and aesthetics of operas by South African composers that were staged in Cape Town.

Although these four historical patterns of reception run concurrently, they present a process that over time led to the creation of a distinctly South African operatic aesthetic which, through the views of the press, were negotiated with local audiences. By uncovering historical layers and tracing historical patterns in journalistic articles published in the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*, and thereafter analysing them through the lens of reception theory, this study has constructed its reception history of the operas performed in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015.

CHAPTER 1

Framing reception in music histories

Introduction

This research project was born out of a personal curiosity to know how my work as a music journalist and opera critic contributed to the historical documentation of the performance history of music, particularly opera. I wondered what a music history would look like if it were constructed of only newspaper articles as sources. How do numerous stories intertwine to form such a history? Do these articles elucidate certain trends in performance practice? What information is conveyed about composers, musical texts and performers? And do these articles contribute to audience members' understanding and experience of performances?

These were some of the questions that started a journey of transforming my curiosity into research that is grounded in theory and a particular research methodology, in order to find results that could contribute to the body of knowledge about the performance history of opera in Cape Town. The journey entailed an exploration of the current historiography of opera and finding a suitable theoretical framework and research methodology to answer my questions. This thesis's first chapter follows this process from conceptualising to executing the research that would produce a reception history of opera.

Critically engaging with the current literature on my topic of interest was the first step in the research process. The literature review in the first part of this chapter focusses on what historical accounts of opera currently exist and critically analyses the value and contribution of these sources to the historiography of opera in Cape Town. In the literature review, it becomes evident that the history of opera (in both Cape Town and South Africa) is still only history-as-event, as Stanford defines this concept.³⁶ No complete list of opera productions in Cape Town – performance dates, works and composers – exists, except for the list that

³⁶ Stanford, 1994.

the current researcher compiled by using newspaper advertisements and marketing brochures.³⁷ The events that would form the basis of history-as-event had not been structured. However, opera production in South Africa has, to a certain degree, been well documented, albeit in “bits and pieces archived at institutions throughout the country”, according to Hilde Roos.³⁸ But much still has to be done to organise these “bits and pieces” into coherent history. In Roos’s study, as well as in several biographical accounts that form a large part of the historiography of opera in South Africa, one gets an overview of the opera activities around the country. What is missing are the connections between and contexts of these activities in order to construct history-as-account.

Different writers at different points in history have focused on diverse events that were significant for them at the time. Later historians may have brushed over these and rather highlighted other events of historical significance. At this stage – with just over fifty years of historical writing on the music activities in Cape Town (if one considers Bouws’s³⁹ work to be the first) – certain recurring themes become evident, which are what Stanford refers to as historical patterns.

During the course of this research project, it became apparent that the literature on opera in the Cape is largely not what can be understood as historiographical – these sources are not descriptive, historical or analytical writings of history.⁴⁰ The history of historical writing on opera still needs to be written, but first an analysis, interpretation and context should be given to the current facts. These historical events may not yet have accumulated well enough to form history, but what is evident is that the groundwork for the construction of a contextualised history of opera in South Africa – the writing of history-as-account – has only just begun.

Besides superficial reference to newspaper articles, no study in the literature used journalistic articles as its major source. In order to conduct research into how the press had contributed to the writing of the history of opera in Cape Town, the next step in the

³⁷ This list of productions and performance dates of operas staged between 1985 and 2015 is included as Addendum A.

³⁸ Roos, H. 2010. Opera production in the Western Cape: Strategies in search of indigenisation. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University, p.21.

³⁹ Bouws, 1966.

⁴⁰ Stanford, 1994: 5.

research process was to find a suitable theoretical framework. Reception theory, developed for the study of literary works, provided such a framework as its premise is the writing of history based on opinions and responses to art, as one finds in journalistic articles. Dahlhaus articulates how reception theory could be employed in musicology to explain responses to musical works.⁴¹ The source of these responses are journalistic articles on music, which represent a collective societal response to musical works. By analysing journalistic articles on music, one is able to construct reception histories in music. This theoretical framework is also discussed in the first part of this chapter.

Dahlhaus, however, warns that the researcher cannot blindly analyse these journalistic texts, but should be aware of the context in which these texts as responses to musical works had been written. In the second part of this chapter, the intricate socio-political context is mapped in which the media (much like the opera industry), and specifically arts journalism, operated between 1985 and 2015. For most of this period, the South African media industry consisted of only two sectors, an Afrikaans and English press, which points to a political divide. The ownership and ideology of each newspaper, as well as its readership market, influenced how critics writing for these publications responded to opera performances. Furthermore, the state and practice of music criticism, and arts journalism in general, within this context had an impact on how critics reported on opera production.

In the third part of this chapter, the research design and methodology of this project is discussed, and the study's structure and delineation by time-span and publications is explained. The timeframe of 1985 to 2015 was purposively selected because socio-politically it was a turbulent time in South Africa, but the dawn of a new political dispensation later impacted hugely on art production and ideologies around what is African art in a local context. Using the two daily newspapers, the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*, as the media to extract the articles from, proved best as both newspapers have strong roots in Cape Town, have consistently and extensively reported on the arts, have complete archives, and represent in their readership markets both the economically dominant Afrikaans and English communities of Cape Town.

⁴¹ Dahlhaus, 1983: 150-165.

Reception theory informed the use of content analysis as qualitative research methodology, which is a means of analysing text data by using a particular coding structure (keywords selected for the purpose of finding the specific text data needed for analysis). The journalistic articles from the newspapers, which are the primary sources, were sourced from the newspaper archive of the Stellenbosch University Library and by using the online newspaper archive, SA Media.

While it was clear that a study on the reception history of opera in Cape Town would make a contribution to the body of knowledge on South African opera performances, theoretically and methodologically this research project also challenges and builds on the trends in current South African musicological research, which seeks to view music and its performance history from different theoretical perspectives and employing new methodologies in collecting and analysing data. In his report on a panel discussion at the 2010 conference of the South African Society for Research in Music (SASRIM), titled “Looking back, looking ahead: The state of our discipline”, Christopher Ballantine led a group of six musicologists in exploring trends in musicological research in South Africa.⁴² Some of the salient remarks in this discussion included a call for research that did not divorce musical form from its socio-economic context and its impact on the broader South Africanist historiography by asking “new questions about old problems”.⁴³ A plea for more quantitative research in music was made, as well as for interdisciplinary research, which would push the boundaries of current musicological research done in South Africa – this means rethinking research methodologies in music. Furthermore, one participant raised the urgency for research on music in/and democracy to engage with a “democratic musical culture”. There was also a call to move away from writing about music through an apartheid view and using the apartheid narrative as an explanation for everything from composition to performance, and the assertion that South African music research could benefit from more engagement with scholars from outside the country.

⁴² Ballantine, C. 2012. “Looking back, looking ahead: The state of our discipline”. *South African Journal of Musicology* (SAMUS), 32: 113-133, January 2012.

⁴³ *Ibid*: 116.

I would suggest that the current research project of constructing a reception history of opera in Cape Town aims to address some of these concerns in South African musicological research. It interrogates the history that has been written on opera up until now and how master narratives have been created and perpetuated. Although an apartheid perspective is unavoidable, the study seeks to look at the history of opera from a broad vantage point that aims to explain how different political ideologies – not only apartheid – have over two centuries shaped how we view opera today. South Africa's social reality is that we live in a post-apartheid era where much of what had happened in everyday life since democratisation in 1994, including art production, is often impacted by or a reaction to what had happened in the previous almost five decades of institutionalised racial segregation. Music, if viewed as a social construct, cannot be separated from such a major act of social engineering.

This study is interdisciplinary. By using journalistic articles as the primary sources of this reception history, the research also veers into the field of journalism and media studies as academic disciplines, and uses a text-based research methodology, namely content analysis. The musical texts (or scores) of the operatic works are not analysed in any way. Rather, the researcher steers away from referring to the musical texts and searches for meaning not in what the composers' intentions might have been, for instance, but in how people who experienced the music at different instances over time responded to the work in the context of public performances.

PART 1

Historiography and the theory of reception

Literature review

This study constructs a history of the reception of operas performed in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015 as viewed by the print media, specifically two daily newspapers distributed in Cape Town and which reported on and reviewed opera in the city. Such a study has not been done before. Several writers and scholars have documented historical facts regarding opera performances in South Africa, and the current study relies to a greater or lesser extent on their contributions to the documentation of the history of opera. However, few of these historical documents are studies of the history of opera; often they are historical explorations of music activities by artists in Cape Town or biographical accounts by those involved in opera.

Various sources in different formats contain information regarding the history of opera in Cape Town. The sources that are discussed in this literature review pertain to the general historical facts regarding opera and opera performances in South Africa and Cape Town, and do not address the actual focus of this study: the reception of opera in Cape Town or South Africa. This literature review provides a critique of how opera and opera performances in Cape Town have been documented in a variety of sources. Although these are not primary sources of opera reception in Cape Town, they provide important historical contexts for the understanding of the reception history that is constructed in this study. These sources form the foundation and timeline on which the reception history is built.

Three points of critique can be levelled at the historiography of opera in South Africa. First, the literature containing historical information regarding the performances of opera in South Africa, and in particular Cape Town, is limited and data is sparsely spread and interwoven with other historical facts on music performances. Second, in dealing with opera and its history, writers and scholars seem to divorce the art form from its South African social and cultural context, as though opera in this country has been performed in a void.

Third, and linked to the previous critique, the historiography of opera is burdened with the history of the writers of South African history, in that it rests on “historical approaches that propound ‘master narratives’ for the South African past and, implicitly, for its future”,⁴⁴ which have led to an obliviousness to minority and alternative histories.

South African musicologists seem to have little interest in the study of the history of opera in their country. Only one study has until now attempted to construct a comprehensive history of opera in South Africa. This is Hilde Roos’s 2010 doctoral thesis⁴⁵ on the indigenisation of opera in South Africa, of which the first chapter explores how opera arrived in this country and its subsequent development and performance history. Roos deals superficially with historical facts, as this is not the focus of the study and the purpose of her “history” was ostensibly to determine certain historical points of departure. Sabina Mossolow’s Master’s thesis⁴⁶ on the career of her mentor, soprano Nellie du Toit, provides, due to it being a biographical study, limited historical facts on opera in South Africa, and certainly only those related to Du Toit’s career in this country. Elizabeth Blanckenberg completed a Master’s thesis⁴⁷ on the music activities (which include opera), of the now defunct Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB). Due to its scope, the study also provides limited historical facts on opera performances in Cape Town, the main base of CAPAB. As the thesis’s subtitle, “a historical survey” suggests, the aim (and indeed the result) is not a deep-rooted history of opera performances by CAPAB.

The historical studies of musical events in Cape Town by Bouws, a Dutch musician, composer and lecturer who settled in Cape Town in the middle of the twentieth century, led to two published monographs: *Die musieklewe van Kaapstad 1800–1850*⁴⁸ (“The musical life of Cape Town 1800–1850”) in 1966 and *Solank daar musiek is...*⁴⁹ (“As long as there is music”) in 1982. His writings, especially in the former book, give accounts of the earliest

⁴⁴ Ross, R. Mager, A.K. & Nasson, B. (eds.). 2012. *The Cambridge history of South Africa, Volume 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.2.

⁴⁵ Roos, 2010.

⁴⁶ Mossolow, A.X.S. 2003. The career of South African soprano Nellie du Toit, born 1929. Unpublished Master’s thesis. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.

⁴⁷ Blanckenberg, E. 2009. The music activities of the Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB): A historical survey. Unpublished Master’s thesis, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.

⁴⁸ Bouws, 1966.

⁴⁹ Bouws, J. 1982. *Solank daar musiek is...* Musiek en musiekmakers in Suid Afrika 1652–1982. Cape Town: Tafelberg.

performances of opera in Cape Town. Bouws had scoured the newspapers of the time and used the information he acquired – from advertisements to articles – to construct his historical overview. His history is peopled by significant role-players who enabled performances of music in the city, and he often interjects with comments about, for instance, choice of repertoire and standard of musicianship as deduced from his sources, which are not always clearly referenced. Although these monographs are valuable and pertinent sources, their focus on opera is minimal. In *Die musieklewe van Kaapstad 1800–1850*, ten pages are dedicated to opera, of which four are specifically about the first performance of Weber's *Der Freischutz* in 1831.

In their autobiographical accounts, soprano and University of Cape Town singing lecturer Désirée Talbot⁵⁰ and baritone and opera producer Gregorio Fiasconaro⁵¹ write about the operas they were involved in and their experiences of South Africa's opera industry. As is normal for autobiographies, Talbot's and Fiasconaro's are both personal accounts and not intended as "objective" historical documents. Talbot's focus is on the operatic activities at the University of Cape Town and her involvement at that institution, as well as some views expressed in the media and by others in the industry. Fiasconaro, an Italian immigrant, takes the reader behind the scenes and gives first-hand accounts of singing operatic roles, producing and directing operas, as well as the training of singers in Cape Town. With their balance of fact and opinion, both Talbot and Fiasconaro provide interesting accounts, but their personal biases are overwhelming and one must consider this when judging their opinions. These two autobiographical accounts, though containing an abundance of historical facts, sketch only a fragmented history of opera in Cape Town, as one would expect from personal accounts.

While Talbot and Fiasconaro wrote their autobiographies while still working in the industry, actress and arts administrator Hermien Dommissie's 2001 memoir, *Long journey of the heart*,⁵² benefits from hindsight. Looking back on her career of more than fifty years with a focus on theatre, opera and ballet, this memoir not only traces the performance history of

⁵⁰ Talbot, D. 1978. *For the love of singing – 50 years of opera at UCT*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

⁵¹ Fiasconaro, G. 1982. *I'd do it again*. Cape Town: Books of Africa.

⁵² Dommissie, H. 2001. *Long journey of the heart – A memoir*. Pretoria: Lapa Publishers.

these art forms, but also puts historical facts in a socio-political context. As an autobiography, Dommissé's book only relates her experiences and refers to her involvement in the arts industry and is not about the art forms *per se*. Also, opera constitutes a relatively small part of the book, but sheds light on the administration (and politics) behind arts in South Africa.

*Eoan – Our Story*⁵³ is an oral history book compiled from interviews with 47 singers, administrators and their family members by the Eoan History Project at Stellenbosch University's Documentation Centre for Music (DOMUS). Segments of these interviews are published almost verbatim in order to relate the history of the opera section of the Eoan Group, a Cape Town social and arts society for coloured people started in 1933 and exists to this day. Because it relies on the memories of the interviewees at the time when the interviews took place, it lacks indisputable factual information, although some facts are given in a timeline as an appendix to the book. What *Eoan – Our Story* provides is a social history of the work of a significant company in Cape Town's opera landscape.⁵⁴

The theatres in Cape Town, some of which presented opera performances, are the subject of former reviewer of the *Cape Times*, Olga Racster's book, *Curtain up*⁵⁵. Racster does not provide a history of opera, but references to opera are made as part of, essentially, the history of theatre life in Cape Town. Its contribution to the historiography of opera is minimal.

The omission of the article "opera" in the *South African Encyclopaedia of Music*⁵⁶ is probably an indication of the little interest South African musicologists have shown in opera history. The encyclopaedia does, however, provide valuable information and a broad account of opera activities in South Africa, but these are scattered throughout under the entries referring to opera companies, singers and composers. Under the entries, "South Africa" and "Cape Town" in *Grove Music Online*,⁵⁷ May and Mears provide a potted history of the

⁵³ Eoan History Project. Roos, H. & Muller, W. (eds.). 2013. *Eoan – Our Story*. Johannesburg: Fourthwall Books.

⁵⁴ Hilde Roos, co-editor of *Eoan – Our Story*, is currently in the process of writing a conventional history of the Eoan Group.

⁵⁵ Racster, O. 1951. *Curtain Up!*. Cape Town: Juta and Co. Ltd.

⁵⁶ Malan, J.P. 1979-. *South African Encyclopaedia of Music*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

⁵⁷ Mears, C. & May, J. 2001. 'Cape Town', in *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Available: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed 19 October 2011].

development and role-players in opera in the country. They gloss the major role-players in the production of opera since the beginning of the nineteenth century, some works performed, and the training of singers, among others. But these two articles cover different musical activities in respectively South Africa and Cape Town, of which opera forms only a small part.

A survey of academic journal articles has also revealed few reports on research that directly relate to the history of opera in Cape Town and South Africa. In the now defunct journal *Lantern*, Rinie Stead writes about “Opera in Suid-Afrika” (“Opera in South Africa”).⁵⁸ This article is extensive and traces the development of the performance of Western art music from 1658, shortly after Jan van Riebeeck’s arrival at the Cape of Good Hope. However, it is not always certain which sources Stead used for the assertions in her article.

Racster, in her article “Music in South Africa”⁵⁹ in *The Musical Times*, gives information on professionalism in music performance, music tuition and arts funding in the Cape, with a special focus on the beginning of the twentieth century. Historian Pieter Kapp focuses on the contribution of the Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns (Academy for Science and Arts) to opera in South Africa.⁶⁰ Jeffrey Brukman’s article about the South African composer Cromwell Everson’s Afrikaans opera *Klutaimnestra* explores the impact of Afrikaner nationalism on the composition of this opera.⁶¹

Roos’s article, based on her doctoral dissertation, looks at the history of opera through the perspective of indigenisation, arguing that opera in South Africa became South African opera through a process of indigenisation, “the act or process of adaptation or subjection to the influence or dominance of the indigenous inhabitants of country”.⁶² In her article on the Eoan Group,⁶³ Roos explains and contextualises the legacy of the group in terms of historian

⁵⁸ Stead, R. 1963. “Opera in Suid-Afrika”. *Lantern*, 13:8-31, December 1963.

⁵⁹ Racster, O. 1919. “Music in South Africa”. *The Musical Times*. 60(919):495, 1 September.

⁶⁰ Kapp, P. 2008. “Die Akademie en opera”. *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 48(1):13-22, March.

⁶¹ Brukman, J. 2012. “Dominant culture, Afrikaner Nationalism and Cromwell Everson’s *Klutaimnestra*”. *South African Journal of Musicology (SAMUS)*, 32:1-20, January.

⁶² Roos, H. 2012. “Indigenisation and history: how opera in South Africa became South African opera”. *Acta Academica Supplementum*. 2012(1):117-155, August.

⁶³ Roos, H. 2013. “Remembering to forget the Eoan Group – the legacy of an opera company from the apartheid era”. *South African Theatre Journal*, 27(1):1-18, October.

Mohamed Adhikari's theoretical perspective on coloured identity.⁶⁴ In her article, Juliana M. Pistorius similarly analyses the work of the Eoan Group from the perspective of coloured identity, concluding that the group's opera performances and portrayal of "whiteness" on the opera stage (opera being associated with the white population) could also be read as a means of undermining "apartheid's politics of colour".⁶⁵

Frederick Hale explores "the first South African scholarly interpretation" by Ramsden Balmforth, a Capetonian from Yorkshire, of Wagner's work, which was presented in a lecture at the time of performances of Wagner's operas by the travelling Quinlan Opera Company in Cape Town to celebrate the centenary of the composer's birth.⁶⁶ Hale admits that "the history of opera in South Africa remains a relatively unexplored field in which many more furrows must be ploughed..."

Online sources also reveal little about the history of opera in South Africa. The website myfundi.co.za tells "the early history of opera in South Africa",⁶⁷ while Angelo Gobbato in an essay published on the Cape Town Opera Company's website, "remembers the history of opera in Cape Town and the beginnings of Cape Town Opera".⁶⁸ The information on [myfundi](http://myfundi.co.za) is short and cryptic, providing seemingly important highlights of opera productions in the country. It falls short of providing a comprehensive summary of what is known about opera production in South Africa; rather, the facts seem haphazardly and randomly selected. Gobbato is considered the doyen of South African opera, having been a singer on the country's opera stages, later becoming a director and producer of opera, and leading CAPAB Opera in the 1990s during its transition under the first democratic government to a section-21 company called Cape Town Opera. He was also director of the University of Cape Town's opera school. His article on the Cape Town Opera website is a short overview of the development of the opera industry in Cape Town, told from his perspective. It highlights most of the important happenings in the local opera industry. As a short overview, this

⁶⁴ Adhikari, M. 2005. *Not white enough, not black enough*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.

⁶⁵ Pistorius, J.M. 2017. "Coloured opera as subversive forgetting". *Social Dynamics*, 43:2, p230-242.

⁶⁶ Hale, F. 2013. "The first scholarly South African interpretation of Wagner? Ramsden Balmforth's Fabian analysis of the *Ring and Parsifal*". *Journal of Musical Arts in Africa*, 10:1, p53-69.

⁶⁷ *The early history of opera in South Africa*. Available: http://myfundi.co.za/e/The_early_history_of_Opera_in_South_Africa [accessed 19 October 2011].

⁶⁸ Gobbato, A. 2011. *History of Cape Town Opera*. Available: www.capetownopera.co.za [accessed on 19 October 2011].

historical account by Gobbato provides enough material to entice further investigation, but does not make a significant contribution to opera historiography.

Two archives house rich material on opera in Cape Town. The Artscape Archive⁶⁹ houses programmes and marketing material on most productions staged at the former Nico Malan Centre since its opening in 1971. It is, however, an unsettling experience to visit the Artscape Archive⁷⁰ because the room is filled to the brim with documents, and finding relevant information is a daunting task as not all of the material is sorted or catalogued. For instance, not all programmes of the operas staged, especially in early years (1960s), can be found in the archive. The most reliable sources of information about the operas that were performed were the marketing brochures, which were kept in chronological order. For this study, marketing brochures and newspaper advertisements were used to compile the list of opera productions staged since 1985 at Artscape.⁷¹ For a researcher, this archive contains a wealth of information, but due to its disorganised state, searching for specific and comprehensive information is a near impossible endeavour.

In 2008, DOMUS at Stellenbosch University acquired the (unsorted) archive of the Eoan Group. It contains an array of documents on the Eoan Group's activities, including production programmes, newspaper clippings, personal and official correspondence, and official documents such as minutes of meetings, government permits and financial records.

In summary, one has to conclude that limited research has been done on the history of opera and its performance in Cape Town and South Africa. Roos's chapter has done much to string together the different strands of opera history scattered across the panoply of primary and secondary sources. It coherently provides a narrative of works performed and the role-players involved in those opera productions that were performed across South Africa, and it does so with much detail. However, the process of historiography cannot end at such a drawing together of sources. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Stanford's distinction between history-as-event (a factual history of dates and events), and history-as-account (an exploration of the past and changes over time), is instructive in

⁶⁹ The Artscape Archive is housed at the Artscape Theatre Complex, DF Malan Avenue, Cape Town.

⁷⁰ The researcher visited the Artscape Archive on 18 and 19 April 2013.

⁷¹ See Addendum A.

gauging the historiography of opera in South Africa. Although focused, Roos's chapter is, like the rest of the sources discussed above, still history-as-event, which gives rise to the second critique of South African opera historiography. For too long, the history of opera in South Africa has been concerned with dates, places, composers and works of music – a history of “great composers and great works”.

Existing sources of opera history in South Africa often discuss opera with little or no historical context. Blanckenberg's study on the music activities of CAPAB delves deep into the inner workings of this arts council, but only touches on the context in which this organisation was established. She discusses its establishment in 1963 without considering it being a political strategy of the National Party government, something Dommissie clearly suggests. Although superficial references are made to the impact of apartheid when discussing CAPAB's admission policy, the study does not explore the social and cultural impact or role of this arts council. Although Mossolow's dissertation focuses on the career of soprano Nellie du Toit, it comes across as though Du Toit had performed in a void. Mossolow discusses the establishment of the arts councils – which were disbanded after the “restructuring (sic) of the South African government in 1994” – in a similarly superficial way as Blanckenberg. For instance, she does not even mention that these councils, which were “good news” to Nellie as a young (34-year-old) singer, were only for white artists.

As historic documents, Bouws's studies deal primarily with names of musicians and venues, works of music, and dates of performances. Little attention is given to the societal contexts in which these musicians performed or why they played the works they did – although Bouws at the time of writing these monographs had the benefit of hindsight of more than one hundred years. Bouws's monographs provide valuable historical information, but do not analyse the facts he presents in order to construct a contextualised historical account. This is also a critique of Talbot and Fiasconaro's work, albeit that both are autobiographical in nature. These texts at least do give the reader a sense of the *Zeitgeist* in which operas were produced in the middle of the twentieth century. As an oral history, *Eoan – Our story* is dependent on the context provided by the interviewees. Although readers should be able to get a sense of the social, cultural and political contexts in which the Eoan Group operated, the narrow focus of the book on only the opera activities of this group does not contextualise its activities within the greater opera industry in South Africa.

The articles by Stead, Kapp and Racster, mentioned above, mostly contribute to the chronology of opera performances in the Cape, but they also provide connections between opera and its place in society, although it is a limited perspective. Brukman's article provides a fascinating case study of the influence of Afrikaner nationalism on the composition of operas, but one cannot generalise the composer Cromwell Everson's ambitious ideas to extend to opera composition in the country. Brukman never makes this claim, but this also limits the article's contribution to the body of historic works on opera in South Africa.

Although many of the accounts discussed above engage with the same themes, none of them identify the themes as historical patterns that link, explain and contextualise the significant events in the history of opera in Cape Town. In the historiography of opera in South Africa, Roos, again, has been the first scholar to contextualise the history of opera by exploring its place in society, its cultural meaning and the politics that shaped this history as much as the choice of repertoire and artists, for instance, have shaped South African opera history. But as with all other South African opera histories, Roos's scholarship rests entirely on the writings of those who had gone before her. This is the essence of the third critique I level at the historiography of opera in South Africa: that this history is burdened with the history of earlier historians and the perspectives from which they approached history. This means that South African historical writing on opera has been moulded by a colonial perspective, and later from the view of Afrikaner nationalism.

This state of affairs has led to the perpetuation of certain viewpoints, which are only that: points of view into history. In their introduction to Volume 2 of *The Cambridge history of South Africa*, Ross, Mager and Nasson write:

Over the years, like prison sentences, a number of these narratives have run successively or concurrently through South African history. Each, in its own way, has reflected the political stance of those who have developed it and has naturally also been influenced by the sociology of the historical profession. In this respect, it is hardly surprising that the initial thrusts of South African historiography were defined in the context of white politics. In the first instance, therefore, the country's history since the 1880s was

written in terms of the development of its constitution and on the place of South Africa as a new dominion in the British Empire.⁷²

In South African historical writings of the late nineteenth century “a broad swath of colonial opinion” can be found which aimed at portraying “blacks, Bushmen and Hottentots” in particular as inferior.⁷³ Saul Dubow calls this the “racialization of knowledge”, and states that “the variants of settler or colonial histories of the nineteenth century foregrounded whites”, although it could not ignore the native black population.⁷⁴ By the start of the twentieth century (after the South African War), two reactions to this liberal imperialist historiography came about: an Afrikaner nationalist and an English liberal historiography.⁷⁵ The first focused on the colonial origins of an Afrikaner *volk*, the Great Trek and Afrikaner republics; the second was concerned with “the historical potential for the establishment of a common and all-inclusive society in South Africa”.⁷⁶ It is evident that little history was written from other social perspectives and backgrounds. It was only from the 1970s that “alternative” histories started to develop, not without their own perspectives, which could be seen as a reaction to previous histories.

Recent historical studies of opera show the markings of past historical writing. This is in part visible in the lack of socio-political context in these sources (as discussed above as the second critique of this historiography), but also in their approaches to the study.

Blanckenberg’s study views the establishment of CAPAB, and the other performing arts councils, as a means by which the National Party government wanted, primarily, to provide a stable income for (white) artists. She does not consider that this was a strategy of that government to advance the agenda of an Afrikaner nation and portray the *volk* as being sophisticated because of its interest in European “high” art – establishing the *volk* as both having European roots (cultured), yet distinctively different in that they created their own art and indigenised European art forms like opera.⁷⁷ Mossolow’s dissertation about the

⁷² Ross *et al*, 2011:2.

⁷³ Dubow, S. 2011. South Africa and South Africans: Nationality, Belonging, Citizenship, in R. Ross, A.K. Mager & B. Nasson (eds). *The Cambridge history of South Africa, Volume 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.26.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*: 26.

⁷⁵ Ross *et al*, 2011:3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*: 3.

⁷⁷ Muller, S.J.vZ. 2000. *Sounding margins: Musical representations of white South Africa*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Oxford: University of Oxford, p.34-40.

career of Nellie du Toit is a biographical account devoid of any social reality, and her treatment of the history of the arts councils is similar to that of Blanckenberg.

Roos's study and the two subsequent articles also reveal this burden of histories from colonial and Afrikaner nationalist perspectives that viewed local inhabitants as "the other". In her study on indigenisation, she uses the opera section of the Eoan Group as a case study and admits that it is "an inherently racist assumption, taking as its premise the belief that people with a different skin colour would naturally adhere to a different aesthetics, which could then be theorized as an example of indigenisation in South African opera". That music historians have not investigated the history of the Eoan Group is evidence of how earlier histories have ignored "the other", but its inclusion in this study, ironically, gives the impression that this history is still viewed as a history of "the other". One has to admit, however, that there is a need for these forgotten histories to be told.

Roos's argument for choosing the Eoan Group as an example of indigenisation is that although they did not adapt or alter (as indigenisation would imply) Italian opera,⁷⁸ they were responsible for giving it a performance history in Cape Town. But by 1956 when the Eoan Group performed its first opera, Verdi's *La traviata*, most of the operatic works which later became part of their repertoire had been introduced to South Africa by travelling companies from Europe. The Eoan Group's musical development follows in essence the same trajectory as that of the work by John Connell⁷⁹ in Johannesburg – first starting with choral concerts and gradually progressing to producing opera.⁸⁰ One could argue that, other than being a group for coloured people and therefore racially different to earlier opera companies, there is in fact no unique reason to view the Eoan Group's work as an instance of indigenisation. Roos could have included the Eoan Group in her study quite simply because they were the first Cape-based opera company, albeit an amateur company.

In her article on the Eoan Group, Roos employs Adhikari's theoretical perspectives in a manner that gives a better understanding of the group and its activities in the cultural

⁷⁸ The Eoan Group gave regular performances of *La traviata*, *Il trovatore*, *Rigoletto*, *La bohème*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Cavalleria rusticana*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Carmen*, *L'elisir d'amore* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.

⁷⁹ John Connell was an organist who settled in Johannesburg in 1916.

⁸⁰ Roos, 2012:39.

context, but Roos treats the group as though Western art forms, such as opera and ballet, had not been part of the coloured community for a very long time. Social studies on the coloured community published at the start of the twentieth century show that there had been music groups performing a wide range of musical styles, as well as theatre and dance groups that performed in the traditional Western European style.⁸¹ Roos writes: “Imagine the surprise when in March 1956, the Eoan Group ... appeared on the opera scene with a full-scale production of Verdi’s *La Traviata* ...” But it could hardly have been a surprise as the Eoan Group had even before then performed oratorios and musicals.

Pistorius, at times, also falls in this historical trap when she argues that colouredness is necessarily “a racial uncertainty which slipped uncomfortably between whiteness and blackness”.⁸² While her perspective on Eoan’s history could be considered novel, it too rests on the notion that opera and theatre – possibly Western European art forms in general – were at the time far removed from the real-life experiences of the Eoan performers or their coloured audiences. I would argue that the “Italianate world of extravagance and grandeur”⁸³ had been equally removed from the reality of the white (or, for that matter, the black) population at the time.

These are the remnants of South African historical writing – be it from the viewpoint of colonial imperialism or Afrikaner nationalism – that have until recently ignored “the other”. In order to rectify this and tell the untold histories, recent studies have, ironically, relied on those very same histories that give little perspective on “the other”. By no means is this true of all historical writing in the field of musicology in South Africa. Some local scholars have for a number of years been exploring and questioning the value and impact of the country’s social, political and economic histories on Western art music in South Africa.⁸⁴ But it is only

⁸¹ See in this regard: Theron, E. (ed.). 1964. *Die kleurlingbevolking van Suid-Afrika – ’n verslag van ’n komitee van die Suid-Afrikaanse Buro vir Rasse-Aangeleenthede insake die Kleurling*. Stellenbosch/Grahamstad: Universiteitsuitgewers en –boekhandelaars. Du Plessis I.D. 1955. The coloured people of South Africa: some aspects of their present position, in *Referate gelewer op die sesde jaarvergadering van die Suid-Afrikaanse Buro vir Rasse-Aangeleenthede*, p.14-26. Patterson, S. 1953. *Colour and culture in South Africa – a study in the status of the Cape coloured people within the social structure of the Union of South Africa*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. Cilliers, S.P. 1963. *The coloureds of South Africa – a factual survey*. Cape Town: Banier Publishers. Van der Ross, R. 1979. *Myths and attitudes – an inside look at the Coloured people*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.

⁸² Pistorius, 2017:232.

⁸³ *Ibid*: 233.

⁸⁴ See in this regard: Stimie, A. 2010. Die Europese musiektradisie en die ontwikkeling van ’n Afrikaner-identiteit: ’n Oorsig van Afrikaanse musiekjoernalistiek in *Die Brandwag* (1910–1921) en *Die Nuwe Brandwag* (1929–1933). *LitNet Akademies*,

since Roos's research that the historiography of opera and the scholarship thereof has started to rid itself of the absence of social context and the yoke of the history of historical writing in South Africa.

Theoretical framework

This study is theoretically based in reception history, specifically as articulated in musicology by Carl Dahlhaus. In his *Foundations of music history*, Dahlhaus addresses the "problems of reception history", and this chapter represents a touchstone for theoretical thinking about reception in musicology.⁸⁵

There are many iterations of reception as theoretical framework, but Dahlhaus's "problems of reception" is a fundamental text and a point of departure for later theorisation thereof. Although Dahlhaus is critical of reception in music histories, his view of the concept of "musical works" and the use of journalistic criticism is most suited for the current study, although used here to make the case in favour of the use of reception in music histories and as theoretical framework for this study.⁸⁶

Reception refers to both "the history of social responses to art, and to an aesthetic that privileges those responses".⁸⁷ As a history of social responses to art, reception is concerned with the reactions of a collective group, which can be defined for example by nationality or social class, rather than individual reactions. A reception history is therefore shaped around how social groups respond to and engage with a work of art and how those responses change over time and in different social contexts. Whereas the artwork remains constant and a singular creation, those responses to it and the context within which it is received

7(3):103-128, December. Venter, C. 2011. Die verband tussen vroeë apartheidsintellektualisering, Afrikaner-musiekhistoriografie en die ontluiking van 'n apartheidsestetika in die toonkuns. *LitNet Akademies* 8(3):580-527, December.

⁸⁵ Dahlhaus, 1983:150-165.

⁸⁶ See in this regard: Calella, M. 2017. "Einführung" in Dahlhaus, C., *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte*. Laaber: Laaber. p.xxii–xxiii. Cook, N. & Everist, M. (eds). 2001. *Rethinking music*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. Geiger, F. 2016. "Probleme – und Perspektiven – der Rezeptionsgeschichte" in Geiger, F. & Janz, T. (Eds) in Dahlhaus, C. *Grundlagen der Musikgeschichte*, p.211–226. Marvin, R.M. 2013. "Introduction to special issue on opera reception". *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 25 (2), p.117-120.

⁸⁷ Samson, J. 'Reception', in *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Available: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed on 19 October 2011].

change constantly over time. A reception history is the documentation of these responses and the changes thereof over a certain period.⁸⁸

Reception theory has its roots in literary scholarship, with Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser of the University of Konstanz and its Konstanz School developing a model of literary criticism called “reception aesthetics” in the 1960s. In Jauss’s *Toward an aesthetic of reception*, he presents this approach to literary history, saying that previous historiographic methods have ignored the reader “in his genuine role, a role as unalterable for aesthetics as for historical knowledge”.⁸⁹ He argues that even the writer who conceives the work (“in light of ... norms of an earlier work”), critics who judge the work, and literary historians who classify works, are at first only readers before they engage critically with the work. For Jauss, the public that consumes a literary work (“the addressee for who the literary work is primarily destined”) is not passive in the historical process, but rather “an energy formative of history”, because “the historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees”.⁹⁰

Jauss continues that the relationship between the reader and the work has both aesthetic and historical implications. He explains it as follows:

The aesthetic implication lies in the fact that the first reception of a work by the reader includes a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with works already read. The obvious historical implication of this is that the understanding of the first reader will be sustained and enriched in a chain of receptions from generation to generation; in this way the historical significance of a work will be decided and its aesthetic value made evident.⁹¹

As an aesthetic object that is experienced, perceived and judged by an audience, musical works are different to literary works. Regarding the latter, Jauss talks about the “triangle of the author, work and public”, but musical works have the extra dimension of the

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Jauss, H.R. 1982. *Toward an aesthetic of reception*. T. Bahti (tr.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p.19.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*: 19.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*: 20.

performer/musician as the medium between the work and the audience. Whereas readers engage directly with the text of a literary work, which stays constant – its aesthetics only changing in the course of reception – audiences of musical works seldom engage with the musical text, but rather with the music in performance, bringing into play concepts such as artistry, interpretation and performance practice (in essence processes of the aesthetics of reception itself). What then constitutes a musical work in the context of a reception history?

Dahlhaus explores this concept of the musical work, saying that if musical creations are seen as “ideal objects with an immutable and unshifting ‘real’ meaning”, a reception history of musical works seems superfluous.⁹² According to this understanding, the meaning of a (musical) work lies within the text (score and/or libretto) of that work and a single interpretation is valid for all times. Works are “aesthetic objects contemplated in isolation”, meaning that although they have been viewed differently in different contexts, it does not change the work’s “real meaning”. Unless these views are done away with, Dahlhaus argues, a reception history, which takes into account the historical conditions in which a work is perceived, is of no use.⁹³

However, when one moves away from the notion that a musical work has a “real meaning” that is unchangeable, “the historical conditions behind the changing modes of reception become basic and indispensable to the study of music histories”.⁹⁴ The reception historian, Dahlhaus says, rejects this theory of the “ideal object” and rather favours a “moment in history” as his point of departure. When the latter becomes what Dahlhaus calls “the final arbiter”, concrete meaning (I would suggest aesthetic value) can be found outside the musical text. This meaning is found in the course of reception in the reactions and views of those who experience, engage, and react to the work. It follows that, for the reception historian, a musical work is an object that is created in performance.

Jean-Jacques Nattiez writes that the “musical work manifests itself, in its material reality, in the form of sound waves”, and “the existence of the work finds its source in the ‘creative

⁹² Dahlhaus, 1983:150.

⁹³ *Ibid*: 151.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*: 151.

act' of the performer, and its foundation in the score".⁹⁵ He continues that spectators and critics are in an aesthetic position, which is not only related to the current performance but also the knowledge they have of the composer, the music and the performance practice.⁹⁶ As Dahlhaus also concludes, the main historiographical focus of a reception history is not the musical work or text itself (although the work is that which elicits reactions) but "the intellectual or social structure ... that supplied a context for the work's reception".⁹⁷ This only realises in performance.

Dahlhaus cites Vodička, who argues that, "the object of a reception history does not lie in individual reactions but in norms and normative systems that determine how surviving texts are perceived within groups or strata conditioned by history, society and ethnic origin".⁹⁸ It follows that at different points in time ("moments in history") the "meaning" of a musical work is shaped by the views, opinions and reactions within the particular intellectual and social contexts, with those "moments in history" referring to the performances of the work at a particular time. Furthermore, Dahlhaus argues that to substantiate these opinions the criteria is not how these reactions relate to the work's "real meaning" (which the reception historian rejects) but rather how they "represent the age, the nation and the class or social group which conditioned them".⁹⁹

In writing about the methods for constructing a reception history of musical works, Dahlhaus admits "there is practically no getting around ... music journalism" as a source of views, opinions and accounts of performances. Journalistic sources, according to Dahlhaus, observe "the origin, consolidation and spread of those opinions and modes of reception that were later turned by history ... into a canon".¹⁰⁰ It is therefore in music journalism that the reception historian finds evidence of reactions to, and opinions and views of, musical works and how those opinions evolved over the course of history.

⁹⁵ Nattiez, J. 1990. *Music and Discourse – Toward a Semiology of Music*. C. Abbate (tr.). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.69.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*: 75-77.

⁹⁷ Dahlhaus, 1983:154.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*: 154

⁹⁹ *Ibid*: 154

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*: 161.

Ellis, in her reception history of musical culture in nineteenth-century Paris as revealed by music critics in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, writes that “the processes of canon formation are thus revealed through the writings of the *Gazette’s* critics”.¹⁰¹ She argues that the musical canon has two dimensions: first, the practical dimension of performance and repertoire; second, that of a governing aesthetic by which the value of specific items of repertoire may be judged.¹⁰²

It is in the content of music criticism (reviews of musical works), and music journalism in general (articles about musical life and performers), that the reception historian can therefore trace the formation of the canon within a specific social context. The trajectory of the formation of a canon is evidence of the reception of musical works within that context. Music criticism and journalism report on both dimensions that Ellis refers to. In these journalistic writings, performances and repertoire are discussed, and the aesthetic value thereof is judged within the local context. For the reception historian, journalistic writings are therefore essential primary sources and evidence of the formation of a canon within a certain society.

Maus *et al* defines the function of music criticism as “evaluating aspects of music and musical life” in general.¹⁰³ He compares scholarly music criticism with journalistic criticism, saying the former “treats musical works as the basic units for critical evaluation and interpretation”. Such criticism neglects the contribution of performance. The criticism of new compositions is done in the light of their potential contribution to the existing canon. But, writes Maus *et al*, because performances of “old, critically accepted compositions have become the norm in twentieth-century [and twenty-first-century] concerts, criticism of performance has often been the dominant kind of professional critical discourse”. In writing about the role of arts journalism from a South African perspective, Herman Wasserman asks

¹⁰¹ Ellis, K. 1995. *Music criticism in nineteenth-century France – La revue et Gazette musicale de Paris, 1834-80*. London: Cambridge University Press, p.3.

¹⁰² See in this regard these reception studies: Meredith, W. 2007. “New Rare Beethoveniana at the Ira F. Brilliant Center for Beethoven Studies: Reception History, 1833-1847”. *The Beethoven Journal*, 22(2):105-109, Winter. Wright L.A. 2009. “Rewriting a reception: Thoughts on Carmen in Paris, 1883”. *Journal of Musicological Research*. 22:282-294. Ipson, D.L. 2010. *Attila* takes Rome: The reception of Verdi’s opera on the eve of revolution”. *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 21(3):249-256.

¹⁰³ Maus, F.E., Stanley, G., Ellis, K., Langley, L., Scaife, N., Conati, M., Capra, M., Campbell, S., Grant M.N., Rothstein, E. ‘Criticism’. *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Available: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed on 19 October 2011].

whether there is a universal aesthetic that arts journalist should know, or if they operate to individual standards or an aesthetic that varies according to the context they work in.¹⁰⁴

Arts critics, Wasserman holds, should have “a sensitivity to the broader societal context, the attitude and tastes of their audience [readers]”. He further argues that critics, when judging the aesthetic value of a work of art, must be led in their decisions by public interest and their major responsibility is towards the reader. It follows that the aesthetic criteria employed in arts criticism (including music criticism) are informed by the audiences for whom the critic writes. To contextualise these opinions and views expressed in arts criticism, one has to take into account the media landscape and society in which arts journalists function.¹⁰⁵

Crist, in her article on the reception history of Aaron Copland’s Third Symphony, explains her use of journalistic music criticism as follows:

I engage journalistic criticism not to locate meaning in the musical work at hand but to explore the symphony’s fluid import as perceived by various individuals listening in different historical and cultural contexts. Reviews may be read not only as musical criticism but also as sociocultural commentary, documenting the critical construction of significance and its subsequent transformation...¹⁰⁶

However, in his editor’s notes, Leon Botstein warns that, “it is impossible to make grandiose or subtle interpretative claims by interpreting selective pieces of published criticism without referencing the intricacies of historical context”.¹⁰⁷

As a matter of methodology, Dahlhaus writes that the reception historian should reflect on his criteria of selection of material from journalistic sources. If one is to focus on the formation of a canon, a criterion could be the role of a document in creating history (i.e. the way in which a piece of music journalism contributes to what is later seen as history). And,

¹⁰⁴ Wasserman, 2004:140.

¹⁰⁵ Botma, G.J. 2008. “Poles Apart: Mapping the field of arts journalism in South Africa”. *Critical Arts*, 22(1):83-100, July.

¹⁰⁶ Crist, E.B. 2001. “Critical politics: The reception history of Aaron Copland’s Third Symphony”. *The Musical Quarterly*, 85(2):232-263.

¹⁰⁷ Botstein, L. 2006. “Music in History: The perils of method in reception history”. *The Musical Quarterly*, 89(1):1-16.

when depicting the “panoply of opinions that characterised a particular period”, Dahlhaus suggests a criterion could be the weight attached to the critic who wrote about the work, or that of the publication.¹⁰⁸ In constructing a reception history of musical works, the choice of journalistic writings should therefore include writings that concern works that form part of the contemporary canon, and/or writings that appeared in publications of stature (within the specific social context) or by writers whose opinion is respected in that context.

Looking more closely at the content of music journalism, Dahlhaus holds that a reception history of musical works often has its roots in “fixed, perpetually recurring clichés”.¹⁰⁹ These Dahlhaus calls stereotyped opinions, or “topoi”, meaning something that is repeatedly used in rhetoric. Composers and their works have over time been described in terms of certain “topoi”, which can be traced and analysed. Another method Dahlhaus discusses is to describe the chronicled changes in the function of musical works. As he explains, “the liturgical function of a church cantata is lost in concert performance” and “a march forfeits some of its utility value when performed at a park concert, but the military and patriotic connotations associated with the music remain unaffected by the change or loss of function”.¹¹⁰

It is from this historiographical theoretical perspective that this study constructs a history of the reception of operas performed in Cape Town. The (musical) objects of the study are performances of the works, and not the scores and libretti as such. By extracting opinions, reactions and views on these staged operatic works from music journalism in specific publications, the study shows how aesthetic preferences have changed over the chosen period (1985–2015), what the value of these works were in local society, reveal how the canon of operatic works has been shaped, and how the reception of these works in turn represent the socio-cultural landscape of Cape Town.

¹⁰⁸ Dahlhaus, 1983:161.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*: 162.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*: 163.

PART 2

Music criticism and the South African media as contextual frameworks

Defining music criticism and arts journalism

Although music criticism can broadly be defined as any critical thoughts and writings that convey an evaluation of a wide range of aspects with regards to music – from its composition to its performance – the concept is narrowly used in this thesis to refer specifically to the evaluation of aspects of music and musical life published in popular media, particularly newspapers. Broadly speaking, music criticism may refer to any act of commentary on music, which includes audience conversations, private reflections and teaching.¹¹¹

In its narrow sense, music criticism has the aim of describing and evaluating music performances as objects of aesthetic experiences.¹¹² What is important in this sense is that it is an evaluation nuanced with a collective understanding of music as art within a certain societal space. The *Grove Dictionary* definition refers to two elements of music criticism: that it is about *music* (that which is performed) and *musical life* (the social context in which it is performed). The latter aspect differentiates journalistic music criticism, in degree if not principle, from that of academic or musicological criticism. Music journalists produce professional writing in which music and musical life are evaluated by experiencing performances, reflecting on them, evaluating them according to certain standards, contextualising how a specific performance fits into a greater performance practice and history, and then shaping their writing for a specific readership market.

In writing music criticism, journalists aim to help readers understand, contextualise, evaluate and identify trends in music performances. Such journalistic reviews tell readers

¹¹¹ Maus *et al*, 'Criticism', *Grove Music Online*.

¹¹² *Ibid*.

why certain music is considered programmatic music, the relevance (or lack thereof) of the music and its performance within the specific segment of society, why it is regarded as good, mediocre or bad, how the music industry works, and also describe developments in music as a performance art in a specific society. For consumers of journalistic publications at large, music criticism provides a view on the aesthetics and social relevance of musical works and their performance.

In the media of different European countries, aspects of musical life had been part of the editorial portfolio as early as the seventeenth century, but it was only during the nineteenth century that music journalism and criticism was clearly established in newspapers.¹¹³ This change was connected with society's realisation that music is also an historical phenomenon worthy of being reflecting upon and that journalistic criticism is a means of expressing this reflective view. Whereas academic journals and treatises focused on technical aspects of music, newspaper criticism reviewed stylistic and aesthetics aspects in a pithy way. Such newspaper music reviews evaluated music as part of societal institutions portraying certain societal or cultural values and trends.

Contemporary music had been the topic of music reviews during the nineteenth century and more often than not, it had been a debate of composition rather than a critique of performance.¹¹⁴ It was a space of critical thought on music in which composers like, in Germany and Austria for instance, Robert Schumann, Richard Wagner and later Arnold Schoenberg; and in France, Hector Berlioz and Francis Poulenc, had participated. Likewise, in Italy, Britain, Russia, the United States of America and Canada, music criticism of mostly compositions had been published in both popular publications and academic journals. The idea of the composer as music critic was reinforced during the early nineteenth century, aiming to establish music criticism as having a certain professional status.

Contemporary polemics in music and its broad aesthetic concerns – the development of styles, music identities, performance practices and musical values – were the topics addressed by the composer-critic. Essentially, it was the changes in the style of music that

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Maus *et al*, 'Criticism', *Grove Music Online*.

needed to be explored and explained to music lovers and readers of publications. However, other themes in music were also of interest to readers of the press. Nationalism, religion and philosophy in Wagner's operas drew the attention of music critics at the time. In his criticism, Wagner often aimed to defend his own music, and coupled that with a critique of German culture in his time.¹¹⁵ Schumann had been concerned with the future of German music after the death of Beethoven and Schubert. During the Nazi period, the superiority of Aryan culture and a focus on educating the population had become a priority of music criticism in Germany. In Britain, style, structure and description of the music and its aesthetic merits had been the main topic of music criticism. Coupled with that, there had also been a focus on praising British composers for their work and musical contribution.

In Italy, the popularity of Gioachino Rossini marked the birth of music criticism in that country. Here it was mostly popular writers rather than other composers or musicians writing criticism. The composer played a central role in music criticism, and the influence of specialist critics brought about the development of new music. By the late nineteenth century, music criticism in Italy was a sophisticated writing endeavour published mostly in periodicals, but in the twentieth century, music criticism had extended beyond that medium and was published in the popular daily press. Italian opera and the current state of Italian music and its history had become the topics of most interest.¹¹⁶ In Russia, writing on music developed slowly, but by the late nineteenth century newspapers had published regular music critiques that focused on Russian musical identity.¹¹⁷ With the rise of professional opera companies in the United States of America during the 1820s, a tradition of published reviews also commenced. These critiques were initially intended more as material for the society pages (written by writers who often did not have specialised music knowledge), rather than as a critique of the music or of its performance.¹¹⁸

It is evident that during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, music criticism, whether in the popular press or academic journals, had as its central point of discussion the musical work and its composer. Contemporary music was evaluated and debates ensued on

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

how composers reformed, adapted or perpetuated the present style of music. Describing a composer's music by means of metaphors and evaluating the merits of the music by comparing it with other compositions was, until the middle of the twentieth century, the primary task of the music critic. Little attention was given to the performer of the music and his/her role in communicating and interpreting the musical work. The performance as an event was the mainstay of the social pages and focused on the audience members and their social graces and dress.

The advanced stage of a fixed and established concert repertoire and the ossification of a canon of works changed the nature of music criticism from the middle of the twentieth century. By then the concept of "classical" music had become established and the preservation of "old" music as cultural artefacts had become normal. In contrast, the rise of other, popular music genres presented a different kind of musical experience for which criticism had to be developed. Both these developments altered the music critic's role, as the offering of music for both concert audiences and readers of the popular press had shifted. Rather than explaining new music to their readers, music critics now promoted the cultural value of "classical" music as high art. "Musical progress", referring to style, became an obsolete critical category in the popular press.

Likewise, the criticism of musical styles and the composer's work also became obsolete. The canon of musical works implied a repetition of well-established works, not in need of any explanation and judgment of its various merits and demerits for readers. Audiences now already had a well-established idea of the cultural value and merit of the works and the standing of the composers – the idea of great works and great composers that had dominated the early development of music histories. This brought about the shift in music criticism from the musical work to the performance of that work. By the middle of the twentieth century the central focus of music criticism – at least of what would become known as "classical" music – was the performer. The power and importance of the conductor in interpreting canonical symphonic music and the rise of instrumental and operatic star performers were also factors in this move towards reviewing performance rather than musical works. In essence, these changes in music criticism were the effect of the rise of highly paid virtuoso performers of music that was already considered great. In musical scholarship, this change found expression in the emphasis of the cultural and

political contexts in which music was performed – part of what is contemporary musicology.¹¹⁹

Music criticism in South Africa followed a similar trajectory to that described above. The operas staged by European travelling companies in Cape Town during the nineteenth century already had a performance history in Europe. Judging the musical merits of the operas performed in Cape Town during that time would have been superfluous for local newspapers (as is shown in the example of Weber's *Der Freischütz* in the introductory chapter of this thesis) because most of the works were brought to the country because of their prior positive reception in Europe. Opera criticism in Cape Town, from the nineteenth century until today, therefore, has evaluated performances rather than the musical merits of the work being performed. The composition of South African operas, mostly in the later twentieth century, created the opportunity for music critics to review the musical merits of these works.

In a context where the performances of canonical works are reviewed in newspapers, the purpose of music criticism is to help readers understand musical works, contextualising such music within the cultural life of the readers, evaluating the aesthetic value of a performance, and identifying trends within the music industry and cultural concerns of readers. As a form of journalism, music criticism has – as is the case with all forms of journalism – at its core the function of conveying information to a certain readership market. All journalism is reportage and sharing of information.

Music critic for the *New Yorker*, Alex Ross, explains that reviewing is a work of reporting, of journalism. The writer experiences a musical event and is expected to report his/her observation of this event in the form of prose. Ross says that review writing is “a very eccentric and subjective type of reporting, but it is reporting nonetheless. Yes, opinion plays a role, but there is much else to be done that is more neutral and objective in tone.”¹²⁰

Much like a newspaper report on, for instance, a motor vehicle accident, music criticism

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Meline, G. 2014. “‘It’s a Very Strange Job’: Talking with Alex Ross about music criticism”. 4 November. Available at <https://ww2.kqed.org/arts/2014/11/04/alex-ross-classical-music-criticism/> [accessed on 20 January 2017].

includes facts on what was performed, who had performed the music, where and when it was performed, why it had been performed, and how the performance had been experienced.

Historical documentation is therefore a primary function of music criticism. What has been written by music critics and published in the media, becomes part of history – a source of information about performances. All journalistic writing published, whether in a newspaper, magazine or on websites, become reflections on a particular time in a particular place or space. Music criticism of concerts make up the body of history on concert life within a particular social and physical space. Often, the only documentation of music performances is a programme booklet and a review or report of a concert. For constructing a history of music reception, journalistic music criticism is therefore an essential source of historical facts.

Apart from historical documentation, arts criticism has the function of contextualising and evaluating performances by giving an opinion and making value judgments. Ross continues by explaining that, “probably the most important thing [critics] do”, is to give context. “There is this single event that occurred, and a bunch of people came away with varying opinions about it. The critic steps in and places it in context, in history, in relationship to other performances of this same repertory happening at the present time.”¹²¹ The music critic’s role, then, is to explain where this singular performance fits into the greater social context and musical life of the readers of a specific publication.

While “contextualising” seems an easier feat by comparison, “evaluating” is a more complex matter. Its complexity lies in the fact that a single person, the reviewer, is entrusted with giving an opinion and making a value judgment on behalf of society and social interest groups. This begs the question as to how music critics evaluate performances and according to what standards, invented or maintained by whom. Earlier I quoted Wasserman asking: “Is there a universal aesthetic that arts journalists should be initiated in? Do they operate according to individual standards or should different aesthetics be developed according to

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

the varying context in which arts journalists work?”¹²² Critics do express their personal opinions, and one can surmise that they do so according to an individual standard, but because critics usually attend and experience many concerts, they also have a broader, benchmarked, sense of the perceptions and aesthetics in specific contexts.

Critics’ opinions are often constituted by a composite of what the critic thinks and assumptions on what he/she thinks readers of a specific publication would perceive to be good. As Wasserman explains, critics should have “a sensitivity to the broader context, the attitudes and tastes of their audience, and the function or aim of art in this society should therefore be cultivated by arts journalists. [...] The arts journalist has to be led in his or her decisions by the public interest”.¹²³ However, it is also true that contemporary readers of publications expect critics to be authorities on their subject matter, and readers are therefore interested in such critics’ individual opinions as well as receiving these opinions within the contexts of what they know about the art form.¹²⁴ In reviewing the arts (and music is no exception), critics have to find the balance between their individual opinions and the collective public taste, and be aware of that difference. Critics write for their readers in the context of their readers’ lives and frames of reference about the art form.

In giving opinions on a work of art within the societal context and the notion of collective taste of their readers, arts critics make value judgements. There would be little sense in a critic writing a review without making a judgment on what they had experienced. Readers are interested in an informed opinion that judges whether a performance was, for instance, good or merely mediocre. Wasserman writes that, “a critic’s major responsibility is therefore toward the reader, rather than toward the artist whose work is under review”.¹²⁵ Critics become the arts watchdogs for their readers, judging performances against the performance history, their personal experience and knowledge, and their awareness of a general standard of expectation implied by the notion of the collective taste of their readers.

¹²² Wasserman, 2004.

¹²³ *Ibid*: 144.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*: 144.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*: 144.

Besides “taste” being a matter of subjectivity and relative to the context in which a work of art is experienced, the notion of taste also changes over time within a certain context. What is viewed as being good is always under review, what is considered extraordinary today may be ordinary in future. As society’s tastes and interests develop, so too do the critic’s tastes and standards. Wasserman explains: “Aesthetic values and norms for excellence are constantly under review, never finalised, open-ended”.¹²⁶ Such changes in perceptions of art and its place in a specific social context over time, is a central concern in reception studies.

Although these functions of arts journalism may seem enduring and essential to the work of critics, Wasserman argues that the global and South African context in which arts journalists operate had changed to such an extent that one should reconsider the role and responsibilities of arts journalism.¹²⁷ South Africa’s political history, diverse cultures, economic inequality and the changes in arts administration over the past thirty years are only some of the influences on arts journalism in the country that have shaped the public discourse (through the media) on art and aesthetics. According to Botma, arts journalists in South Africa have had a reputation for being oppositional towards the National Party government under apartheid.¹²⁸ Arts journalists at some publications were seen as progressive and pushing the boundaries of what was considered by the former government as the “cultural direction” of the country. However, arts journalists at pro-National Party publications (for instance *Die Burger*) were, as Botma puts it, “creators of a form of cultural capital that aided the maintenance of the elite status quo in apartheid society”.¹²⁹ Afrikaans journalists’ creation of this cultural capital can be seen in their support of Afrikaner culture, performing arts in Afrikaans, and Afrikaans-speaking artists. The political power shift that came with democratisation in 1994 changed both the fields of arts journalism and cultural production in post-apartheid South Africa.

Globally, the emergence of social media and other technological changes have made it possible for more people to participate in the discourse on arts and even in the evaluation

¹²⁶ *Ibid*: 146.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*: 143.

¹²⁸ Botma, 2008:86.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*: 95.

of art. These developments impart to society at large the opportunity to essentially become reviewers of art, albeit amateur critics. Economic pressures on the media sector have also resulted in less coverage of the arts in especially the print media. Arts pages and publications now operate in a niche market and do not generate as much advertising revenue as, for instance, sports coverage. The limited editorial space for arts reviews and reportage hampers elaborately-formulated and extensive reviews, a development that has eroded the scope of discourse on the arts. It is also evident that there is a dynamic at play between the shift in political power in South Africa, changes in the structure and function of arts journalism at local publications, and the changes in the structure and content of cultural production in the country. The socio-political changes that have taken place in the country over the past thirty years play a central role in this dynamic, having brought about newly informed discourses on arts production as well as leading to the creation and adaptation of new and standard works of art. Through their reportage, arts journalists have steered and negotiated the effects of these changes to their readers, thereby playing a role in the creation of a changing cultural landscape.

Ownership, ideology and readership markets

Historically, the print media has played a particular role in the shaping of national identities, and since the nineteenth century it had advanced the spread of the ideas and ideals of various manifestations of nationalisms. It is for this reason that one of this research project's delineators is print media, and specifically the publications *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*. In his book, *Imaged Communities*, Benedict Anderson charts the historical trajectory of the print media's role in what he calls "the origins of national consciousness".¹³⁰ Spoken language eventually developed into signs used to document such spoken language in writing. With the invention of the printing press, a market of literate readers was created. By the sixteenth century, printed documents and a print-capitalism had resulted in the

¹³⁰ Anderson, B. 2006. *Imagined Communities* (second edition). Verso, London and New York, p.37-46.

spread of the Reformation, with Martin Luther's Biblical translations becoming "the first best-seller".¹³¹

Anderson argues that print-languages became a basis for "national consciousnesses" as it enabled the spread of ideas in a common language spoken by certain communities, thereby contributing to what would later be termed nationalism.¹³² The print media therefore became a means of establishing, as Anderson puts it, imaged communities, consisting of people with a similar language, value system and ideology. In this sense, both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* represent print media that have each shaped their distinct imaged communities. For this reason, the print media, and specifically these two publications, have been chosen for this study as a source of opinions and views on opera performances in the Cape.

In order fully to engage with the reception of opera in Cape Town and the opinions extracted from journalistic writings used as sources, it is imperative to understand the context in which these texts were published. Only by understanding the history of these media can one have a clear understanding of the contribution these articles make to the reception history of opera. A reading of what the reviews and articles as historical documents say about the reception of opera would be superfluous if the context in which the print media operated, is ignored. Opera and the media were and still are entities that exist and operate within the same social, physical, cultural and political space. Because of this, there are similarities in the historical patterns that constitute these contexts. For instance, the influences of Afrikaner nationalism and later, after 1994, an Africanist nationalism have been a significant part of (or pattern in) both the history of opera and that of the media.

The South African print media landscape is divided along political and cultural lines.¹³³

Broadly speaking, two print media sectors exist: Afrikaans language and English language media. For the most part of the twentieth century, publications in other South African

¹³¹ *Ibid*: 39.

¹³² *Ibid*: 44.

¹³³ Tomaselli, K. Tomaselli, R. & Muller, J. (eds.) 1989. *Studies on the South African media – The press in South Africa*. New York: St Martin's Press Inc., p.46.

languages have not existed. It is only recently that publications were established that report news in so-called black African languages (notably in isiZulu and isiXhosa). Besides the societal divide between Afrikaans- and English-speaking communities in South Africa, this linguistic divide also has its roots in the ownership of publications. Because of the country's history as a British colony, the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid, white-owned media companies have monopolised ownership of the print media. Although some publications – mostly political in nature – owned by black people did exist during apartheid, these were not considered part of the “formal” media landscape and were mostly banned publications under apartheid legislation.¹³⁴

The absence of formal black-owned media has a bearing on the current study, because it implies that the opinions of the largest section of South African society do not form part of this reception history. Until the 1990s, South Africa had no commercial newspapers, radio stations or television networks that were owned and controlled by black people.¹³⁵ In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century a number of black-owned publications, with articles in African languages, had existed. However, economic restraints and/or political suppression led to their demise around the 1930s.¹³⁶ During the 1940s and 1950s a few black-owned publications were set up again, notably *Inkundla ya Bantu* by the African National Congress (ANC) in 1946. These all had a “radical” political view (for the era) and were all banned by the government.

Two white South Africans started the Bantu Press in 1931 and produced the company's first newspaper, *Bantu World*. By 1950 the Argus Company, with funding from the Anglo American Corporation, acquired a dominant interest in the Bantu Press. The company, now white-owned, grew while no other independent African newspaper could survive the Bantu Press's monopoly. The only publication with a black readership to survive, was *Drum* magazine, first owned by South African Associated Newspapers and later acquired by Naspers, the dominant Afrikaans media company. Before this acquisition, the Afrikaans press owned *Bona*, an educational magazine published in isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*: 47.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*: 48.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*: 48.

Most of the development of the black media was in the magazine industry, with notable publications being *Pace* and *Drum*, both English language publications.

White-owned newspapers directed towards a black readership, were published in English, and these included *World*, *Weekend World*, *Post*, *Weekend Post*, *Golden City Press* (today *City Press*, owned by the Naspers subsidiary Media24) and *The Sowetan*.¹³⁷ During the 1980s, Naspers made a concerted effort to buy a stake in the black media, of which *City Press* became the most noteworthy. Although these publications were aimed at a black readership, Keyan Tomaselli *et al* argue they were under “white protection”. Under apartheid, stringent publication laws had to be adhered to, intervention by the State was normal, and editorial decisions and policies were in the hands of the white owners. Content was often decided upon by white editorial directors in consultation with black editors.¹³⁸

This period also saw more black journalists employed by the (white) English press. Already during the politically turbulent latter part of the 1970s – significantly the student uprising of 1976 – the English media had black journalists who could cover these riots in the townships.¹³⁹ The implication was that readers of English newspapers were able to read first-hand accounts of these riots, which would later have a direct impact on the political changes of the 1990s. The Afrikaans press, as Tomaselli *et al* put it, was “caught unprepared” with only the *Transvaler* having one black reporter. This is indicative of the historical disparity between the news content published for the English and Afrikaans print media markets.

Two groups, Argus and South African Associated Newspapers, with Anglo American and Johannesburg Consolidated Investments as major shareholders, initially dominated the English press. At the helm of these companies – and major influencers of the news content of these publications – were individuals like Harry Oppenheimer, John Martin and Gordon Waddell.¹⁴⁰ During apartheid, the English press became known as oppositional to the government and its policies, but it was more by default than by intention. The real voice of

¹³⁷ *Ibid*: 48.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*: 52.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*: 53.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*: 57.

opposition against the National Party government was the black working class, but this constituency had no voice in the media. The National Party's ideology of creating an Afrikaner culture with Afrikaans as main language, coupled with its political exclusivity and implied exclusion of English-speakers, put the English press by default in the role of opposition. Also, with the general absence of black representation in the formal media, the English press – due to its oppositional role and the accessibility of its language – put itself in the role of representing the black voice, which also happened to have no other mass-distributed outlet.¹⁴¹

Soon the English media started creating content for black readers, mostly those in cities, addressing issues such as housing, transport, recreational environments and education. Black readers in rural areas were initially not catered for, but by the 1980s, with the political issues surrounding the former Homelands, more attention was given to rural black people, albeit mostly within the context of urbanisation. Special supplements, known as “Extras”, were created by many newspapers and aimed at black readers. (The Afrikaans press, notably *Rapport*, had such a supplement focusing on specifically coloured people in the then Cape Province.) On the one hand, these “Extra” supplements were welcomed in that they recognized a black readership and spoke to its assumed concerns, but on the other hand, the separation from “white” news gave the impression that “black” news was not important enough for the main sections of these newspapers. At the start of the twenty-first century, many of these supplements had disappeared.

Whereas the English press started as commercial ventures, the Afrikaans press was born from a need to create a mouthpiece for Afrikaner ideology. Most Afrikaans newspapers were aligned as mouthpieces of the National Party, propagating the government's messages that were mostly directed at white Afrikaners. The idea behind newspapers like *Die Burger* was never purely to report on news, but rather the promotion of the cultural and political life of Afrikaners. Likewise, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Afrikaans newspapers were also vehicles to formalise the Afrikaans language. The Afrikaans media's roots were

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*: 61.

not fundamentally based on journalistic ideals, but rather on the promotion of a culture and its political ideology.¹⁴²

Funding for the Afrikaans press did not come from big corporates, as was the case with the English press, but was a venture by a large number of small investors. According to Tomaselli *et al*, in 1953 *Die Burger* was registered in the names of 3 239 shareholders, of which Sanlam/Santam (life and short-term insurers focussing specifically on the white Afrikaner market) was the biggest shareholder.¹⁴³ The Afrikaanse Pers, in the then Transvaal, was financially supported by members of the National Party.

Dr DF Malan, at the time leader of the Cape National Party, and later to become Prime Minister, was the editor of *Die Burger*, which was clearly aligned with the policies of the National Party. It was only by the late 1950s that *Die Burger* started challenging certain government policies. Even so, it never challenged the principles of apartheid, but rather its application.¹⁴⁴ During this time a strong call was made by *Die Burger* and other Afrikaans newspapers for the inclusion of (Afrikaans-speaking) coloured people in the political arena, foreshadowing the establishment of a Coloured Council and later the tri-cameral system with coloured, Indian and white people forming the government. With the National Party in power, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) also became an extension of the propaganda system of the National Party.

The Afrikaans media was, as Tomaselli *et al* argue, closely associated with Afrikaner identity and ideology.¹⁴⁵ Along with the media, the Dutch Reformed Church and organisations such as the Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuurvereniging, or ATKV (Afrikaans Language and Cultural Societies), were part of the societal structures that aimed to establish an Afrikaner identity and create spaces for a discourse around the ideology of the Afrikaner. However, for much of the twentieth century newspapers remained the major public forum where matters of ideology could be openly discussed and negotiated, mostly because newspapers occupy the public sphere with established relationships with specific readership markets who share

¹⁴² *Ibid*: 87.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*: 90.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*: 90.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*: 152.

certain societal values and traits.¹⁴⁶ During apartheid, newspapers like *Die Burger* and *Rapport* became vehicles to create a sense of community (“we”) and nurture Afrikanerdom. Botma argues that Naspers “took part in and depended on the fabrication, exploitation, and transformation of Afrikaner habitus”. The company had created what Botma calls, “symbolic capital through the fabrication and glorification of the direct, historical and virtually exclusive links between Afrikaners and Afrikaans”.¹⁴⁷

Until the end of the 1990s, the majority of South Africa’s media were white-controlled and were still divided into the English and Afrikaans press run by duopolies. This concentration of ownership impacted on the access of people to media, because these media were set up to address certain readership markets and to exclude others. With only a few black journalists in editor positions, the editorial decisions of both the English and Afrikaans press were in white hands. Even if a publication’s readership was constituted mostly of black people, these duopolies employed white media managers. The broadcast media was mostly state-controlled, with the exception of DSTV and smaller privately owned radio stations.¹⁴⁸

It is evident that much of what South African society consumed as news from the local media were curated by either the ownership of the media or censorship by the apartheid state. Under apartheid, an intricate set of media laws were in place that protected the apartheid state from potential media criticism.¹⁴⁹ Raymond Louw argues that the thinking of the South African population has been conditioned by the country’s “long enslavement to thought constriction through censorship”, but also many other constraints brought about by a “compulsion to adhere to doctrine”.¹⁵⁰ What is therefore on record as news in South Africa’s mainstream media, and by implication the historical documentation of what had happened in this country up until the late 1990s, is informed by the dynamics of media ownership and state censorship. As an example, Allison Gillwald says that the South African

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*: 154.

¹⁴⁷ Botma, G.J. 2010. “Paying the field: The cultural economy of Afrikaans at Naspers”. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 29(1):42-63.

¹⁴⁸ Duncan, J. & Seleane, M. 1989. *Media and Democracy in South Africa*. Pretoria: HSRC, p.137.

¹⁴⁹ Wasserman, H. & De Beer, A.S. 2009. “Afro-optimism/Afro-pessimism and the South African media”. *Critical Arts*, 23(3):377-395.

¹⁵⁰ Louw, R. 1990. The Shape and role of the media in a New South Africa. Conference summary, hosted by Idasa and the Campaign for Open Media, Johannesburg, 22-25 November.

media have “consistently failed to contextualise the armed struggle as a response to institutionalised state violence”.¹⁵¹

In a report on the media’s role in and during apartheid, Edward Bird and Zureida Garda state that the South African media in fact became the voice through which the apartheid government legitimised and validated its ideology.¹⁵² This manifested in the media’s “unequal and unfair” representation of black and white people. Like the state, the media criminalised any form of political protest activities. News was depoliticised, and the media never challenged or opposed human rights violations, even the restrictions on the provision of information and censorship of the media itself. Furthermore, the media limited the political arena by blatantly (like the Afrikaans press) or unknowingly (like the English press who, although they were against apartheid, focused on “white” news) supporting and affirming apartheid ideology. According to Bird and Garda it was only the alternative press who provided news that the mainstream did not cover.¹⁵³

The dawn of democracy and the instalment of a newly elected government in 1994 brought about certain changes in the media industry, with the societal changes due to democratisation informing these changes in the media. As in pre-1994 South Africa, where news values followed national values, a new dispensation with its accompanying new values (for instance, the ideals of a “rainbow nation”) resulted in dramatic changes in the media landscape and the media’s portrayal of the South African state of affairs.¹⁵⁴ Wasserman and De Beer list four major media developments of the new South Africa: shifts in ownership and editorial ideology; the change from legal constraints through censorship to a self-regulatory media; attempts to broaden the public sphere and critiques thereof; and friction between the media and the post-apartheid government.¹⁵⁵ Although these scholars list them as four distinct changes, they are interrelated and provide a broad description of the

¹⁵¹ Gillwald, A. 1990. Media Morality: More than codes of ethics. Conference “The Shape and role of the media in a New South African”, hosted by Idasa and the Campaign for Open Media, Johannesburg, 23-25 November.

¹⁵² Bird, E. & Garda, Z. 1996. “The Role of the print media during the apartheid era”. Available at www.mediamonitoringafrica.org [accessed on 20 January 2017].

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Raubenheimer, L. Access and control of broadcasting. Conference: The Shape and role of the media in a New South African, hosted by Idasa and the Campaign for Open Media, Johannesburg, 23-25 November.

¹⁵⁵ Wasserman, H. & De Beer, A.S. 2005. “Which public? Whose interest? The South African Media and its role during the first ten years of democracy”. *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, 19(1-2):35-51.

media landscape since the 1990s with specific reference to the traditional media. The changes brought about by the rise of social media over the past few years have been equally significant in terms of access to media, participation of consumers in news dissemination and its impact on regulation. Social media, however, lies outside the scope of the media used as sources for this study.

Although South Africa's news media is still dominated by the duopoly of Naspers (through its Media24 publications) and the Independent Media Group, many other media institutions, albeit smaller companies, have emerged and "diluted" the abovementioned media groups' monopoly, although not significantly. The emerging media groups over the past few years have been black-owned media, but their rise has been accompanied by considerable difficulty. Competing with two big media corporations has proved challenging, and in some cases Naspers has bought up their smaller competition, possibly in a bid to hold on to its monopoly. The cost of entering the market is also enormous and a profit is not guaranteed. Coupled with that is the history of suspicion of the press by readers because of decades of propaganda in the traditional media.¹⁵⁶

Greater diversity in ownership in the media industry is visible today and there have been several new news publications entering the market. These new titles have not dominated the market; rather the old newspapers that have been around for decades have held their position, for example the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*. Also, the media managers at these newspapers are the journalists who have been working and writing since the 1990s, which begs the question whether editorial decision-making has been transformed at all. Foreign owners have entered the press market too, taking over existing titles and launching new titles.¹⁵⁷ Since 2000, the introduction of tabloid newspapers aimed at the black and coloured market has led to intense circulation wars.¹⁵⁸ This has also resulted in greater access to and participation in the media for most of the broader public.

With a new constitutional democracy in South Africa, the relationship between the state and the media changed. In the previous dispensation and during the struggle years the

¹⁵⁶ Duncan *et al*, 1998:138.

¹⁵⁷ Sparks, C. 2011. "South African media in comparative perspective". *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 32(2):5-19.

¹⁵⁸ Wasserman *et al*, 2005:39.

distinction between pro- and anti-government news media, was clear. To a large extent the English and alternative press (which after 1995 started to disappear) were able to position themselves at the start of the democracy as the guardians of the newly acquired media freedom. Being a supporter of the struggle movement, represented politically by the ANC, they have had to rethink their role in now being critical of the ANC government.

As the supporters of the apartheid regime, the Afrikaans media have found it a bigger challenge to reposition themselves.¹⁵⁹ The changing political and socio-economic landscape of South Africa since 1994 has shifted the cultural economy of Afrikaans for Media24, the owner of *Die Burger* and that still publishes mostly Afrikaans publications.¹⁶⁰ Naspers had the financial backing of wealthy Afrikaners, but within a new dispensation they have had to compete in the current economic climate and media landscape.¹⁶¹ During the 1990s, *Die Burger* tried to retain its affluent (and therefore profitable, from the newspaper's perspective) white readership by portraying the ANC government as against Afrikaners and Afrikaans by showing how racist incidents constitute a victimisation and marginalisation of Afrikaners, and by ensuring that their readers understood that they would ensure the survival of Afrikaner culture and identity.¹⁶²

The changing relationship between the state and the media, with the government expressing misgivings about its representation in the media, and the media's fear of possible threats to media freedom, resulted in the demise of censorship and gave the media the opportunity to become self-regulatory. Organisations and bodies like the Press Ombudsman and Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) facilitated this move towards self-regulation. Guarding this right to self-regulation and greater professionalism in the media industry is the South African National Editor's Forum (SANEF).¹⁶³

Recent developments in the media that have been noted by some scholars, include a "brain drain" at newspapers, with most journalists and editors now being under the age of 30,

¹⁵⁹ Wasserman *et al*, 2009:383.

¹⁶⁰ Botma, 2010:42-63.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*.

¹⁶² Wasserman, H. 2009. " 'Ons is nie so nie': Vryheid van spraak en die ontkenning van rassisme in die Afrikaanse pers". *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 49(1):111-130, March.

¹⁶³ Wasserman *et al*, 2005:40-43.

which has led to articles that show a lack of context. Wasserman and De Beer argue that although reports are factual, “readers are given no framework in which to analyse developments”.¹⁶⁴ Context and analyses of news events have become a luxury. Colin Sparks also notes that the press is often used by factions to discredit rivals.¹⁶⁵ He argues that – as had happened in Russia, China, Brazil and Mexico – control of the media improves politicians’ chances of holding on to political power. The now defunct daily newspaper *The New Age*, started in 2010, is an example of a publication that had close links to the state, with a goal of portraying a positive image of the ANC government.

Concerning arts journalism, less space has been given in daily newspapers to reporting on the arts, with new publications entering the market (like *The New Age*) not even attempting to publish an arts section. Reporting on “serious” arts have been replaced by articles on popular culture. Few publications still have an arts editorial team, with *Die Burger* currently only employing two journalists focussing on the arts in general. In November 2016, the *Cape Times* and *Cape Argus* retrenched all permanent and some freelance arts journalists. These journalists have since started the online publication *Weekend Special*. While at daily newspapers this decline in arts reporting is significant, weekly newspapers still create space for articles about the arts: the *Mail&Guardian* has a dedicated arts supplement; *Sunday Times* makes arts news and reviews (especially book reviews) part of their lifestyle supplement; and the Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, *Rapport*, has a supplement called *Weekliks*, in which some arts news and book reviews are published.

¹⁶⁴ Frederikse, J. 1987. “South Africa’s Media: The commercial press and the seedlings of the future”. *Third World Quarterly*, 9(2):638-656, April.

¹⁶⁵ Sparks, 2011:5-19.

PART 3

Research methodology

Research design

The research findings of this study are structured into two chapters. Chapter 2 explores three historical patterns present in the current historiography of opera performances in Cape Town. Chapter 3 focuses specifically on the reception of opera on the basis of four historical patterns. A literature study and critical analysis of secondary sources representing the current historiography of opera was used to construct Chapter 2. This forms an historical basis for the understanding of Chapter 3, and aims to contextualise the findings and inferences made in that chapter. It provides a narrative pre-history, which is crucial to comprehending a history of reception during the selected period of 1985 to 2015. Without such a broad historical foundation, the narrative of the reception history created in Chapter 3 would lack context and historical justification.

As discussed in the literature review (earlier in this chapter), the sources of opera history have until now only reported on events, and therefore this history is what Stanford calls only history-as-event.¹⁶⁶ When one takes a broader view of the events in opera history in Cape Town, it is possible to identify certain patterns within this history. As mentioned earlier, these patterns – identified by the current researcher and which may in later histories be broadened or contested – are, first, the impact of the South African socio-political contexts that shaped the reception of opera; second, the aspiration towards professionalization; and third, the dominance of nineteenth-century operas in the repertoire of works performed in Cape Town.

These three historical patterns have informed the structure of Chapter 2. This thematic structure according to historical patterns, rather than a chronological history, provided the opportunity to look at changes in this history from different perspectives over a period of

¹⁶⁶ Stanford, 1994.

almost 200 years. Shaping this chapter according to a chronological history would have allowed for a different historical perspective, as it would only lend itself to dealing with certain historical events in isolation, with a less pronounced effort hermeneutically to link these events. Because the performance and reception history of opera in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015 is not historically naïve, as it were, it is important to link this 30-year history with the history that preceded it, hence the decision to include a chapter on this “pre-history” structured according to perceived historical patterns. Because this historical background is based on secondary sources, it may in itself also be considered a form of reception. How historians, researchers and writers interpreted the evolution of opera in Cape Town represent written responses to opera at various points in history, and therefore also constitute reception.

Chapter 3 forms the central focus of this study and is a reception history based on primary sources sourced from two selected newspapers over a specified time period. The parameters of this research project are delineated by two factors: first, the selected time-period, and second, the choice of newspapers. The specific timeframe of 1985 to 2015 and the daily Cape Town newspapers the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* were purposively selected. The choice of timeframe is informed by the contents of the literature on opera history in Cape Town as discussed in the literature review earlier in this chapter. In her doctoral dissertation on the indigenisation of opera in South Africa, Roos writes that politics played a pivotal role in how opera developed in South Africa, and that over the past two decades the social and political changes in the country “have had an unprecedented and specific impact on the production of opera”.¹⁶⁷ This is especially true of the period 1985 to 2015.

In the 1980s, opera was performed against a backdrop of political protests against apartheid legislation, which had a direct impact on the arts because different races had to perform in separate spaces and in front of segregated audiences. Particularly, on 2 July 1985 former Prime Minister PW Botha declared a partial State of Emergency, which “signalled the beginning of the end of apartheid society and governance in South Africa”.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, the

¹⁶⁷ Roos, 2010:193.

¹⁶⁸ No author. *State of Emergency – 1985*. South African History Online. www.sahistory.org.za/article/state-emergency-1985. [accessed on 30 October 2018].

year 1985 could arguably be seen as the start of the post-apartheid era in the country. This period of political turmoil also saw the so-called cultural boycotts that isolated South African from international artistic practices. This meant that overseas artists refused to perform in South Africa because of apartheid, while South African artists were often not employed abroad. During the latter part of the 1980s, political changes in the country gathered momentum, leading eventually to the formal end of apartheid. This meant that the arts industry in South Africa also slowly became more open to artists of colour, and theatres gradually began allowing audiences of different races to attend performances.

This was also a period of great transitions in the opera industry. The demise of the Eoan Group's opera section in 1975 ushered in the breakdown of "apartheid" in opera.¹⁶⁹ Despite legislation at the time, the first coloured singers (mostly former Eoan singers) were allowed to join CAPAB's opera chorus in the early 1980s already.¹⁷⁰ During the 1990s – under a democratically elected government – opera was viewed as an elitist Eurocentric art form and government funding for opera was cut drastically.¹⁷¹ The four provincial arts councils, established by the apartheid government, were seen as structures that had no place in the new South Africa. Whereas government funding during the apartheid era was focused on supporting European art forms, the new establishment advocated the support of African art forms and the creation of new works of art by South Africans.

After the provincial arts councils, including the CAPAB, were dissolved in the late 1990s, opera struggled financially. The rise of black opera singers – the result of a project started as a "counter-action" against the government's opinion of opera being an elitist Eurocentric "white" art form with no place in Africa – brought about a focus on new repertoire, like Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* and new South African operas based on indigenous stories. The standard (Italian, French and German) repertoire was still performed, but often the setting of these productions were localised.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ The Eoan Group opera company was considered amateur because the performers did not receive a professional fee. Most of the singers were, however, professionally trained.

¹⁷⁰ Eoan History Project, 2013:228-238.

¹⁷¹ Gobbato, A. 2011. *History of Cape Town Opera*. Available: www.capetownopera.co.za [accessed on 19 October 2011].

¹⁷² Gobbato, 2011.

In the following decade, the political changes brought about new funding and management models of opera companies. Cape Town Opera (CTO) was established in 1999 as a section-21 company and this meant that funding had to be sourced from both government entities and private companies. Looking at the list of operas this company produced up until 2015, more operas by South African composers were staged during this period than in the previous 30 years. Almost all of these works were based on local or traditional African stories, and many of the European works were staged in South African settings. CTO also embarked on innovative projects by, for instance, commissioning 30-minute operas and producing modern operas seldom performed. The selected timeframe therefore also saw the largest number of South African and world premieres of operas in the history of South Africa.

The socio-political context of the chosen period of this study, had a direct and particular impact on opera production in South Africa. Investigating this 30-year period, allowed for a rich perspective on the interplay of politics, societal changes, as well as changes in the repertoire and the opera industry. Similarly, the political changes in the country during the period 1985 to 2015 influenced the media landscape, which in turn had an impact on the practice of arts journalism, as pointed out by Wasserman¹⁷³ and Botma.¹⁷⁴ As discussed earlier, the manner in which the South African media operated and the readership markets they served during the 1980s were divided along racial and cultural lines, as a result of apartheid legislation. From 1994, under the new democratically elected political dispensation, new markets emerged (especially the emerging black middle class) and media companies changed their policies to align with the new political order.

Besides structurally defining the research by means of using a specific timeframe, the selection of media as sources to collect data serves as a further means of delineating the parameters of this study. As discussed in Part 2 of this chapter, the print media was specifically and purposefully chosen because of its historical role in shaping national identities.¹⁷⁵ Regional daily newspapers in Cape Town were chosen, because predominantly

¹⁷³ Wasserman, 2004:139-157.

¹⁷⁴ Botma, 2008:83-100.

¹⁷⁵ Andersons, 2006:44.

newspaper journalists and critics have reported on and reviewed opera, and these newspapers regularly reported on the arts and opera in particular. Because daily newspapers are not niche publications, they reach a broad readership, and the views and opinions are aimed at a wide segment of society. Also, complete records of these publications can be found in archives. Within the South African context, the broadcast media (radio and television) do not review opera, and seldom report on it. Online publications have been omitted from the study because in South Africa there are currently few websites that report on or review opera. Furthermore, the electronic media as an industry in South Africa is now only about fifteen years old, and it is impossible to trace the complete record of online writing because websites are often deleted and no register of online publications exists.

Because of the media duopoly of Afrikaans and English media (as discussed earlier in this chapter), publications from both markets were chosen to represent a broad spectrum of opinions. *Die Burger* was chosen because it is the only Afrikaans daily newspaper in Cape Town, it has a dedicated arts page, and it reported on and reviewed arts over the full period the study covers. The *Cape Times* and *Cape Argus* are the only two English daily newspapers in Cape Town. The *Cape Times* also has a dedicated arts page, and reported on and reviewed arts over the full period this study covers. *The Cape Argus* has an entertainment supplement, called *Tonight*, focussing mainly on television and film entertainment, although it also reported on and reviewed theatre, classical music and opera, but this was not the main focus of the newspaper's arts reportage. For this reason, and practical considerations of scope, the *Cape Argus* has been excluded from this study. An additional consideration in this decision was the benefit of allowing balance in the selection of reportage from Afrikaans and English media. As there is only one Afrikaans daily newspaper in Cape Town, it was decided to choose only one English newspaper as well, and the *Cape Times* was chosen because of the similarity in the format of its arts reportage to *Die Burger*, thus enabling the most suitable basis for comparison. Also, the *Cape Times* and *Cape Argus* are both published by the same media house, Independent Media Group, justifying an assumption of a shared ideological approach to their respective approaches to arts coverage.

A qualitative research approach, which enables the observation of social life, is followed in this study. It allows for the examination, analysis and interpretation of non-numerical data

collected by means of observations made through, amongst other techniques, content analysis, in-depth interviews and/or participant observations.¹⁷⁶ For the purpose of this study, both opera as it is traditionally defined and operetta have been included. Only performances of those works are included, and indeed only performances by professional musicians. The units of analysis, i.e. that which is specifically studied, are social artefacts, defined as any product of social beings or their behaviour.¹⁷⁷ In the case of the current study, the units of analysis are journalistic articles on opera in the selected print media.

According to Babbie, qualitative research methods involve a continuing interplay between data collection and theory. Therefore, the methodology in this qualitative research project follows closely those premises discussed by Dahlhaus in his chapter on reception histories in musicology, and which have been discussed earlier in this chapter.¹⁷⁸

Data collection

The data needed for this study were journalistic articles relating to opera in Cape Town published in the selected newspapers, the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*. In order to find these articles, performance dates and names of the specific productions that were performed between 1985 and 2015 were initially required. The archive at Artscape, the theatre where most of the operas were staged, did not have a complete list of these performances; nor did the archive possess a complete collection of all the programmes for the productions. The only complete reference material for the productions were publicity brochures. The researcher used these brochures to compile a production list and crosschecked the list with advertisements in the selected newspapers.¹⁷⁹

The articles about these productions have been sourced from two archives: the newspaper archive at the Stellenbosch University Library and the online newspaper archive SA Media.

¹⁷⁶ Babbie, E. 2015. *The practice of social research*. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, p.26.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*: 97.

¹⁷⁸ Dahlhaus, 1983:161.

¹⁷⁹ The production list is included as Addendum A.

The former has hard copies of both newspapers, while SA Media¹⁸⁰ is an online archive of South African newspapers and magazines that stores scanned copies of articles.

The approach used for the sampling of these articles was nonprobability sampling, which Babbie defines as “any technique in which samples are selected in some way not suggested by probability theory”.¹⁸¹ In practice, this approach is used when it is impossible to determine the whole population from which a sample would be taken. There is no way to predict and count the amount of articles written on opera, because newspapers choose which articles will be published on the basis of newsworthiness, availability of physical page space, and the availability of journalists to attend events. The publication of articles is therefore haphazard and unpredictable. In the case of the current study and its scope, it would be logistically impossible to search all the pages of both newspapers over the 30-year period.

Babbie lists four types of nonprobability sampling, and for this study, purposeful or judgmental sampling was used. With this type of sampling, the units to be observed are selected based on the researcher’s judgment about which ones will be the most useful or representative.¹⁸² It is possible to predict a probable period in which articles relating to specific opera productions would have been published by using the full list of opera productions performed and the performance run. The most probable period when articles relating to those specific opera productions would have been published, is a few days before the performance and during the run of a production. Therefore, newspaper issues published a week before and during the run of all the productions were selected and articles in those newspapers relating to the specific operas were collected. Three different types of articles were found: reviews, news articles and interview/profile articles. It was possible to crosscheck the reviews published with the complete list of productions, because newspapers would in all probability publish reviews during the run of the production. For the 193 opera productions staged between 1985 and 2015, a total of 357 reviews were found in *Die Burger* (192) and the *Cape Times* (165). This represents 92.4% of the possible

¹⁸⁰ SA Media covers more than 120 South African newspapers and periodicals, and selects approximately 500 articles daily from these publications and indexes the articles in 22 categories.

¹⁸¹ Babbie, 2015: 186.

¹⁸² *Ibid*: 187.

reviews that could have been written if both newspapers published one review of each of the 193 productions. However, news and interview/profile articles are not necessarily published during a production period, which makes it superfluous to crosscheck the amount of the articles found with the productions staged.

Non-probability sampling, and specifically purposeful or judgemental sampling, has its limitations. Babbie warns that researchers need to take heed of and acknowledge some limitations that relate to accuracy and the precise representations of populations.¹⁸³ For this reason, the search for articles was broadened to include the online archive SA Media. It can be assumed that some articles – particularly news articles about the South African opera and arts industry, as well as interview/profile articles – would have been published outside of the period before or during the run of an opera production as chosen by using purposeful or judgemental sampling. In order to add these possible articles to the sampling, a search was done on SA Media using the keyword “opera”. Only this keyword was used because the articles on SA Media are archived and indexed according to subject categories and themes, “opera” being one, and all opera related articles would have been tagged accordingly.

Because these sampling techniques and archives were used, it is not possible to generalise about the findings. The researcher does not assume all articles relating to opera performances in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015 had been collected and that the sample studied is therefore representative of all opinions on opera during this time. But the assumptions and inferences made are informed by the articles which were sourced according to the methodology explained above, which could be argued to have resulted in a representative sample. In total, 796 articles (reviews, news articles and interview/profile articles) relating to opera over the thirty-year period were sourced from the two newspaper archives and the SA Media online archive.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*: 190.

Data analysis

Content analysis was used to analyse the collected data, a process that Babbie defines as the study of recorded human communications.¹⁸⁴ Because the research requires text-based data (i.e. newspaper articles), content analysis was especially suited, and opinions about the opera performances over the thirty-year timeframe were extracted from the different texts collected. As Dahlhaus suggests, the researcher collected “stereotyped opinions”, or “topoi”, in the written texts. These “stereotyped opinions” do not only pertain to works, but also include aspects of performance practice, the presentation of the production, the artists and the social context relating to the period in history during which the opera was staged.

In order to extract these stereotyped opinions from journalistic articles, coding was used as a means of data processing. Categorising the data by using coding allows researchers to discover “patterns among the data, patterns that point to theoretical understandings of social life”.¹⁸⁵ Babbie discusses three types of coding, which were used in this study: open coding (the initial classification and labelling of concepts), axial coding (a reanalysis of the results of open coding), and selective coding (which organises the concepts resulting from open and axial coding).

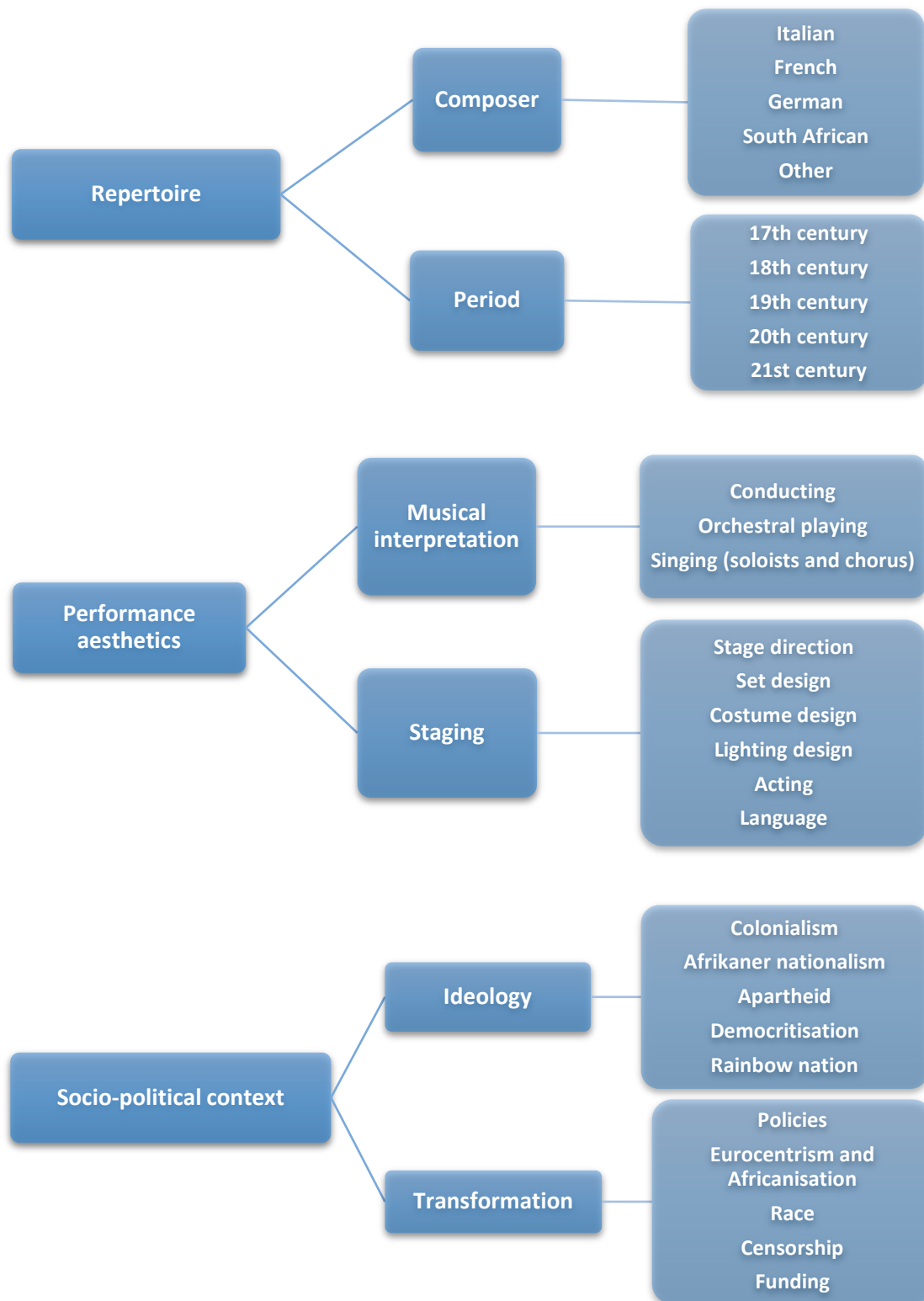
An inductive approach to the coding was employed, whereby specific observations were coded, which led to the discovery of certain patterns that could to some degree be ordered, as Babbie defines induction.¹⁸⁶ In practice, this meant that the researcher analysed the articles by tagging or coding certain concepts as they appeared in the texts. These codes were later manually organised according to certain identified patterns noticeable in those coded concepts across all the different texts. These patterns represent the stereotyped opinions or “topoi” referred to by Dahlhaus, and which inform the narratives of reception histories. The coding systems used in this research project are graphically portrayed in Figure 1 on the next page, with the left-hand codes representing open coding, and the codes to the right representing respectively axial and selective coding.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*: 323.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*: 388.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*: 23.

FIGURE 1: Coding system for content analysis employed in the research



Conclusion

This chapter has outlined how this research project is structured in theoretical, contextual and methodological terms. The study constructs a reception history of opera between 1985 and 2015 in Cape Town, and is therefore theoretically based in reception theory. Because reception histories rely on journalistic articles as primary source, the context in which these articles were written is pertinent. The context in which the South African media operates and the purposes of arts criticism in the media inform the inferences made in order to construct this reception history. From a methodological point of view, this is a qualitative research project in which content analysis is used as a method to analyse the collected data.

The motivation for this research has been the gap in the historiography of opera in Cape Town. Little has been written up until now on the performance history of opera in Cape Town, and the available literature only addresses historical facts without analysing those facts. The implication thereof is that opera historians have constructed histories that are more often than not merely chronological lists of events, versions of what is called history-as-event. Such a history does not explain the links between events, nor does it reveal any historical patterns.

Historical patterns explain the social and cultural contexts in which events in history happened. Because the writers and scholars of opera history in South Africa have not linked events or identified any patterns in that history, the impression is created that opera was performed in a void and that the socio-political landscape had little or even no impact on the performance history of opera. It is hardly revolutionary to claim that South Africa's tumultuous political history – colonialism, Afrikaner nationalism, apartheid and democracy – has had an impact on all aspects of social life in this country, including the arts. And yet the claim itself, and its implications, remain to be made and investigated regarding the history of opera in the country.

Not all sources on the history of opera in Cape Town, especially recent studies, have ignored the impact of the socio-political context on opera performance. Some scholars have shown how the political and social history of South Africa have shaped the performance history of

opera, but their narratives are themselves burdened with the history of the writers of South African history. Historical writing in South Africa has often been influenced by socio-political factors, so much so that many aspects of the country's history have been re-researched and rewritten. Certain master narratives – the perspectives of the writers of histories that supported (sometimes tacitly) the agendas of political systems that ignored minority and alternative histories – exist in historical writing on South Africa, and recent scholars have relied on these master narratives to build their histories of opera and music performances.

One of the gaps in the history of opera in Cape Town is a study on the reception of opera in the city. Reception histories trace responses to art over time and reveal how art has been received within a specific place, timespan and social grouping. It seeks to explain how people react and engage with a work of art and how those responses change over time and in different contexts. Dahlhaus has written on how reception theory, with its origins in literary theory, can be employed in the study of music histories. Like literary works, musical works are created by a person; they are objects that remain the same (the notes do not change), and they are presented to an audience. But unlike literary works, musical works are interpreted by performers/musicians, which represents an interface between the work and the audience. Dahlhaus argues that reception histories in music do not view musical works as “ideal objects” with a specific meaning, but as works of art created in performance – a “moment in history” – experienced differently each time, even by the same audience. Reception histories explain how and why these social reactions to art change over time.

According to Dahlhaus, these responses can be found in music journalism and journalistic articles are sources of views, opinions and accounts representing a particular social group. Music journalism provides evidence of these responses to musical works, as well as providing opinions, and shows how these reactions changed over time. Besides changes in responses, Dahlhaus argues that opinions on musical works are often fixed and one finds recurring clichés. Changes in opinion and perpetually fixed opinions are collected and analysed in order to compile a reception history.

Music journalism and criticism aim to describe and evaluate performances, but this evaluation is based on an assumed collective understanding of music as an art form within a certain social group or the readers of a specific publication at a certain time or era. The

music journalist's vocation is to help his/her readers understand, contextualise, evaluate and identify trends in music performances. Music criticism before the twentieth century were critiques of the musical texts, but with the establishment of a concert repertoire and the development of a canon, reviewing musical texts became less central to the practice of reviewing. From the middle of the twentieth century onwards, most journalistic music criticism focused on performances rather than on musical texts.

For most part, opera reviews in Cape Town have been critiques of performances, as the operas staged since the nineteenth century have been works with an already existing performance history and positive reception in Europe. Only the staging of new South African operas gave local reviewers the opportunity to judge the musical merits of new works. When reviewing canonical works, such as the majority of operas staged in Cape Town, the purpose of music criticism is to help readers understand the work and its performance within the context of the reader's cultural life, discussing the aesthetic value of a performance, and pointing out trends in the performance history.

To ensure that the opinions collected for this research project were representative, two Cape Town daily newspapers were purposively selected from which data has been collected. The *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* were chosen because full archives of these newspapers exist, because they represent both the dominant Afrikaans and English spectrum of the media, and because both publications have reported and reviewed opera extensively. These publications' ownership, ideology and the readership markets they serve have a substantive bearing on the opinions collected from these newspapers. Whereas the Afrikaans media (represented here by *Die Burger*) were seen as conservative and being a mouthpiece of the National Party government during apartheid, the English media (represented here by the *Cape Times*) were viewed as liberal and the voice of the majority of the South African population. Publications for the black readership market and black-owned media companies only surfaced in the late 1990s.

Guided by the theoretical framework, and informed by the context of the South African media and the aims of music criticism, this study follows a qualitative research approach in which social life is observed by examining, analysing and interpreting non-numerical data. Content analysis is used as the methodology to collect and analyse data, which in the case

of this study comprise journalistic articles relating to opera that have been published in the two selected daily newspapers. The articles were sourced from the archive of printed copies of the newspapers housed in the Stellenbosch University Library, as well as the online newspaper archive SA Media.

Through its theoretical, methodological and contextual frameworks, this research project aims to address four pertinent research questions that relate to the reception history of opera in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015. First, what have scholars up until now documented about the performance history of opera in Cape Town? Second, what has been documented about the performances of opera in Cape Town in the journalistic articles sourced from the two selected newspapers during the period 1985 to 2015? Third, what was the reception of the operatic works performed during this period in Cape Town as reflected in these journalistic articles? And, in conclusion, what are the problems and possibilities of reception histories in music within the South African context?

CHAPTER 2

Revisiting opera historiography

Introduction

Although this study is a reception history of opera in Cape Town over a specific thirty-year period (1985 to 2015), this era does not exist outside of time, because this history constitutes a complex interaction with a broader history of almost four centuries during which opera (or the circumstances for its existence) had developed in South Africa. In this chapter, the historical trajectory of opera performance in the Cape is presented in order to allow the implications of this complex interaction to be considered for the period under investigation. By 1985, when this period under investigation in this study commences, there had been a canon of operatic works and a professional opera industry able to sustain performances of a particular standard.

Three historical patterns or perspectives, which were identified during the study of the secondary sources on opera performances, shaped this history. These patterns are, first, the socio-political changes in South Africa as enablers of operatic expression; second, the professionalization of the opera industry; and last, the introduction and formation of a repertoire dominated by nineteenth-century operas. These patterns are not only interlinked, but they are also relevant to a reception of opera and contribute to explaining its continued performance over the course of about two hundred years of documented music activities in the Cape.

This chapter serves as an overview of the opera activities in the Cape over a period of almost two hundred years – there are no documented references to opera activity in the Cape before 1800 – and provides historical points of departure and a summary of how the “bits and pieces” of historical information on opera in the city are interwoven. A chronology of and general information on opera (which works were performed, when and by whom) provide a framework for understanding this history. As discussed in Chapter 1, current historical writing on opera in South African ends with Roos’s doctoral dissertation as the

most recent study to link events regarding the production of local opera. However, this does not mean that events of historical significance regarding opera production in Cape Town have been comprehensively documented. Roos's work itself serves as a point of departure, rather than a destination in identifying and elaborating upon the historical patterns that the current research has identified.

These patterns provide a basis for the understanding of the findings of this research project. The current historiography of opera in Cape Town – the literature reviewed in Chapter 1 – provides historically significant points of reference that have been used as sources for tracing the development of opera in Cape Town and South Africa from the earliest documented performances. Scouring through the myriad of historiographic traces of opera in the Cape, the current researcher identified several trends that have enabled, characterised and influenced the performance, role and cultural value of opera in South Africa, and specifically Cape Town. The current approach constitutes a novel hermeneutic shift in the treatment of the literature on the history of opera in South Africa, aiming to provide a perspective on the reading of current research, as well as providing the historiographic grounding on which further investigation into the history of opera in South Africa can be undertaken.

The first part of this chapter explores the political systems and socio-political contexts which, over the course of more than four hundred years, served as enablers of the performance and development of opera in South Africa. Different strands of nationalism over these centuries – from colonialism (and it will be argued that this too is a form of nationalism), Afrikaner nationalism, and eventually the current Africanist nationalism of the “new South Africa” – steered and determined in a number of ways the role and place of opera in South African society. The country's colonisation by the Dutch and British served as an initial enabler of the evolution and performance history of opera in South Africa, as colonial society had been instrumental in the introduction of opera to and the development thereof in the country. How colonial society and its musical tastes evolved over time laid the foundation for opera to become an established art form enmeshed in the discourses of identity politics in the region, as opera sustained and delineated the connection between the colony in Africa and the empire centralised in Europe.

With colonial society having “settled” opera as an art form in South Africa, it was Afrikaner nationalism that enabled its tenacious continuity during the twentieth century. Between the early 1900s and 1994, Afrikaner nationalism was a dominant political movement in the country and it shaped all aspects of South African society, including the arts. As a strategy to promote Afrikaner nationalism through the arts, the National Party government formalised structures such as the former provincial arts councils and their funding as a form of cultural nationalism and the creation of nationhood, albeit purely to the benefit of the white population of South Africa. The impact of Afrikaner nationalism on operatic expression for a large part of the twentieth century is also evidenced, for example, in the translation of standard repertoire in Afrikaans and the composition of new operas referencing Afrikaner lifestyle, notably nostalgia about farm and country life.

The democratic dispensation since 1994 ushered in a new Africanist nationalism – the building of the new South Africa and its rainbow nation – which also influenced the choice of repertoire and the professionalization of opera. During the 1990s, the discourse on opera focused on it being a Eurocentric and elitist art form with little relevance or place in the new South African society. But contrary to the perceived death of opera, black opera singers became more audible and visible almost immediately after 1994. The increasing number of black singers influenced the choice of repertoire, with Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* serving as an exemplary case because only black singers may perform the lead roles, as prescribed by the composer. Coupled with this, a trend of the “Africanisation” of opera productions began in which the European referenced milieu of standard repertoire operas made way for South African settings. Indigenous African stories also found their way into local opera composition. A new political dispensation and the rise of Africanist nationalism seemed to have ensured the continuity of opera as an art form, whilst encouraging the composition of new South African operas during the 1990s and the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century.

A second pattern in the history of opera in the Cape, discussed in the second part of this chapter, is an aspiration towards the professionalization of opera and recognition of the art form as a professional industry. Ambitions towards professionalization can be traced back to the colonial era when travelling theatre companies from Europe toured to the Cape, starting

at the beginning of the nineteenth century and continuing until the end of that century.¹⁸⁷ As the number of these companies increased, competition between them seemed to have compelled companies to raise performance standards.¹⁸⁸ Innovative stage sets were designed, while singers and actors who had already been stars of the stage abroad and made a profession of singing or acting, for instance, were contracted in a bid to attract audiences.¹⁸⁹ More refinement in performances resulted, indicating the effects of this aspiration towards professionalization.

The building of theatres in Cape Town over more than two centuries is another indicator of an endeavour towards professionalising opera. The building of the African Theatre on Boereplein in 1797 had a significant impact on the kind of theatre productions that could be staged, as well as the level of professionalism of these productions. In later years, the building of the Cape Town City Hall, the Alhambra, Nico Malan and Joseph Stone theatres gave producers and performers opera venues with facilities that allowed them to stage professional productions. Another indicator of professionalism is education, and specifically a tertiary education. The establishment of an opera school in 1954 at the South African College of Music (SACM), founded in 1910 and incorporated into the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 1923, ensured that singers could receive formal vocal and academic training to prepare them for a professional career in opera.

Financial struggles and a need for full state funding of the arts had been contentious issues in South Africa since the latter part of the nineteenth century. Artists and producers saw increased funding, from either private sources or state coffers, as a means and an enabler to stage professional productions and reward artists and staff with appropriate remuneration. Since the early nineteenth century, artists and opera producers had argued that the arts should be fully funded by the state in order to develop a professional industry in South Africa.¹⁹⁰ It was, however, only in the 1960s that the National Party government funded the arts through arts councils established in each of the country's four provinces and the former

¹⁸⁷ Bouws, 1996:54-55.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*: 112-113.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*: 55.

¹⁹⁰ Malan, J.P. (ed.). 1979-1986. "Touring theatre companies and concert artists, 1800-1914", in *South African Music Encyclopaedia, Volume 4*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, p.349.

South West Africa (now Namibia).¹⁹¹ Before the arts councils were established, several arts organisations and societies produced theatre and opera across the country.¹⁹² These opera organisations, established in the 1940s and 1950s, were in themselves indicative of a move towards professionalization. In fact, these societies had as their objective – and their *raison d'être* – the professionalization of opera.¹⁹³ The establishment of several opera companies in the Cape was a further step towards professionalization.

The third pattern in the history of opera in the Cape explains how the dominance of nineteenth-century operas in the repertoire performed in the Cape since the nineteenth century had provided the foundation for the practices in the period under review. Already at the beginning of the 1800s, the Cape was a regular destination for performing artists as it had long been for travelling traders on their way to the East.¹⁹⁴ Bouws, in his monograph on the history of music performances in the Cape, provides evidence that the first travelling opera companies had disembarked in the Cape in the first decade of the nineteenth century.¹⁹⁵ Their repertoire consisted of works by contemporary composers of the time, including Gioachino Rossini, Georges Bizet and Giuseppe Verdi, but most of the performed works were light operas, operettas and French *opéra comique*. The contemporary (nineteenth-century) repertoire that treated audiences in the Cape to opera eventually became a mainstay in the city. Although the dominance of nineteenth-century opera is not unique to South Africa, and today across the world operas from this era remain most often performed, it is interesting for particular reasons within the South African context.

Writing an historical account of opera activities in South Africa (as Roos also mentions in her dissertation) proves especially challenging as information is scattered in different sources, which often do not properly reference where “facts” are derived from.¹⁹⁶ Also, arranging those “facts” gathered from different sources into a narrative provides a further challenge, especially in terms of how the information is organised; whether chronologically,

¹⁹¹ The Arts Council in Namibia existed until 1989, when that country received its independence from South Africa.

¹⁹² Roos, 2010:46-49.

¹⁹³ Malan, J.P. (ed.). 1979-1986. “Opera societies in the Transvaal (before PACT)”. *South African Music Encyclopaedia*. Volume 4, p.311-314.

¹⁹⁴ Bouws, 1966:54.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*: 54.

¹⁹⁶ Roos, 2010:21.

thematically or otherwise. In this chapter, the above-mentioned three historical patterns are a means of contextualising the historical facts from an array of secondary sources, and of thematically arranging these facts to form a narrative history that serves to inform the reception history constructed in this research project.

I argue that these historical patterns are indicators of reception too, because the sources of this historiography are secondary and inherently an interpretation of the historical facts or, in the case of autobiographies and memoirs, reflections on history and experiences – much like other sources of reception. How opera in South Africa negotiated the ebbs and flows of socio-political changes reflects a reception of opera within that context. The ambitions toward professionalised opera reveal a favourable reception, as opera seemed to be regarded as an essential part of the city's culture, so much so that it was deemed necessary to establish a professional industry. Lastly, changes over time in the choice of repertoire reflect how audiences have received an opera and how opera companies and producers have reacted to this reception.

PART 1

Opera and its political enablers

The trajectory of opera production in South Africa has not been left untouched by politics. Under apartheid in South Africa, the official start of colonialism in this country with the settling of the Dutch East India Company in the Cape in 1652, was defined and celebrated as the “beginning of South Africa”. After clashes with the local pastoral inhabitants, the Dutch had taken control of the Cape.¹⁹⁷ The arrival of British settlers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries perpetuated the rule of colonialism, and until the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, European colonialism and the manifestations of empire shaped South African life.

Today colonialism is defined as the “exploitation by a colonizing power of a territory under its control either for its own benefit or the benefit of colonists settled in this territory”.¹⁹⁸ An unequal relationship existed between the coloniser – dominant in his position – and the indigenous people, who were a minority in terms of the little power they had. Laurent Fouchard furthermore defines this relationship as one of powerful self-legitimation in which the coloniser proclaims that his rule is in the best interest of the conquered. The conquerors were, however, the overwhelming beneficiaries from this power balance, while indigenous peoples often experienced the colonial “civilising mission” and the destruction of indigenous cultural practices across the African continent as one and the same thing. In this colonial encounter, the assumption of cultural superiority based on racial superiority was *de regueur* for the colonising Europeans.¹⁹⁹

Described in British historiography as a history of progress, colonialism generally involved assimilation, association and indirect rule between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1920s. The demise of colonialism came about when subjects became citizens and the

¹⁹⁷ Eades, L.M. 1999. *The end of apartheid in South Africa*. Greenwood Press, United States of America. p.4-5.

¹⁹⁸ Fouchard, L. 2011. “Colonialism”, in *International Encyclopaedia of Political Science*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE publications Inc. p.303-307.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*: 303-307.

cost of such a dispensation became too expensive for colonial budgets. It brought about rebellions, and in South Africa led to the South African War of 1899 between the British rulers and Boer subjects. With the rise of nationalism globally, European leaders cut formal political ties with most colonies. What is evident, is that colonialism profoundly shaped both the colonisers and the colonised, and its impact still plays out in the contemporary realities of former colonies.²⁰⁰

Although the rise of nationalism in Europe had started in the nineteenth century, it was only by the twentieth century that the doctrine became politically established in South Africa. The Great Trek of 1838 was partly a result of nationalist sentiments among white Boers, but it was the South African War, which ended in 1902, that incited a stronger Afrikaner nationalism. According to Michael Keating, a range of definitions of nationalism exists, but it can generally be described as a concept treating “nationhood as a claim made both as to the existence of a group and to a set of rights that pertain to nationality”.²⁰¹ A single and universally valid general theory of nationalism is problematic, but scholars define the notion with reference to particular nationalisms. Some of the most significant characteristics and viewpoints of nationalism include that it is created by an imagined collective, is essentially a form of politics; that nations are created and mobilised by elites who are usually the rulers, and aggressive nationalism seeks to dominate over other nations. Furthermore, nationalism has been associated with liberalism and democracy in the sense that identifies with liberation from foreign domination and conquest (in the case of Afrikaner nationalism this liberation was from British colonial rule; in the case of Africanist nationalism, the liberation was from Afrikaner apartheid rule). As a means of spreading the nationalist ambitions of states, the media has been instrumental in creating the idea of a shared identity.²⁰²

Joep Leerssen, in referring specifically to nationalism in Europe, postulates that all instances of nationalism are in fact cultural nationalism, and that one of the tenets thereof is the cultivation of a culture that can be “mapped as a specific array of concerns”, which include

²⁰⁰ Fourchard, 2011:303-307.

²⁰¹ Keating, M. 2011. “Nationalism”, in *International Encyclopaedia of Political Science*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc. p.1654-1658.

²⁰² *Ibid*: 1655.

the advancement of the rights to self-determination, cultural survival and self-expression.²⁰³ The state is therefore a means to an end in the process to establish nationhood.

According to Leerssen, cultural nationalism is expressed in a number of ways in which language is central, as it is “the essential soul of a nation’s identity and position in the world”.²⁰⁴ Language becomes the medium through which nationalism is expressed, be it in literature, historical writing, artefacts such as painting and sculpture, performances of theatre and music, or the rise of a school of composition. Also important are physical spaces that enable these expressions, like national theatres and concert halls for the performance of theatre and music, libraries to house literature, and galleries for artefacts. In order to build a sense of nationhood, nationalism is spread through clear propagandist proclamations.²⁰⁵

The National Party in South Africa implemented its oppressive policy of apartheid from the time they were voted into power in 1948, until 1994. As with most nationalisms arising after oppression, a new Africanist nationalism emerged after liberation from apartheid during the 1990s. Nelson Mandela’s release from prison in 1990 and the first democratic elections in 1994 ushered in a new period of nation-building. It was Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu who coined the term “rainbow nation” – a metaphor adopted by and associated with Mandela, and used to describe the new South Africa’s divergent cultures belonging to one nation. While the National Party government’s ideals of nationalism had been determined by “shared blood, culture and language”, the new Africanist nationalism aimed to change this connotation with nationhood.²⁰⁶ The new concept of the rainbow nation had to accommodate a variety of cultures, races and languages, and was “a form of citizenship freed of the baggage of the nation”.²⁰⁷

The rainbow nation became the new national identity and was perpetuated and instilled through the mass media, as is the case with many contemporary nationalisms. Martha

²⁰³ Leerssen, J. 2006. Nationalism and the cultivation of culture. *Nations and Nationalism*, 12(4):559-578.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*:569.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*: 570-571.

²⁰⁶ Evans, M. 2010. “Mandela and the televised birth of the rainbow nation”. *National Identities*, 12(3):309-326, September.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*: 309-326.

Evans's research shows that especially broadcast images of the rainbow nation (during the 1990s) had portrayed the new South Africa as a *fait accompli*, and not a work in progress. These images were used as symbols of the rainbow nation and simultaneously as symbols affirming the collapse of apartheid.²⁰⁸ Through the image of the rainbow nation, the definition of a new nation took shape, as well as the formation of what can be regarded as an Africanist nationalism.

The socio-political systems of colonialism, Afrikaner nationalism and an Africanist nationalism had, over the past two hundred years – for which historical documentation of opera exists – had a particular and specific impact on operatic expression and performance in the Cape. Although these political systems constitute a societal context in which opera resides, it had also enabled the art form's development as an intricately enmeshed ingredient of South African nationhood over time.

Colonialism – Conquering culture

During most of the twentieth century, South African history taught in schools regarded the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652 as the beginning of modern South Africa and the birth of Western civilisation at the barren southern tip of Africa. Rewritten South African history and the decolonisation of knowledge production have revealed different stories and made space for alternative histories, some of which are still being researched. But the remnants of colonialism remain deeply entrenched in South African society, and the introduction and development of Western art music in this country is undeniably rooted in colonialism. An oft repeated alibi for colonialism was the spread of Western European culture. Being mindful thereof, Dommissé's perspective on the rise of Western art forms in Africa and how it came to dominate South Africans' understanding of what art constitutes, proves valuable:

Our [European settlers] particular focus was ... dominated by those that had evolved through the centuries from their cultural and indeed political origins in ancient Greece. We brought the vicissitudes and manifold

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*: 309-326.

developments of that inheritance with us to our new fatherland, oblivious of the African culture that dated back to unrecorded origins in lost and forgotten civilisations.²⁰⁹

It is possible that, had the Cape not been a (temporary) destination for European traders, who later settled here, travelling theatre companies from Europe would not have arrived to perform there, and opera would have had little or no significance in South Africa. The arrival of Dutch and British settlers to the Cape over a period of two hundred years – from the 1600s to the 1800s – brought about the introduction of Western European music and musical instruments to the Cape. Over time, a tradition of concert performances had developed as musicians from Europe visited the Cape, with some settling and making it their new home.

It is a logical assumption that Western European music and musical instruments arrived at the Cape subsequent to the first explorers from that continent: Bartolomeu Dias in the latter half of the fifteenth century and Vasco Da Gama in the first half of the sixteenth century. However, no evidence of music activities at the Cape during that time exists. The earliest references of European music and musical instruments date from after the arrival of Van Riebeeck to the Cape – most probably because South African history until recently only focused on the period after Van Riebeeck's arrival. An account from Van Riebeeck's journal mentions a harpsichord played in October 1660.²¹⁰ The harpsichord and violin were also played during a visit of a certain captain Susoa to the fort at the Cape, and in later years, the violin seemed to have been popular in bars and dance halls.²¹¹

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, slaves at the Cape had played on Western instruments, like the violin, at weddings and celebratory events.²¹² Most of the slaves originated from Indonesia, India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and often provided musical entertainment, with some playing the harp and bass lute,²¹³ while reference is also made to

²⁰⁹ Dommissie, 2001:ix-x.

²¹⁰ Thom, H.B. (ed.). 1952. *Journal of Jan van Riebeeck, Volume 3*. C.K. Johnman & A. Ravenscroft (tr.). Cape Town and Amsterdam: A.A. Balkema, p.279.

²¹¹ Schoeman, K. 2010. *Kolonie aan die Kaap: Jan van Riebeeck en die vestiging van die eerste blankes, 1652-1662*. Stellenbosch: Protea Boekhuis, p.139 and p.245.

²¹² Schoeman, 2011:39.

²¹³ Schoeman, K. 2007. *Early slavery at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1717*. Stellenbosch: Protea Boekhuis, p.94.

“music which the slaves have learned to make very beautifully on all manner of instruments”.²¹⁴ Dancing slaves were accompanied by other slaves on instruments, such as the ghomma, drum, fiddle and indigenous instruments.²¹⁵

In the eighteenth century, slave orchestras – much like those in earlier years in the other Dutch East Indian colony of Batavia (now Jakarta) – existed at the Cape. The slaves played on Western instruments and they “presumably [produced] Western music of some kind”.²¹⁶ Karel Schoeman mentions that musical instruments were rarely recorded in inventories during the eighteenth century, but it had been documented that slave orchestras, an organist or “someone ... who could play the fiddle” performed at weddings and lavish parties, and also accompanied the dancing.²¹⁷ It would seem that by the late eighteenth century, music concerts had become a regular institution, as noted by Schoeman in a survey of the documented expenses of one Johanna Duminy (1757–1807): payments “for the concert” and “subscription for concert”.²¹⁸

Instruments like the harpsichord and violin, although then not common at the Cape, were listed in inventories among the contents of colonial households. Other musical instruments, however, were not common in Cape probate inventories, and if they did occur on an inventory list, it usually referred to instruments used in slave orchestras. Schoeman refers to several inventories of the homes of inhabitants of the Cape that contained a variety of instruments, which were probably used in slave orchestras. Among these are harpsichords, French horns, bassoons and violins.

Music and dancing constituted an important part of the lives of slaves and at their festivals held on Sundays or free days. Women slaves danced to entertain white women, something which seemed to have been surprising and pleasing to the Europeans, while slaves also gathered regularly to dance on what today is called Greenmarket Square in Cape Town’s city centre.²¹⁹ Slaves entertained visitors to the settlers at the Cape by playing the harp and bass

²¹⁴ *Ibid*: 230.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*: 237.

²¹⁶ Schoeman, K. 2012. *Portrait of a Slave Society: The Cape of Good Hope, 1717-1795*. Stellenbosch: Protea Boekhuis, p.458.

²¹⁷ Schoeman, 2011:39, 226, 307.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*: 508.

²¹⁹ Schoeman, 2012:458-469, 379, 579, 530-533.

lute, for which they were praised by listeners.²²⁰ Playing on a variety of instruments, slaves also provided music for weddings at the Cape.²²¹ Among the instruments were a *raveking* (*ramkie*), and slaves could play the fiddle, as well as local “Hottentot instruments”.²²²

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, Cape Town was known as “Little Paris”, because of the luxurious lifestyle lived by the European inhabitants as exemplified by music, dancing, lavish weddings and parties. Schoeman notes that visitors to the Cape were astonished by the “luxury, ostentation and superficiality” they encountered. Visitors noted the grand houses, furniture, table silver and carriages of the locals, as well as the clothing of the slaves. The city had aristocratic inhabitants, and references were made to the “unnecessary” eight horses (instead of the customary six) to a carriage. Lavish weddings were held, as well as “celebrations with dancing to music provided by slave orchestras, and christenings and funerals followed by lavish meals”. Heavy smoking and drinking was also the order of the day.²²³

Economically, the Cape Colony was thriving in the eighteenth century. Stan du Plessis *et al* note that during that time, officials of the Dutch East India Company in the Cape earned almost as much as people in similar positions in Europe – in fact, those in the Cape were “catching up” with their more affluent peers in Europe. In their findings, Du Plessis *et al* suggest that because these officials had a high standard of living, the opportunity to achieve a higher standard of living was spread to the entire population, both those in the employment of the Dutch East India Company, as well as the free burgers.²²⁴

The economic prosperity in the Cape ensured a lifestyle where musical and theatrical entertainment would be viable, as the inhabitants had disposable income for such entertainment. Whereas in earlier years such entertainment would only have been practiced in a domestic setting, the possibility for staged entertainment seemed a reality by the eighteenth century. Carina Venter notes that due to its colonial ties, it is to be expected

²²⁰ Schoeman, 2007:94.

²²¹ *Ibid*: 230.

²²² *Ibid*: 236-237.

²²³ Schoeman, 2011:39.

²²⁴ Du Plessis, S & Du Plessis, S. 2012. “Happy in the service of the Company: the purchasing power of VOC salaries in the Cape in the 18th century”. *Economic History of Developing Regions*, 27(1):125-149.

that South African art production in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would have similarities with art production during the European enlightenment and Romantic period.²²⁵ With Cape inhabitants being in a similar economic position as Europeans, this seems plausible.

By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, theatre and music societies had been established in the Cape and these ensured that public concerts became an institution in the city.²²⁶ At the turn of the nineteenth century, opera had already been performed in South Africa by travelling companies.²²⁷ Bouws, in his chapter on opera and ballet in the first decade of the nineteenth century, writes that the opening of the Afrikaanse Skouburg (African Theatre) at Boereplein in October 1801 ushered in a new era for the performance of these art forms. The public seemed to have developed a taste not only for instrumental music, but particularly for small light operas and ballets.²²⁸

In the first half of the nineteenth century, however, no regular performances of operas were held.²²⁹ The first artists to visit the Cape around 1803 to 1806 were French opera companies who were on their way to Mauritius. According to Stead, mostly *opéras-comiques* were performed in the original French, as had been the fashion then, and these French companies had introduced new French operas to Cape audiences. From the 1830s onwards, the performing arts flourished in the Cape.²³⁰ However, the last French company to visit the Cape was in 1833.²³¹

Not many British artists came to the Cape during the first fifty years of British rule (until around 1856), but thereafter an increasing number of travelling companies from England performed in the Cape.²³² These theatre companies mostly performed comic operas and theatre works in English and French. Most of the pieces were written by contemporary composers of the time, some of whom visited the Cape, while other operas and theatre

²²⁵ Venter, 2011.

²²⁶ Stead, 1963:8.

²²⁷ Bouws, 1966:129-134.

²²⁸ Stead, 1963:9.

²²⁹ Roos, 2010:30.

²³⁰ Stead, 1963:10.

²³¹ Malan, 1979-1986:350.

²³² *Ibid*: 348.

works included music borrowed from well-known works.²³³ The British military music corps gave regular performances in the Company Gardens and elsewhere, and often included contemporary opera music, like that of Verdi, whose music had by then become popular across Europe.

By the late nineteenth century, several professional touring companies brought their productions from Europe to South Africa. These companies visited cities and towns across South Africa, often traveling from the Cape or Port Elizabeth and making their way north to the interior of the country. These companies, who had a reputation of having staged professional productions, stayed for as long as they could attract audiences, and then moved on to the next town or city.²³⁴

In 1876, the Calli Opera Company from London visited Cape Town and performed Italian operas, including works by Mozart, Verdi, Gounod and Donizetti. They were accompanied not by an orchestra, but by a hybrid instrument (a combination between a piano and a harmonium). Signor Calli was the company's director, and they later had their own theatre in Cape Town, called the Exhibition Theatre, which was made of zinc. Their performances were met with much excitement.²³⁵ Another British group, the Wheeler Company under the direction of Frank Wheeler, by then well known in the arts industry, toured between Cape Town and the north of the country around 1885. Their reputation was mostly built on the performance of theatre works, but the company's repertoire included more operettas than operas.

In 1887, Luscombe Searelle arrived in the Cape with a full opera company. This seemed to have ushered in a new era not only for opera in the Cape, but also in the rest of the country, because Searelle travelled to the former provinces of Natal and Transvaal, as well as the then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Cape Town audiences were by then quite familiar with serious opera, but Searelle injected new life into the industry. The company consisted of 33 members, including an orchestra of twelve players. Starting on 13 June 1887, Searelle's company performed his own opera works, as well as works by composers ranging from

²³³ Roos, 2010:35-38.

²³⁴ Malan, 1979-1986:360.

²³⁵ Stead, 1963:10.

Verdi to Sullivan, until December of that year. In total, the company gave 162 performances.²³⁶ From Cape Town they travelled to, among others, Kimberley, East London and Durban.²³⁷ Searelle produced at least twenty different operas in less than a year.²³⁸ At the time of his death in 1907, he was described as “the greatest and most remarkable personality ever connected with the theatre in South Africa”.²³⁹

With the building of a new theatre in Cape Town in 1893 – which became known as the Opera House – more and bigger stage productions were possible. This led to an influx of touring companies to the Cape, and tours across the country. The Arthur Ronsbey Opera Company visited Cape Town in 1899, performing apparently for the first time in the city an opera by Wagner. In 1903, the D’Oyly Carte Company came to perform at the Opera House in Cape Town. And the next year, the Royal Australian Opera Company came, followed soon by the Italian Opera Company. Between 1911 and 1913, the Quinlan Opera Company from the United Kingdom toured in South Africa. Led by a dynamic and idealistic Irishman, Thomas Quinlan, the company consisted of about 160 artists, of which many singers had performed in the Metropolitan Opera in New York, the Berlin Opera in Germany and La Scala in Milan. The company included 45 instrumentalists and three conductors. Although local opera production had already begun by the middle of the nineteenth century (with Weber’s *Der Freischütz* in 1831), it was mostly touring companies who had performed operas in South Africa until the early years of the twentieth century (around 1912).²⁴⁰

Over more than 200 years, Western art music gradually became part of the culture of not only the white inhabitants of the Cape but also the slaves and working class black and coloured population (although they would not be able to practice the performing arts formally until deep into the twentieth century). While colonial rule initially enabled amateur travelling theatre companies to visit the Cape and with time stage professional opera productions, the regularity and nature of opera performances in the Cape would soon change as sentiments towards the colonial rulers changed at the start of the twentieth

²³⁶ Malan, 1979-1986:362.

²³⁷ Stead, 1963:11.

²³⁸ Malan, 1979-1986:363.

²³⁹ Stead, 1963:13.

²⁴⁰ Roos, 2010: 38.

century. This ushered in a period of the indigenisation and appropriation of opera for narrow political gains in a society that became ever more racially divided.

Afrikaner nationalism – Engineering nationhood

White Afrikaner nationalistic ideals and the Afrikaners' pursuit of liberation from colonialism and British imperialism informed the South African War, which raged between 1899 and 1902. The Afrikaners' defeat in that war only served to fuel their nationalistic fervour. The experiences, reactions and representations of the war gave rise to two currents of South African whiteness: Afrikaner nationalism and a broad white South Africanism. The establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910 cemented the idea of white supremacy, as it was a period to rebuild the country after the South African War and re-establish white colonial hegemony.²⁴¹

Who exactly the Afrikaner was, was problematic: from 1910 to around the 1930s the term sometimes referred to white Afrikaans-speakers of the Reformed faith, sometimes inclusively to mean all South Africans who believed that Dutch as a language had a place in South Africa, and in the Cape it often included coloured people.²⁴² But it soon became apparent that only white speakers of Afrikaans would be part of this new nationhood. At that time it seemed improbable that the Afrikaners could become the ruling class, as they had been mostly a rural people. But by the First World War in 1914, and with the hostility against this war by segments of South African society, Afrikaner nationalism had become a political force.²⁴³

According to Mariana Kriel, movements of nationalism are usually in opposition to the status quo – in the case of the Afrikaners, in opposition to the British imperialists – and language and culture become sites of political conflict if their institutionalisation is demanded. This is because the language and culture of the current rulers are to be replaced

²⁴¹ Bonner, P. 2012. South African Society and Culture, in R. Ross, A.K. Mager & B. Nasson (eds). *The Cambridge history of South Africa, Volume 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.254-271.

²⁴² Giliomee, H. 2004. *Die Afrikaners – 'n Biografie*. Cape Town: NB Publishers, p.307.

²⁴³ Bonner, P. 2012: 254-271.

by that of the aspiring rulers (English replaced by Afrikaans). While language and culture may well be primary means of expressing nationalism, territory and citizenship also play a pivotal delineating role. Furthermore, nationalism finds expression in institutional infrastructure such as universities, libraries, archives, museums and cultural agencies.²⁴⁴

In the case of South Africa, Afrikaner nationalism manifested politically in apartheid after the National Party's election to government in 1948. According to Deborah Posel, this system of institutionalised racism and racial social engineering was never fully implemented because of some resistance towards it. Fundamentally, its aim, writes Posel, was "the preservation of white racial political supremacy as an essential requisite for perpetuating the supposed superiority of white civilisation". Black and coloured people only played a role as the working class, which kept the white population in its position of superiority. "Ethnic nationalism" therefore served the goals of Afrikaner nationalism in advancing the ideals of a "volk" (nation) that had been delivered from the oppression of the British. Sheltered employment were given to white Afrikaners, special separation existed between different races, and to ensure the racial purity of whites, the Immorality Act of 1927 (amended in 1957) was promulgated in order to forbid marriages between people of different races.²⁴⁵

Afrikaner Nationalism had many institutional manifestations, such as the Afrikaner-Broederbond (Afrikaner brotherhood), the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners (the Fellowship of Real Afrikaners), and the Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuurvereniging (Afrikaans language and cultural organisations, ATKV). Branch meetings of such organisations would often be accompanied by lectures on, for instance, the influence of language on the national character. Afrikaner news publications were started, like *Die Afrikaanse Patriot* and *Die Burger*. According to Kriel the rationale for this was that publications in Afrikaans would better promote the language and culture than would rules for spelling and grammar. To promote and provide a sense of national identity was key and, as Kriel puts it, for the Afrikaner, language was a primary symbol of national identity.²⁴⁶ For Dr DF Malan, an

²⁴⁴ Kriel, M. 2010. "Culture and power: The rise of Afrikaner nationalism revisited". *Nations and Nationalism*, 16(3):402-422, July 2010.

²⁴⁵ Posel, D. 2012. The Apartheid Project, 1948 – 1970, in R. Ross, A.K. Mager & B. Nasson (eds). *The Cambridge history of South Africa, Volume 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.319-332.

²⁴⁶ Kriel, 2010:408.

important leader in the spread of Afrikaner nationalism and later the first National Party prime minister (1948–1954), language, and specifically Afrikaans, was the key to the survival of the Afrikaner nation, and the promotion of Afrikaans was not about language per se, but about the *volk*. He considered nationalism as a growing organism, with language as the glue (holding the nation together).²⁴⁷ With the National Party in government, Afrikaans became the language of communication in state departments, municipalities and school boards. Afrikaners were advised to choose Afrikaans-speaking doctors, dentists or lawyers, and to increase the use of Afrikaans in the economy by demanding invoices and advertisements in Afrikaans – thereby institutionalising the language. The Afrikaner nationalist movement therefore was one of “language and cultural organisations”, one being the Federasie van Afrikaner-kultuurorganisasies (the Federation of Afrikaner cultural organisations, FAK).²⁴⁸

During the 1920s, an influx of Afrikaners to the cities changed the social profile of the Afrikaner community from one who had previously been rural, to an urban community. Arts, culture and literature increasingly became channels for the promotion of Afrikaner nationalism, and associations and committees were formed to promote this cultural programme in service of politics. In Afrikaans literature, the nostalgia for the farm became prevalent in what is called the “plaasroman” (farm novel). Poetry about “fatherland” and “mother tongue” was prevalent.²⁴⁹ A group of Afrikaans poets of the 1930s, like NP Van Wyk Louw, Uys Krige and Elisabeth Eybers, called the “Dertigers” (literally, “Those of Thirty”), were instrumental in creating poetry for the fledgling Afrikaans language, which was recognised as an official language by the government in 1925. Meanwhile, Afrikaans theatre was also linked to the struggle of establishing and promoting Afrikaans as language through themes of patriotism and history.²⁵⁰

Literature prescribed for school children from 1941 to 1971 was written to create an “imagined community”, a middle-class lifestyle Afrikaners had to aspire to. The Keurboslaan series, for instance, portrayed Afrikaners as elite, urbanised people who had professional

²⁴⁷ Koorts, L. 2014. *DF Malan en die opkoms van Afrikaner-nasionalism*. Cape Town: Tafelberg Publishers, pp.60, 74, 84.

²⁴⁸ Kriel, 2010:411.

²⁴⁹ Bonner, 2012:306-307.

²⁵⁰ Raditlhalo, T. 2012. Modernity, Culture, and Nation, in R. Ross, A.K. Mager & B. Nasson (eds). *The Cambridge history of South Africa, Volume 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.578-579.

careers and international networks, which at the time of its publication constituted not a realistic but rather an aspirational view of the Afrikaner. With the birth of popular fiction in Afrikaans during the 1930s and 1940s themes of poverty and the position of poor whites were explored, as was the sentiment that they were marginalised but had aspirations. However, often depictions of poor Afrikaners were frowned upon as it hurt national pride.²⁵¹ The 1960s saw a new generation of writers called the “Sestigers” (“Those of Sixty”), consisting of writers like Jan Rabie, Breyten Breytenbach, Ingrid Jonker and André P Brink, who went against the established literary and political grain in their poetry and fiction.²⁵²

Cementing its influence on the performing arts, the National Party established four provincial arts councils (each with an orchestra, opera, ballet and theatre company), built theatres, and in this way endeavoured to make theatregoing a part of the Afrikaner identity and lifestyle.²⁵³ By the 1950s, when these plans were being implemented, many Afrikaners had moved to the cities and saw these developments as important to establish their own arts spaces in which to develop a performance tradition. For the first time in South African history, performing arts formally received full state funding, that is to say: “white, European-orientated theatre companies, as obviously only they could apply for and negotiate state funding”.²⁵⁴ However, it enabled theatre companies to tour across the country with performances. While black and coloured performing arts organisations had existed before the creation of the arts councils, they did not receive funding, except for the Eoan Group of Cape Town, which received a minimal subsidy. The absurdity of apartheid performing arts policy is evident in the career of ballet dancer David Poole, who was coloured but whose race had officially been changed to “white”.²⁵⁵ For the 1960 Union Festival in Bloemfontein, an official government instruction was given that his birth certificate, which stated that he was coloured, be destroyed so that no evidence existed that a non-white person was appointed artistic director of CAPAB Ballet.²⁵⁶

²⁵¹ Du Plessis, I. 2010. “Afrikaner nationalism, print culture and the ‘capacity to aspire’: The imaginative powers of popular fiction for young readers”. *African Identities*, 8(1):3-20.

²⁵² Raditlhalo, 2012:590-592.

²⁵³ *Ibid*: 589.

²⁵⁴ Dommissie, 2008:8.

²⁵⁵ During the apartheid years, it was possible for light-skinned coloured people to “try for white” by applying to have their race officially changed from “coloured” to “white”.

²⁵⁶ Dommissie, 2001:8, 13, 258.

While Afrikaans arts flourished and championed Afrikaner nationalism in an attempt to rid the arts of English imperialism, arts in other sectors of society were active but marginalised. In black African communities there had been theatre productions staged by 1904, and male choirs and gumboot dancers were popular forms of entertainment. The Bantu Dramatic Society was established in June 1932, and performed mostly European plays, but encouraged the creation of “African dramatic and operatic art”.²⁵⁷ Black performance arts during the 1970s was what Raditlhalo calls “African exoticism”, as it was aimed only at titillating Eurocentric minds. In this period, alternative (or protest) theatre developed in specific spaces, with the Market Theatre in Johannesburg and the Space Theatre in Cape Town featuring works by Mbongeni Ngema, Percy Mtwa, Barney Simon, Athol Fugard and Pieter-Dirk Uys.²⁵⁸

For the apartheid government, opera was “symbolic capital” that created a link between South African and European culture, and was viewed as being better than any indigenous or local art production. Opera was therefore well funded.²⁵⁹ A body of scholarly work exists on opera and the expression of nationalism through opera, with some of the most notable examples being the *risorgimento* operas of Verdi in Italy, Borodin and Mussorgsky’s historical operas in Russia, the English operas of Purcell and Britten, or Wagner’s epic operas and their significance in portraying a German cultural identity. While opera has been used as an artistic expression of nationalism, existing operas have also been appropriated to further nationalist aims; the Nazi regime’s use of Wagner’s operas as a portrayal of “Germaness” is a prime example.²⁶⁰ Much like these expressions of nationalism, Afrikaner nationalism also found expression in opera, particularly through the composition of new works and the translation of the libretti of standard repertoire into Afrikaans.

²⁵⁷ Raditlhalo, 2012:578-579.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*: 590-592.

²⁵⁹ Roos, 2010:192.

²⁶⁰ See in this regard: Hussey, D. 1926. “Nationalism and Opera”, *Music & Letters*, 7(1):3-16, January 1926. Newman, E. 1914. “Russian Opera and Russian Nationalism”. *The Musical Times*, 55(858):505-508, August 1914. Körner, A. 2012. “Opera and nation in nineteenth-century Italy: Conceptual and methodological approaches”. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 17(4):393-399. Grey, T.S. 2002. Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger* as National Opera (1868–1945), in C. Applegate & P. Potter (eds.), *Music & German national identity*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p.78-104. Calico, J.H. 2002. ‘Für einde neue deutsche Nationaloper’: Opera in the discourses of unification and legitimation in the German Democratic Republic, in C. Applegate & P. Potter, *Music & German national identity*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p.78-104.

A significant contribution to the composition and development of Afrikaans opera was *In die droogte* (*In the drought*, Op.17) by John Joubert (born 1927) in 1955. This chamber opera is billed as the first South African opera with a libretto originally in English but translated into Afrikaans by conductor Anton Hartman for the 1958 staging by the Opera Society of South Africa. The significance of this performance was the fact that Joubert was born in South Africa and of Dutch descent (he moved to England in the 1940s), the characters were typically white Afrikaans people, and all the performers were South African.²⁶¹ Also, *mise en scène* is a farm at the end of the nineteenth century. Hartman instigated the composition of the opera, and he was instrumental in advancing the work of South African composers through the Opera Society of South Africa, especially the presentation of opera in Afrikaans.²⁶²

The case of Cromwell Everson (1925–1991) best illustrates Afrikaner nationalism's impact on South African opera composition. Everson's *Klutaimnestra* (1967), the "first full-length Afrikaans opera in South Africa", conveyed Afrikaner sentiments of oppression by the British. Everson believed it would benefit his career as a composer and prove himself a full-blooded Afrikaner if he composed this opera. *Klutaimnestra* has three central themes or characteristics: first, it portrays women and children in concentration camps; second, the oppression of a powerful nation; and third, the oppressed nation's rise to power. This is a clear attempt at portraying the Afrikaner's history of being involved in the South African War, their incarceration by the British in concentration camps, and the rise of the National Party. His choice of an Afrikaans libretto was an attempt to "uplift" Afrikaans to a language equal to that of Western European languages used in opera. As Brukman puts it, this strategy ensured that Afrikaans was "a worthy medium of expression". In his music, Everson also used musical references familiar to Afrikaners, which made the audience more appreciative of his work.²⁶³

Afrikaans composers could receive government subsidies and support, but this depended on their "continued validation" of Western culture as being elite and "white" music being high

²⁶¹ Kapp, 2008:17.

²⁶² Dommissie, 2001:71.

²⁶³ Brukman, 2012:18.

culture.²⁶⁴ According to Venter, current historiography confirms that there was reciprocal support between the apartheid state and white composers who “sounded” the greatness of the political system and in return received unlimited financial and institutional support. Venter argues that, in retrospect, there seems to be an inconsistency between the real musical achievements of the Afrikaner culture and the imagined cultural sophistication of Afrikaners.²⁶⁵

The translation of opera libretti further strengthened the historical and cultural links Afrikaner cultural planners wanted to retain with Europe, in their view the pinnacle of sophistication, intellectualism and art. Opera in their own language allowed them to “stake claims to a discrete high culture”, which would eventually indigenise opera.²⁶⁶ According to Roos the translation of opera into Afrikaans had overt political aims to make opera relevant to Afrikaans speakers.²⁶⁷ While the argument was that it would make opera accessible to the general public – this also pertained to translation of libretti into English – it can be seen as a means of promoting Afrikaner nationalism because the public implied was always only the minority white population.²⁶⁸ In this sense, language was again employed to support the aims of Afrikaner nationalism.

The movement in favour of translating standard repertoire operas into Afrikaans started in the 1940s. Sources differ on which opera was the first to be translated and performed in Afrikaans. According to Roos the first opera to be performed in Afrikaans was Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana*, translated by Con de Villiers and performed in Stellenbosch in 1940.²⁶⁹ Dommissie, however, claims the first opera in Afrikaans was in 1946: Bizet’s *Carmen* as translated by Gideon Roos, who also translated Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* two years later. The Afrikaner cultural establishment saw the translation of these two operas into Afrikaans, and their successful performances, as a conquest of opera.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁴ Pooley, T.M. 2011. “ ‘Never the twain shall meet’: Africanist art music and the end of apartheid”. *SAMUS* 30/31:45-69, 2011.

²⁶⁵ Venter, 2001:514-523.

²⁶⁶ See in this regard: Muller, 2000. Stimie, 2010. Venter, 2001.

²⁶⁷ Roos, 2010:228.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*: 49

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*: 49

²⁷⁰ Dommissie, 2001:26.

The Opera Society of South Africa, started in 1956, wanted “to strive for the development of opera and related art forms, especially in Afrikaans”, aiming to popularise opera among white Afrikaans-speakers. Operas were performed in the original language, as well as in Afrikaans. In this way, the Opera Society aimed to establish an “own opera art form” and give local singers opportunities to perform. At the time, there had been great interest from the Afrikaans public in performances in Afrikaans.²⁷¹ The Opera Society committed to producing at least one opera in Afrikaans each year. Among the translated works were Puccini’s *La bohème* and *Madama Butterfly*, Mozart’s *Così fan tutti* and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and Smetana’s *The bartered bride*.

The South African Opera Federation, established in 1958, performed several operas in Afrikaans translation, notably *Die Fledermaus* by Strauss, *La bohème* by Puccini, *Die Zauberflöte* by Mozart, *Les contes d'Hoffmann* by Offenbach, as well as Afrikaans operas like *In die droogte*. Also, the Pretoria Opera Group performed opera alternatively in Afrikaans and English translation.²⁷²

Even the UCT Opera Company at the English-language University of Cape Town performed operas in Afrikaans, and Afrikaans operas were composed for this company. This shows the power of Afrikaner nationalism, and that the company probably performed Afrikaans operas either under political pressure or to gain political favour. In 1952, the UCT Opera Company staged Albert Coates’s opera *Tafelberg se kleet* (*Table Mountain’s cloth*, performed in Afrikaans translation) in the Cape Town City Hall. Two more Afrikaans operas were written for this company, Cromwell Everson’s *Klutaimestra* and the operetta *Die noodsein* (The distress signal) by Péter-Louis van Dijk. Later the company staged Xander Haagen’s Afrikaans operetta *Lentelief* (Spring love) in the Labia Theatre in Cape Town. In 1963, UCT performed Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale* in Afrikaans, translated by Albie Louw, and at the Union Festival in Bloemfontein in 1960 they presented a performance of Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* in Afrikaans.

²⁷¹ Kapp, 2008:18.

²⁷² Malan, 1979-1986:313.

While the composition of Afrikaans opera and translation of opera into Afrikaans supported (even if indirectly) the nationalistic agenda, the Afrikaans media spread the idea of the Afrikaner's conquering of Western art music in general and opera specifically. *Die Burger* in Cape Town regularly published articles on performances written by the composer Hubert du Plessis and cultural activists Charles Wiech and Frits Stegmann. Since its establishment in 1937, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) had also expended considerable effort into broadcasting live performances of operas across the country.²⁷³ Research into the music journalism of two Afrikaner publications, *Die Brandwag* (1910–1921) and later *Die Nuwe Brandwag* (1929–1933), has shown that there had been a “constructed nationalism” in their reportage that used a European point of departure to develop Afrikaners' national identity.²⁷⁴ The relationship between Afrikaner nationalism and the arts was a constant theme, while Europe was consistently used as a model on which to base South Africa's music tradition, which had to be aligned with European standards in order to elevate Afrikaners' level of civilisation. While Afrikaner arts production had to be local, it simultaneously had to be aligned to international contexts.

The deliberate process of nationalism resulted in the collateral result of the indigenisation of Western European art forms. It is clear that Afrikaner nationalism's strong grip on cultural production from 1948 until the 1990s had a significant impact not only on the trajectory of the performance history and indigenisation of Western European opera in South Africa, but also on the creation of new works that portrayed the cultural milieu of a specific era in the country's political history. Dommissie comments:

In 1960, we, the dominant white rulers of the country, were empowered by the government to make the rich, European cultural fruits garnered by our forefathers available to our people in our new land. That was our main target, and we revelled in it for close on four decades, taking little note of the cultural needs of the indigenous people before those far-off rumblings

²⁷³ Kapp, 2008:16.

²⁷⁴ Stiemie, 2010:107.

became a physical force that was to change the nature of our social life and cultural institutions forever.²⁷⁵

Among those far-off rumblings were the voices of singers from townships across South Africa who changed the nature of opera in this country. After the fall of apartheid and the loss of the Afrikaner's hegemonic political and economic power during the 1990s, Afrikaner nationalism made way for a new political dispensation in search of a new national identity.

Africanist nationalism – Building the rainbow nation

Wednesday, 27 April 1994 is deeply etched into the memories of South Africans and engraved in the country's contemporary history as the dawn of democracy. It was the first Election Day in a democratic South Africa in which black people could exercise their voting right. After the volatile 1980s, during which the country was in a state of emergency amid violent protest action against apartheid, former president FW de Klerk announced on 2 February 1990 the unbanning of a number of political parties, including the ANC, as well as the release of Nelson Mandela. In the years that followed, still under the National Party government, political parties across a wide spectrum negotiated over a new political dispensation, and by April 1993, the ANC had demanded that a date for the first democratic election should be set. The ANC was voted into government in 1994, and Nelson Mandela became the first black South African president.²⁷⁶ Inevitably, these political changes would see major transformations in South African society and consequently the building of a new nationhood.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu coined the term "rainbow nation", which became a metaphor for the new South Africa consisting of different cultures but still being one nation. The idea of a nationhood determined by "shared blood, culture and language", the prevailing ideology under the National Party government, made way for the new rainbow nation accommodating a variety of cultures, races and languages, and was "a form of

²⁷⁵ Dommisse, 2001:ix-x.

²⁷⁶ Eades, 1999:28-29.

citizenship freed of the baggage of the nation”.²⁷⁷ The rainbow nation became the new national identity, perpetuated and instilled via the mass media. In her research, Evans found that especially broadcast images of the rainbow nation had portrayed the new South Africa as a *fait accompli*, and not a work in progress. Images of Mandela’s release from prison in 1990, the inauguration of the “miracle nation’s” new president, and the 1995 Rugby World Cup held in South Africa and won by the “rainbow warriors”, the Springbok rugby team, for example, were showcased as symbols of the collapse of apartheid and the early successes of the new South Africa.²⁷⁸ This new nationhood introduced a new Africanist nationalism in which different races were to unite as one, embracing their shared heritage and celebrating everyone’s connection to the African continent.

Much like its predecessor, Afrikaner nationalism, the new Africanist nationalism began making its mark on all art music production in the country soon after 1994.²⁷⁹ According to Pooley there had been a crisis in South African composition in the years leading up to 1994, and “Africanist” art music became a means to negotiate this crisis. This, he argues, ensured that white composers were still in favour with the outgoing apartheid state, but were ready for the new nationalism that was to follow 1994. These composers did not challenge the apartheid system because it was not in their interest.²⁸⁰ Music by Afrikaner composers like Stefans Grové, Arnold van Wyk and Hubert du Plessis was perceived as the pinnacle of European modernity, something the apartheid state had aspired to.²⁸¹ Pooley quotes Hubert du Plessis as saying (in 1986) that incorporating African music in Western art music would not work as the result would be a hybrid, “interesting at best, but without grandeur”. White composers had little knowledge of African traditional musical styles, and a huge gap between Western and African music existed up until the 1990s. Muller argues that even the existence of a distinction between Western and African music is a construct of the country’s political history of colonialism and apartheid. According to him, this distinction is not based on musical works, but is essentially a political construct.²⁸²

²⁷⁷ Evans, 2010:309.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*: 311-323.

²⁷⁹ Roos, 2010:225.

²⁸⁰ Pooley, 2011:45-69.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*: 56.

²⁸² Muller, 2000:27.

In the 1990s, there had been a decline in the support from Western art music's white constituents as the political landscape of South Africa changed. It began a move towards an Africanist style in music, which Muller sees as the result of Western art music's dependence on political credibility.²⁸³ As discussed earlier, it is evident that Western art music and certain local composers flourished under Afrikaner nationalism. With the advent of democracy in 1994, the production and survival of Western art music was again in political hands.

While, according to Pooley, the attitude of white composers changed along with the political transformations in South Africa in the early 1990s, Africanist music had still been directed at predominantly white audiences rather than the racially mixed audience of the rainbow nation. Because of its dependence on political credibility, composers of Western art music sought new audiences, and started "flaunting" references to reconciliation, democracy and "rainbow people" – what Pooley calls the rise of a new Africanism in music composition.²⁸⁴ The inclusion of African elements in the music was, on the one hand, an opportunistic effort; on the other, it seemed logical that with the socio-political changes in the country, those changes in composition would naturally follow suit. But what was clear was the expectation that composers who made use of these African elements were going to progress in the new democracy and gain, or retain, their status under the new political dispensation.²⁸⁵ As an example, Pooley refers to Kevin Volans, who brought material and techniques of African music into his compositions for Western instruments before it had been politically expedient to do so, while some other composers only started doing this when it had become clear that apartheid's days were numbered.

Although ballet, opera and classical music had long been seen as elitist, "white" arts and remnants of a colonial period, it was perceived to be even more so shortly after democratisation in 1994. Especially opera came under fire when the then Minister of Arts, Culture and Science and Technology, Dr Ben Ngubane, disbanded the arts councils in June 2000. The transformation of the arts sector from a European colonial one to an African one

²⁸³ *Ibid*: 29.

²⁸⁴ Pooley, 2011:61.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*: 66.

– although such a distinction seems vague – was a government priority, and according to Ngubane this transformation was particularly slow in “Eurocentric art forms” such as ballet, dance, opera and classical music.²⁸⁶ Within a decade, opera in South African, and its related perceptions, would take a dramatic about-turn. In a 1998 speech, former president Thabo Mbeki explained his concept of the “African Renaissance” by using opera prominently as “creative articulations of [his] politics of rebirth”.²⁸⁷ In 2004, George Mxadana, deputy chairperson of the National Arts and Culture Trust, was quoted as saying, “African voices are big and boisterous and suit the pomp of opera. If you go to the rural areas, the choirs perform opera excerpts that are second to none. In ten years, this country has grown leaps and bounds; [we are] finding talent we did not know we had”.²⁸⁸

When the Isango Ensemble presented its localised version of Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*, as *Impempe Yomlingo*, in 2007 a former Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, at the time a patron of Isango, opined that opera was a means of attaining social change and transformation in South Africa.²⁸⁹ At the premiere of Bongani Ndodana-Breen’s *Winnie, the Opera* in 2011, the subject of that work, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (an ANC stalwart), in her speech said that opera has become a means of transformation in the new South Africa.²⁹⁰

Already during the early 1990s, Angelo Gobbato, head of opera at CAPAB, went into townships across South Africa and auditioned singers for CAPAB’s Choral Training Programme, in which specifically young black voices would be trained while they had the opportunity to sing in the opera chorus in productions. Gobbato explains in his personal account of the history of opera in Cape Town, that because there had suddenly been a large number of black singers at CAPAB, it became “a pressing issue” that suitable repertoire was explored for these singers and that the adaptation of standard repertoire to suit an African milieu became imperative. Operatic casts, he said, went from being 98% white to 98%

²⁸⁶ Dommissie, 2001:296.

²⁸⁷ Davies, S.B. & Davies J. 2012. “‘So Take This Magic Flute and Blow. It will protect us as we go’: Impempe Yomlingo (2007–11) and South Africa’s Ongoing Transition”. *The Opera Quarterly* 28(1-2), p.56-59.

²⁸⁸ Gurney, K. 2004. “Sing the Classics; Blacks discover opera in post-apartheid South African”. *Newsweek International*. 17 May 2004.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.60.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.58.

black.²⁹¹ By 2000, 85% of all singers employed in opera houses in South Africa were black singers.²⁹²

Although there had been a dramatic change in the racial profile of opera casts in Cape Town, Gobbato holds that the choice of repertoire remained based on the quality of the available voices and their ability to sing and interpret the roles and operas. The standard repertoire of Verdi, Mozart and Puccini, for instance, remained in the company's repertoire, but it was now possible to stage operas such as Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, which requires a full cast of black singers. The possibilities for new repertoire therefore expanded.²⁹³

Blackness on the opera stage and its association with political changes and changes in the composition and presentation of Western art music is not unique to South Africa. In America, after the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation, it became fashionable for black and white composers to write operas with African American characters. Opera, as with other forms of art, came to represent and provide a mirror image of the world. However, as Naomi André *et al* remind us, blackness on the opera stage remains an alternative to white and European or both.^{294 295}

Although, on the surface, blackness on the South African opera stage represents a sudden change in the perception of operatic music among the black population, opera and Western art music had not been totally foreign to township life. According to Mugovhani, the foundations of choral music in indigenous African cultural groups had been laid between 1850 and 1930. The music of well-known composers Tiyo Soga (1829–1871), John Knox Bokwe (1855–1922) and Enoch Sontonga (1873–1905) were based on Western-style hymnody with African folk elements intertwined.²⁹⁶ Soprano Pauline Malefane is quoted as saying the black choral tradition in South Africa, with its many associated competitions, had “taught black singers opera and has given them a sense of identity ... opera is what we do

²⁹¹ Gobbato, 2011.

²⁹² Roos, 2010:204.

²⁹³ Coetzee-Klingler, C. 2012. “Living and breathing opera with Angelo Gobbato”. Available: www.classicsa.co.za. [accessed on 19 November 2012].

²⁹⁴ André, N, Bryan, K & Saylor, E. 2012. *Blackness in opera*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, p.6-7.

²⁹⁵ In this regard, also see: André, N. 2018. *Black Opera. History Power, Engagement*. University of Illinois Press.

²⁹⁶ Mugovhani, N.G. 2010. “The role of indigenous African choral music in the search for identity: With special reference to Mzilikazi Khumalo's music”. *Muziki: Journal of Music Research in Africa*, 7(1):60-75.

anyway".²⁹⁷ In another article, she continues, "Opera is known to be foreign to us [black people], but I don't look at it that way because we're doing it now".²⁹⁸ Her husband, British director Mark Dornford-May, also points out that South Africa has a strong choral tradition, and that often opera choruses and traditional songs were sung as though there is no difference between them – in townships, opera is not high art but part of popular culture.²⁹⁹

It is evident that since democratisation, a process of the "Africanisation" of opera was materialising in Cape Town. According to Roos, "Africanisation" and "indigenisation" are often used as synonyms, and indigenisation occurs when "the genre responds to issues regarding the social and political relevance or the survival of a cultural format".³⁰⁰ From that perspective, the genre had had to respond to the emergence of black opera singers along with the pressures of portraying the ideals of the new South Africanist nationalism.³⁰¹

The resultant response to this emerging South Africanist nationalism is noticeable in two distinct changes in opera production: changing the staging of standard repertoire from a European *mis en scène* to a South African one, and the composition of new operas based on indigenous stories. In Cape Town, the Cape Town Opera Company and its predecessor, CAPAB Opera, have since 1994 supported Africanist interpretations of standard repertoire, and have commissioned composers to write operas that are set locally, relate local stories and address local issues.³⁰² By their tenth anniversary in 2009, Cape Town Opera had staged 101 productions, of which roughly 12% can be viewed as being indigenous works.

The move to localise opera productions started shortly after 1994, with Cape Town Opera producing an "African" version of Puccini's *La bohème* as *La bohème noir* in 1997. No musical changes were made, but the opera's setting was changed from nineteenth-century Paris to Johannesburg during the student uprising of 1976. Only black singers formed the

²⁹⁷ Pomfret, E. 2012. "Mimi sings in the township; With two companies bound for our shores, opera is booming in South Africa". *The Times* (London, England), Monday 14 April 2012, p.13.

²⁹⁸ Davies, J & Dovey L. 2010. "Bizet in Khayelitsha: *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* as audio-visual transculturation". *Journal of African Media Studies*, 2(2):39-53.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid*: 47.

³⁰⁰ Roos, 2012. "Indigenisation and history: how opera in South Africa became South African opera". *Acta Academica Supplementum*, 2012(1):119.

³⁰¹ In this regard, also see: Herwitz, D. 2017. *Aesthetics, Arts, and Politics in a Global World*. Bloomsbury Academic, London. p.125-148.

³⁰² Roos, 2010:210.

cast. A more dramatic localisation was that of Verdi's *Macbeth* in 2001, with the setting changed to a guerrilla war in Sierra Leone. The opera was also shortened, and sections of the score were transcribed for alto saxophone, marimba and djembe.³⁰³ The Cape Town-based Isango Ensemble, run by Dornford-May and Malefane, first produced Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* as *Impempe yomlingo* in 2007 at the Baxter Theatre using marimbas as the orchestra. Later they made two film versions of Africanised operas: Bizet's *Carmen* as *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* (2005) and Puccini's *La bohème* as *Breathe Umphefumlo* (2015). In an article on *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, Dornford-May says the title was translated with a reference to the Cape Town township of Khayelitsha for political reasons, and to create "as much reality as possible" through its setting and Africanised narrative.³⁰⁴

The Africanisation of standard repertoire operas happened concurrently with the composition of new operas based on indigenous stories. In 1995, CAPAB Opera staged its first new opera with an African setting, Roelof Temmingh's *Enoch, Prophet of God*, the first of three operas Temmingh was commissioned to write; the others being *Sacred Bones* (1997) and *Buchuland* (1998). According to the librettist, Michael Williams, the commission for *Buchuland* came with three criteria: the content had to be South African; the opera had to express the diversity in the South African population; the opera had to embody the spirit of the peaceful transformation to the new South Africa.³⁰⁵ Williams believed that it was then the right time for South Africans to tell their own stories on the operatic stage. It was indeed a time, as Eichbaum wrote, when a brand of opera was developing in South Africa that aimed to be purely African, and not from Italy or Germany.³⁰⁶ It was also during this time that Opera Africa in Durban commissioned Mzilikazi Khumalo to write the opera *Princess Magogo KaDinuzulu* in 2002, which was the first Zulu opera. The opera company "had to see whether it was possible to create a new African opera genre".³⁰⁷

In 2010, Cape Town Opera created *Five:20 Operas made in South Africa*, a collection of five operas with a duration of 20 minutes each. The company wanted to create this production

³⁰³ *Ibid*: 65

³⁰⁴ Davies *et al*, 2010:39-53.

³⁰⁵ Muller, 2000:125.

³⁰⁶ Eichbaum, J. 1998. "A necessary blessing or, the case for opera within our society". *Scenaria*, 212:3, September 1998.

³⁰⁷ Midgette, A. 2004. "An aria for post-apartheid Africa". *The New York Times*. Sunday 30 May 2004:AR23.

because they reasoned that South Africa is a complex country and wanted to relate five uniquely South African stories: that of Saartjie Baartman, Lucy Lloyd and the Bushmen, xenophobia, the assassination of Chris Hani, and Breyten Breytenbach's prison experience.³⁰⁸ Michael Blake writes that there had been a concerted effort at political correctness in the libretti. According to him, *Five:20 Operas made in South Africa* were well composed but the music was not new. Blake found that it had links to "institutional power and politics", and that it was a new concept of marrying politically charged topics with heavy marketing and funding. Furthermore, he opines that there is a clear link between the composers' cultural identity and the subject matter of their operas.³⁰⁹

In the choice of subject matter it is evident that *Five:20 Operas made in South Africa* was an effort to create an opera representing the rainbow nation in its different parts (or colours) in that each of the short operas seemed to address an issue important to different (racial) communities in South Africa. Saartjie Baartman is a significant figure in the history of coloured people; Lucy Lloyd's story would have resonated with the white English community; xenophobia had in recent years been rife in black townships; Chris Hani was a struggle hero in black liberation; and Breyten Breytenbach is a revolutionary figure for Afrikaners.

The Africanisation of standard opera repertoire and the composition of new operas with indigenous stories since the dawn of democracy show an embrace of the new rainbow nation and resonate with the ideals of an Africanist nationalism. As Muller points out, Africanisation has become the new standard for art music production in South Africa and the ingredients for the discourse of music.³¹⁰ Also, it has been embraced by opera audiences, as a regular audience member was quoted as saying after a performance of *La bohème*: "We have become colour-blind – so a Parisian street teeming with black mothers and their white children provokes no surprise."³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Blake, M. 2011. "History never sounded so good". *artssouthafrica*, 9(4):42-45.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*: 44.

³¹⁰ Muller, 2000:126.

³¹¹ Canning, H. 2012. "Summer lovestruck; Cape Town Opera's Porgy and Bess will impress on its tour". *Sunday Times* (London, England), Sunday 27 May 2012, p.32.

PART 2

The professionalization of opera

The Western European notion of music professionalism is that of a musician who performs for economic gain in the context of a career.³¹² In the early colonial years in the Cape, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, music practice was mostly informal. Music was purely entertainment at weddings and parties, and no evidence exists of any concert practice before the nineteenth century. The evolution of music practice as informal entertainment into a formal industry is the process of professionalization. Evidence thereof is found in the documented history of opera in the Cape, which shows how this evolution shaped the development of opera in South Africa.

Only a few studies have been done in the field of the professionalization of music within specific countries and specific socio-political contexts. In his research on the professionalization of music in Sardinia, Bernard Lortat-Jacob defines a professional musician according to two ideas. First, in economic terms, which defines a professional musician as someone who receives remuneration for his/her playing, which serves as a means of recognition of a particular skill. Second, Lortat-Jacob defines it as a sociological idea, which concerns the relationship between professional musicians and their audience. This relates to the distance in that relationship, meaning that the professional musician is one who performs music on a stage for an audience (spatial distance), but the audience is not directly involved in the musician's choice of repertoire, and neither does the professional musician take into consideration what music the audience wants to hear (cognitive distance).³¹³

Donna Buchanan points out certain pivotal moments and structures ensuring the professionalization in specifically the case of Bulgaria. First, the idea of a group of musicians

³¹² Buchanan, D.A. 1995. "Metaphors of power, metaphors of truth: The politics of music professionalism in Bulgarian folk orchestras". *Ethnomusicology*, 39(3):381-416, Autumn 1995.

³¹³ Lortat-Jacob, B. 1981. "Community music and the rise of professionalism: A Sardinian example". *Ethnomusicology*, 25(2):185-197, May 1981.

performing together, or the establishment of a “structure in which they performed”; second, the establishment of radio in 1929 in Bulgaria requiring music to be broadcast, bringing together musicians to perform; third, financial support from the government ensuring the establishment of folk ensembles; fourth, the composition of music for indigenous instruments; fifth, the teaching of students to play instruments; sixth, with the institutionalisation of music in schools, developing a new national musical style (combining traditional and Western musical ideas and ideals); seventh, the notation of traditional music; and eighth, the development of organisations such as the Bulgarian Union of Composers.³¹⁴ According to Buchanan the professionalization of the musical traditions in Bulgaria during the late nineteenth century manifested in an aspiration towards Western European standards, and creating structures (both physical and ideological) for the performance of art music in that country.³¹⁵

In writing about professionalism in music teaching, Lucinda Lear points out that any industry should have a means of measuring professionalism and setting standards to which practitioners should aspire to. The question she asks is whether the basis of professionalism for a music teacher is a degree or a matter of proficiency.³¹⁶ The same may be asked of opera singers: Is a good singing voice the only criterion or is a certain kind of training and a qualification required?

All of these indicators of professionalization are prevalent in the documented history of opera in the Cape, although none of the previous historical research on opera in South Africa has identified or described how these indicators form part of the process of professionalization. Four distinct indicators of the professionalization of opera in the Cape have been identified in this study. These are: the building of theatres (spaces), the establishment of training centres (education), the plight for state funding for the remuneration of artists (financial support), and the establishment of opera societies and companies (structures). This process of the professionalization of opera in the Cape spans over two hundred years of opera production during which role-players in the arts and the

³¹⁴ Buchanan, 1995:387-393.

³¹⁵ *Ibid*: 381-416.

³¹⁶ Lear, L. 2004. Professionalism – What is it and who needs it?. *American Music Teacher*. June/July:66-67.

government made efforts to create a professional industry and negotiated the terms of that professionalization.

Since the arrival of settlers, music in the Cape was fostered over years by “eager amateurs”, but in later years professional standards had been achieved.³¹⁷ The touring theatre companies from Europe had amateur performers, who mostly put up comic operas and operettas. Only later serious operas followed, also performed by artists from Europe. Local opera production also began with amateurs performing in operettas and comic operas, with serious operas following later. It was only much later, when opera had been more professionalised and formalised with training given to singers and more funding to stage increasingly professional productions, that local opera composition was established.³¹⁸ This process of professionalization can be traced in the development of spaces, structures, education and financial support for local opera production.

Societal conceptions of what constitutes a profession cannot be totally disregarded, although it will not be addressed in this part of the chapter. Often the arts is not seen as a professional field, and it is not nearly as highly regarded as professions like law, education or medicine. In her memoir, actor and director Hermien Dommissie relates her own struggles as a first-year university student in 1932 in Pretoria. She was set on having a career in theatre, but at the time it was not regarded as a “true profession”. If she had wanted to make a career in theatre, her only option would have been to join a travelling company. Her parents, too, did not consider acting as a fit career for their daughter and certainly not as a recognised profession. But, she explained, “if theatre was not a recognised profession, it had to be made one”.³¹⁹

Another anecdote that shows the attitude towards the arts as a profession is Dommissie’s meeting with the then Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, General JBM Hertzog (1924–1949). Dommissie argued for the establishment of a national theatre that would

³¹⁷ Racster, 1919:495.

³¹⁸ Roos, 2012:120.

³¹⁹ Dommissie, 2001:3.

provide full-time employment for artists, to which Hertzog replied, “We are not yet a nation, how then can we speak of a national theatre”.³²⁰

Building theatres

Already during the nineteenth century when touring companies travelled across the country with their opera productions, producers and artists had called for more suitable spaces where they could perform professional productions. Because there were several touring companies competing for audiences’ attention, they strived to raise their performance standards. During the initial years, most of these companies performed in wood-and-iron structures, but their drive for professionalism led to the building of proper theatres.³²¹

Gobbato provides a view on professional opera production in the following description: “For an opera to retain its musical power and excitement it really needs to be performed with full vocal and orchestral forces in a venue which permits it.”³²² The building of venues that permitted the performance of opera over the course of two hundred years ensured that audiences in the Cape could experience opera of increasingly professional standards.

The construction of *Di Afrikaansche Schouwburg*, or African Theatre, on Boereplein in October 1801 ushered in a new era for the residents of the Cape. Bouws describes the theatre as opening up the possibilities for entertainment.³²³ According to him, the opening of the African Theatre was an indication that a new epoch in the arts had begun. It meant that the local population could see performances of theatre, opera and ballet, and it provided a performance space for local artists to stage professional productions. While the building of this theatre ensured that travelling companies and artists from abroad had a space where they could stage their performances, it is important to note that the African Theatre also opened up opportunities for locals to produce their own theatre and opera performances.³²⁴ In this way, it stimulated the beginnings of a local arts industry.

³²⁰ *Ibid*: 4.

³²¹ Malan, 1979-1986:360.

³²² Coetzee-Klingler, 2012.

³²³ Bouws, 1966:129.

³²⁴ *Ibid*:129

Amateur performers of the British Garrison put forward the idea for the building of the African Theatre. Sir George Yonge, having been inspired by a performance of Samuel Foote's *Taste* in a makeshift theatre, decided to make the building of a theatre in Cape Town his personal project. He appropriated a part of Boereplein and donated it to twenty-four shareholders for the building of the theatre. It closed down and was sold between 1835 and 1839, and thereafter became a Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), and is today called the St Stephen's Church (a congregation of the DRC).³²⁵

In 1893, a new theatre was built in Cape Town at a cost of 90 000 pounds. Named the New Theatre, it soon became known as the Opera House. This theatre mainly staged operettas for the first twenty years of its existence, but its first serious opera, Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in 1899, was also the first performance of a Wagner opera in the Cape.³²⁶ The Opera House opened its doors on 31 August 1893, but with only half a house attending the event where a full orchestra performed. The house had an iron curtain (then unknown in Cape Town) and is described as having "plush curtains, red upholstered seats, gold decorations, a spacious stage, footlights, battens, dimmers".³²⁷ With its plush décor and these theatre technologies, the Opera House was a space perceived to be the home of professional theatre. According to Racster, the theatre became dilapidated and infested with rats. With less artists coming to South Africa from the start of the First World War, the building made way for the new main Post Office (today the old Post Office Building in Darling Street, Cape Town).³²⁸

At the turn of the twentieth century, some local opera and theatre societies had formed across the country, and in Cape Town, the 1930s proved to be a time when theatres flourished. The South African College of Music trained opera singers and needed space for performances, the Eoan Group and its choir was established, and it was also an era in which cinema (with silent films and live music) provided much entertainment to the locals. In 1928, African Consolidated Theatres built the Alhambra Theatre, which remained Cape Town's major cinema venue for years. It was situated in Riebeeck Street in the centre of

³²⁵ No author. "The African Theatre". Available: http://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/The_African_Theatre. [accessed on 25 April 2017].

³²⁶ Roos, 2010:34.

³²⁷ Racster, 1951:80.

³²⁸ *Ibid*: 81

Cape Town and was described as an “atmospheric” theatre, which had an orchestra pit used by an orchestra providing music for silent films. The Alhambra also served as a music hall; the Eoan Group Choir had given performances there, and the CAPAB Opera Company performed numerous operas there after its establishment in 1963. In January 1972, the Alhambra closed down and it was demolished in 1974.³²⁹

Also at the time of the building of the Alhambra Theatre, William Henry Bell, director of the South African College of Music from 1911 until 1935, looked for a space where students training as opera singers could perform. Bell founded the Cape Town Little Theatre, where opera and ballet was to be staged, by converting an old chemistry building into this theatre. It opened its doors in 1931, and Bell started staging operas there in 1933, the first student production being Cimarosa’s *Il matrimonio segreto*.³³⁰ The Little Theatre was hugely successful and according to Racster there had been three to four productions per year when the theatre opened; by 1951 there were up to fifteen. At the time of its opening in 1931, the theatre’s mailing list consisted of 400 names; 20 years later it was 4 000. The value of costumes, scenery and electrical equipment was worth 9 000 pounds.³³¹

Already at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Cape Town City Hall – opened in 1905 – was home to the regular concerts held by the Orchestral and Choral Society. The hall was able to seat about 1 200 people.³³² It was suited for the performance of opera, and in 1956 the Eoan Group staged its first opera, Verdi’s *La traviata*, in the City Hall, although in earlier years the group held oratorio and other choir performances in the hall. The City Hall became known as the home of the Eoan Group – a space where they performed opera for almost two decades. Because the Eoan Group consisted of coloured people, they were required to have a permit from the 1960s onwards to perform in the City Hall due to apartheid regulations regarding the requirements for segregated seating, entrances and amenities for white and coloured people. Nonetheless, they persisted in performing at the City Hall as it put them in the cultural centre of Cape Town, and this had been their home for a number of

³²⁹ No author. “Alhambra Theatre”. Available: http://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Alhambra_Theatre. [accessed on 25 April 2017].

³³⁰ Roos, 2010:38.

³³¹ Racster, 1951:163.

³³² Racster, 1919:495.

years. In 1973, the Cape Town City Council decided to renovate the hall and revert to its original design of a concert hall, which then made it unsuitable for opera and musical performances. Since the 1960s, there had been forced removals of coloured and black people across South Africa, and in Cape Town it was especially marked by the demolition of District Six, where most Eoan members lived. It seems, and the Eoan Group members certainly experienced it in this way, that this sudden renovation of the City Hall was a means of removing the group from Cape Town's cultural centre.³³³

As an alternative, the City Council donated land in Athlone – a designated coloured neighbourhood on the Cape Flats – for the building of a theatre for the Eoan Group. On 21 November 1969, the Joseph Stone Auditorium was inaugurated. The space could be used for stage productions, but because the Eoan Group's biggest supporters were white people who stayed in the city and were reluctant to travel to a township for opera, attendance dwindled. Some Eoan members saw the building as a monument of apartheid and a reminder of their removal from the city centre.³³⁴

The Joseph Stone Auditorium was built for a total cost of R287 000, which was funded by the government (R120 000), the Joseph Stone Foundation (R100 000), the Bernard van Leer Foundation from the Netherlands (R34 000), and the Eoan Group (R33 000).³³⁵ The effects of apartheid policies can be seen in the fact that, two years later in 1971, the government built a new theatre on the foreshore of Cape Town, called the Nico Malan Theatre Complex, for R11 million – a space only white artists and white audiences could use. With the establishment of the four provincial arts councils in South Africa in the 1960s, the apartheid government poured funds into forty-eight new theatres in designated white areas.³³⁶

The Nico Malan Theatre Complex, with its 1 204-seater opera house, became the home of CAPAB. It was the first modern arts complex to be built in South Africa and was inaugurated in May 1971 to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the Republic of South Africa.³³⁷

Before the building of the Nico Malan (today known as the Artscape Theatre Complex),

³³³ Eoan History Project, 2013:178-181.

³³⁴ *Ibid*:181-184.

³³⁵ *Ibid*: 181.

³³⁶ Raditlhalo, 2012:588.

³³⁷ Roos, 2010:54.

CAPAB staged their operas mainly in the Alhambra and Little Theatre, the latter used especially for productions in conjunction with the UCT Opera Company.³³⁸ For the opening of the Nico Malan, CAPAB chose to stage Verdi's *Aida*, conducted by David Tidboald and directed by Gregorio Fiasconaro.³³⁹ In his memoirs, Fiasconaro describes the theatre as having acoustic problems and an orchestra pit that was too small, although the builders said it was designed to fit 75 players. Fiasconaro describes his production of *Aida* as "acceptable for 1971" but adds that the lighting was not what he had envisioned.³⁴⁰

The Baxter Theatre Centre in Rondebosch, Cape Town opened in 1977 on the campus of the University of Cape Town. Talbot writes that Dr William Duncan Baxter ("one of Cape Town's great sons") had left a sum of money to the university to build a theatre. It would be a space "for the students and all the people of Cape Town". For the opening opera, Poulenc's *The Dialogue of the Carmelites* was chosen because it suited the opera school, which had a large number of female singers.³⁴¹ Today, opera in Cape Town is staged in the Artscape's Opera House and the Baxter Theatre, the latter mostly for productions presented in collaboration with the Opera School of the University of Cape Town.

The building of theatres did not only ensure the professionalization of opera, but along with the building of concert venues, helped in shaping the professional music and theatre industries of South Africa. However, these spaces of performance also had a marginalising tendency because an increasingly elitist view of music and theatre developed along with this professionalization. Furthermore, theatres and concert halls became spaces in which South Africa's racial segregation was painfully evident. From their inception, most of the spaces excluded people of colour from participating in the arts in these venues. Although not unique to South Africa, theatres in this country were spaces that welcomed white affluence and stood as symbols of rejection for those who were racially and socially excluded.

³³⁸ Mears *et al*, 2001.

³³⁹ While *Aida* was chosen for the opening of the new Nico Malan Theatre, the opera was not performed on the opening night. Soprano Emma Renzi, who was to play the title role, fell ill and the *Aida* production was replaced with the ballet *Sylvia* for the opening performance.

³⁴⁰ Fiasconaro, 1982:121.

³⁴¹ Talbot, 1978:151.

Training singers

Cape Town's music scene during the colonial period (from 1652 until the latter part of the nineteenth century) was dependent on amateurs who were part of touring groups, churches or the military. Travelling companies vied for Cape Town audiences' attention, and there was an increasing emphasis on the professional artist as a means of attracting music lovers to performances. These companies brought artists from London in a bid to raise the standard of performances in Cape Town, mentioning in their advertisements that these performers were "stars" of the London theatres, such as the Savoy and Globe theatres. Over time, musical taste and a concerted cultivation of an aesthetic sensibility necessitated greater professionalism because listeners became accustomed to better performances that continued to raise their expectations.

Simultaneously, the music industry in South Africa became more professional by starting to employ only professionally trained musicians in performances. Where choral societies had previously used their own members as soloists, by 1907 these societies in the cities of Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban and Johannesburg – choral societies having become by then institutions and remnants of British culture – decided to engage professional singers as soloists for their performances.³⁴² This consistent drive towards professionalism in productions increased over the years, assisted by an expansion of music training in South Africa. As late as the 1940s, John Connell presented operas in Johannesburg, and there had still been an impetus on his part that a better standard of opera should be presented and that this could be achieved by importing singers. In 1948, Connell left South Africa to scout for singers in London, Brussels, Paris, Rome and Milan.³⁴³

In the first decade of the twentieth century, travelling companies stopped coming to the Cape, and local musicians sought to take over their European counterparts' participation in the local music scene. This change necessitated the local training of musicians as more and more local musicians started to perform in concert spaces in the city. Formal structures (like

³⁴² Malan, 1979-1986:355.

³⁴³ Stead, 1963:22.

small orchestras) and regular subscription concerts made it evident that local training was needed for South Africans desirous of a professional career in music. During that time, facilities for music education began to improve, with immigrant musicians (many of them composers) giving music education.

From 1900 onward, professional training of local musicians started in South Africa when music training institutions were established, the first being an institute founded by FW Jannasch at Stellenbosch in 1905.³⁴⁴ In 1910, the South African College of Music was established by William Henry Bell, who became the first principal who was later succeeded by Eric Chisholm. It opened its doors on 10 January 1910 with thirty-three students, but by 1919, over 400 students had been trained at the college.³⁴⁵ Bell and Chisholm, who both had a keen interest in local opera production, were the directors for the first fifty years. The college initially functioned independently, until it became part of the then five-year-old University of Cape Town in 1923.³⁴⁶

Possessing a tertiary qualification is supposed to vouch for a certain level of proficiency in one's chosen career, but for singers interested in opera, it was still not possible to get professional training in South Africa. In order to make a professional career in opera, South African singers had to travel abroad. In South Africa, singers had only three opportunities to showcase their talents (in Johannesburg): the annual Eisteddfod, the Musical Fortnight, and the African Theatre Trust. An overseas education seemed to be the "*sine qua non* of acknowledged artistry", and still today, South African music students train overseas in an attempt to improve their artistry.³⁴⁷

The University Opera Company was established in 1951, and in 1954 the UCT Opera School opened at the South African College of Music, with the Italian Gregorio Fiasconaro as the director. It provided training in all aspects of opera performance, and although it staged performances for the public, the college and its opera activities were primarily focused on the training of opera students. The opera company, which had a repertoire of about fifty

³⁴⁴ Mears *et al*, 2001.

³⁴⁵ Racster, 1919:495.

³⁴⁶ Roos, 2010:37.

³⁴⁷ Dommissie, 2001:25.

operas, was associated to the opera school, and before the establishment of the arts councils in 1963, this company along with the Eoan Group were the only companies to produce operas in Cape Town.³⁴⁸ By law, coloured people were not allowed to study at white tertiary institutions, but some of the Eoan Group singers had private professional training at the UCT Opera School, while others applied for a government permit (only issued in special circumstances) to be allowed to study at UCT.

In Pretoria, the interest in opera also blossomed as an increasing number of professional singers found themselves in the city. The Pretoriase Operagroep (Pretoria Opera Group), which worked with the amateurs of the Pretoria Operatic and Dramatic Society, staged a number of operas, also Afrikaans operas, and were able to import singers – including South Africans singing abroad – for the 1960 Union Festival. For them, local training of young singers had also become essential, and the group formed what was called the Opera Workshop. Like an opera school (with the country's only opera school being in Cape Town), the purpose of the workshop was to train young singers and provide practical stage experience.³⁴⁹

Because educational facilities had improved in Cape Town, it convinced foreign artists that the city was a place where they could settle and teach.³⁵⁰ The establishment of training centres like the South African College of Music encouraged artists who were part of touring companies to settle in the Cape and teach music. Many singers who performed with the touring companies did not return to Europe, but chose to stay in South Africa and became involved in music education.³⁵¹ Malan lists several foreign musicians who had settled in the big cities of South Africa to train local musicians.³⁵² Even by the middle of the twentieth century, the expertise of artists from abroad was still sought after in Cape Town, and most of the earlier singing and opera teachers in the city were Italians.

In 1926, the Italian-born Giuseppe Paganelli (1882–1956) settled in Cape Town and was engaged as a singing teacher at the South African College of Music. When the Opera School

³⁴⁸ Mears *et al*, 2001.

³⁴⁹ Stead, 1963:26.

³⁵⁰ Malan, 1979-1986:349.

³⁵¹ *Ibid*: 355.

³⁵² *Ibid*: 355.

was inaugurated in 1954, another Italian, Gregorio Fiasconaro, was appointed as director. Angelo Gobbato, who was born in Italy but moved to Cape Town with his family as a teenager, was also director of the UCT Opera School until his retirement, when the first non-Italian, the American conductor Kamal Khan, took over.³⁵³ Khan left the Opera School in 2016.

Currently, South Africa's only dedicated opera school is still the UCT Opera School (after the former Pretoria Technikon, now the Tshwane University of Technology, closed its opera school). However, most universities in the country train singers as part of their music degree programmes. Although the training of opera singers in South Africa over the past century has ensured a steady supply of professional singers, it has always been a struggle to give these singers performance opportunities in South Africa. This has been especially true with the decline in opera activities over the past twenty years across the country, and the Cape Town Opera Company being the only full-time company. Whilst the ideals of studying at an international level at music schools such as the Juilliard is still held as the pinnacle of music training by South Africans, the over-supply of trained operatic voices has now forced singers to move abroad because there are limited performance opportunities in their country of birth. Also, among the opera graduates that the UCT Opera School have produced over the past ten years, there have been many exceptional voices that are able to perform at a high level internationally, as is evidenced by the increasing number of South Africans who have won prizes at international singing competitions.

Soliciting state support

In the South African context, the arts industry and the state have been at loggerheads regarding funding since the middle of the nineteenth century. Even during the apartheid years when the government funded white artists through the provincial arts councils, the arts industry still did not flourish.

³⁵³ Roos, 2010:230.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Cape had a blooming theatre industry, but it seemed that interest in opera fluctuated. By then, staging an opera was already quite an expensive endeavour, although there had been much public interest in opera. Still, opera production during that time had been the exception and not the rule.³⁵⁴ Generally, other performing arts, such as theatre and variety shows, were a constant presence in the city, but operetta and opera were not staged as often. The arts have clearly not been a priority for South Africa's colonial government, and the funding thereof, and particularly the funding of opera, has remained challenging.³⁵⁵

It was difficult to produce opera for extended periods, even during the days of innovative opera productions by Luscombe Searelle at the end of the nineteenth century. Although there was audience support, opera was expensive and most often considered a luxury. Although he had been an enthusiastic theatre-maker, Searelle would later struggle to keep productions on stage.³⁵⁶ Also, the travelling Wheeler Company suffered losses as the public became less interested in attending the company's performances.

Dwindling audience numbers meant diminished income, and with less money, the travelling companies struggled to attract people, even with extravagant productions. In August 1893, the Lyric Opera Company from England toured to Cape Town and presented about nine productions of serious and light operas, of which the staging must have been lavish, because an advertisement for the productions claimed that the company comprised a full orchestra and 4 000 pounds worth of costumes and décor. Performance venues were, however, only half filled to capacity.³⁵⁷ John Connell, who had established an opera company in Johannesburg in the 1940s, began exploring whether it would be possible to receive government support for opera productions. According to him, more than a thousand people subscribed over the previous twenty years to support opera with financial contributions.³⁵⁸ This support would serve to back his argument that the arts could be a lucrative investment for the state. At the time, government funding was not totally lacking, because in Cape

³⁵⁴ Stead, 1963:10.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*: 10.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*: 15.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid*: 15.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*: 22.

Town at the start of twentieth century, the Orchestral and Choral Society had been holding regular music festivals, and in 1906 the Corporation of Cape Town (the municipality) began to fund regular concerts held in the City Hall.³⁵⁹

According to Dommissie, artists wanted a new dispensation where the arts received state recognition and the need for state-funded organisations nationally and provincially had been expressed. After meetings between the government and interested parties and role-players – with Dommissie playing a pivotal role in instigating and facilitating these meetings – the National Theatre Organisation was established in 1947. State-funded theatre companies then started performing across the country – “white, European-orientated theatre companies, as obviously only they could apply for and negotiate state funding”.³⁶⁰

This ushered in a period during which the arts became a strategic political instrument. When the National Party government came into power in 1948, funding and the lack thereof for opera productions became an issue closely related to and influenced by political structures.³⁶¹ According to Thlalo Sam Raditlhalo, patronage of the arts was a means of measuring South Africa’s “level of civilisation” and served to prove that the government and major businesses were committed to social responsibility.³⁶² This provided the political means of arguing for structured financial support from the government, and led to the establishment of the four provincial arts councils in South Africa. Much like government departments, the arts councils would provide artists with full-time salaried employment and institutionalized sheltered employment for white artists, because neither black nor coloured artists could work for the provincial arts councils.

Although the arts councils were set up to direct state funding towards the arts, the structures did not function without problems or bureaucratic restraints. Dommissie writes that from the onset, government did not always fulfil its promise and often the subsidy was less than what was promised. Companies had by then planned productions according to a certain budget, and often had to deal with shortfalls. The Performing Arts Council of

³⁵⁹ Racster, 1919:495.

³⁶⁰ Dommissie, 2001:8.

³⁶¹ Roos, 2010:26.

³⁶² Raditlhalo, 2012:589.

Transvaal (PACT), for instance, held several meetings in Pretoria to discuss their financial dilemmas.³⁶³ Eichbaum, in an editorial in *Scenaria* magazine, commented on the financial stability of the arts councils by saying that during the first seventeen years of the provincial arts councils' existence, the government had "done little to ensure the success or even survival of the arts councils".³⁶⁴ According to him all the arts councils were by then (1981) on the verge of bankruptcy and "starving to death". Eichbaum likened the government to a mother that had given birth to a child only to abandon it. The financial strain had caused CAPAB – who according to Eichbaum was "technically bankrupt" – to cancel an opera production in 1981.³⁶⁵

After the establishment of the arts councils in 1963, it became ever clearer the councils were not only about creating structural funding of the arts, but that political goals had been extremely important in the decision to establish the councils. By the 1980s, it seemed that the political gains of the arts did not deliver the dividends the National Party government thought it would. As the money spent on the arts did not seem to have a positive return on investment, funding from government was not as forthcoming as before. Gobbato claims that the biggest challenge during his tenure as director of opera at CAPAB (1989 until 1999) was the dwindling subsidy. This had led to the cutting of the number of opera productions staged by CAPAB Opera per season. Engaging international opera singers also became more difficult as the value of the Rand was dropping and international cultural boycotts against South Africa intensified.³⁶⁶ A worldwide cultural boycott against South Africa started to take shape after a recommendation by the UN General Assembly in 1969 to suspend cultural, educational, sports and other exchanges with the apartheid government.³⁶⁷

After 1994, several theatres in the country were close to bankruptcy and orchestras had to merge. Opera companies had to find new ways of financing opera as state subsidies continued to decline.³⁶⁸ The late 1990s also saw the demise of the provincial arts councils, essentially disbanding all opera companies in the country. Initially, it was only in Cape Town

³⁶³ Dommissie, 2001:197.

³⁶⁴ Eichbaum, J. 1981. "The Crisis in our Performing Arts Councils". *Scenaria* 25:3, May 1981.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ Coetzee-Klingler, 2012.

³⁶⁷ Raditlhalo, 2012:290.

³⁶⁸ Roos, 2010:62.

where an opera company survived, as role-players at CAPAB began talks to establish a section 21-company (non-profit), called The Cape Town Opera Company. This company's financial model differed from CAPAB Opera, because it had to rely on private sponsorship and minimal government subsidies.

Currently, it is still a struggle to stage operas in Cape Town, as both public and private funding is steadily decreasing, which makes it difficult for opera companies to stay solvent and provide work for singers who have been trained in the country.³⁶⁹ This has meant that the amount of opera productions across the country has declined. Although efforts have been made by several companies in the north of the country – notably the defunct Black Tie Ensemble, Gauteng Opera, and Opera Africa – most full-scale operas are currently only staged by Cape Town Opera, which remains the only opera company providing salaried employment for singers. A lack of funding has compelled Cape Town Opera to produce fewer operas over the last ten years. Whereas the company produced eight full-scale operas in 2005, only five productions were staged in 2015, of which only Verdi's *La traviata* and an Africanised version of Léhar's *Die lustige Witwe* in English was standard opera repertoire (the others had been local compositions). The declining number of opera productions due to decreasing funding, has in turn encouraged opera singers to leave the country, as they are unable to work in the local industry. As mentioned earlier, singers trained at the UCT Opera School often leave the country to seek employment at European or American opera houses.

Establishing opera societies and companies

While the building of theatres, training of singers and the financial support from government and other sources played a pivotal role in professionalising opera in South Africa, the establishment of structures like opera companies and societies was perceived as the pinnacle of professionalization. The provincial arts councils, started in the four provinces of South Africa between 1962 and 1963, was seen as a “triumph of professionalism”.³⁷⁰ Malan opines that local professionalization in opera started by the 1860s, and over the

³⁶⁹ Coetzee-Klingler, 2012.

³⁷⁰ Malan, 1979-1986:349.

course of the next hundred years, evolved into the establishment of these performing arts councils.³⁷¹ It was only from the 1930s, however, when various amateur opera groups were well established, that local production houses staged regular opera seasons.³⁷²

By 1919, Cape Town had a choral society, chamber music association and a municipal orchestra (started in 1914). According to Racster, fifty years earlier there had been only an amateur choir and orchestra. In later years, the Orchestral and Choral Society grew to such an extent that it was possible for them to present regular music festivals.³⁷³ In 1906, the Orchestral and Choral Society started with a series of choral festivals, which included Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust*, as well as lesser-known choral works. Soloists were brought from London each season, and they would also perform these works in Durban and Johannesburg.³⁷⁴ The Amateur Musical Society, performing anything from orchestral music to excerpts from operas and transcriptions of operatic music, were also active in Cape Town, mostly during the latter half of the nineteenth century.³⁷⁵

According to Stead, the First World War practically brought the visits of touring companies to the Cape to an end. The Quinlan Company and the John Riding Opera Company were among the last companies to travel to South Africa. Although other forms of entertainment, like bioscopes, had by then been available in Cape Town, it did not signal the end of opera in the city; in fact, there had long been an enthusiastic audience for opera. But the survival of opera hinged on whether any locals would take action to keep the art form alive now that European travelling companies did not bring their productions to the Cape anymore. One such person was Alessandro Rota, an Italian tenor who came to South Africa around 1931/1932 with the Gonzales Opera Company from Italy and decided to settle here. Along with William Pickerill, conductor of the then Cape Town Municipal Orchestra, Rota started the National Opera Company in 1940, which performed three opera seasons. In 1939, he also established the Cape Town Opera Company, performing full-length operas for more than five years. His next endeavour was the Labia Opera Company, which presented five

³⁷¹ *Ibid*: 349.

³⁷² Roos, 2010:37.

³⁷³ Racster, 1919:495.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid*: 495.

³⁷⁵ Bouws, 1966:112.

operas in two years. Later Rota also played a role in the performance of opera in Stellenbosch before being involved in the establishment of the National Opera Association in 1955 and joining the Eoan Group in 1956, when the group performed its first opera.³⁷⁶

From 1929, the South African College of Music (opened in 1910 and incorporated into the University of Cape Town in 1923) produced operas, ranging from baroque works to contemporary operas composed by Eric Chisholm, head of music at the University from 1939 until 1964.³⁷⁷ The University Opera Company was started in 1951 and the Opera School opened in 1954. The Opera School was prolific in staging opera performances, and in less than a decade, the students had performed in forty different operas in 650 performances in the Little Theatre, with Eric Chisholm as conductor of the University Orchestra.³⁷⁸ This company also travelled the countryside to towns like Swellendam, Riversdale, King William's Town, Grahamstown, Cradock, Graaff-Reinet, Paarl, Stellenbosch, Kimberley, Bloemfontein, Pretoria, and the former Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).³⁷⁹

From the 1940s, several efforts were made to structure the opera industry and thereby professionalising it. As mentioned above, Rota started the National Opera Company in 1940 in Cape Town, while in Johannesburg John Connell launched the National Opera Society of South Africa in 1946. Part of the aim of these societies had been to negotiate with the government in securing state funding. Rota, who in the 1950s had moved to Johannesburg, was also instrumental in the launch of the National Opera Association of South Africa, which was set up in Johannesburg in 1955. Its aim was to encourage "indigenous opera and ballet and to encourage South African artists to remain in this country".³⁸⁰

Soon thereafter, conductor Anton Hartman and "a group of leading figures" in Johannesburg launched an Afrikaans counterpart, the Opera-vereniging van Suid-Afrika (Opera Society of South Africa), on 29 October 1956. Its aim was to promote opera among white Afrikaans-speakers, as well as opera in Afrikaans.³⁸¹ They also encouraged the

³⁷⁶ Kapp, 2008:13-22.

³⁷⁷ Talbot, 1978:156-175.

³⁷⁸ Roos, 2010:38.

³⁷⁹ Kapp, 2008:15.

³⁸⁰ Malan, 1979-1986:313.

³⁸¹ *Ibid*: 313.

development of opera as an indigenous art form. The society received a subsidy from the Department of Education, Arts and Science. Its mission was not to stage operas but to serve as a support structure for the performance of opera by opera companies, for whom they would organise funding.³⁸² Composer John Joubert, whose opera *In die droogte* was staged by the Opera Society of South Africa, said the founding of this society was of “outstanding importance in South African cultural history”.³⁸³ Because the government was not keen to subsidise two opera organisations, these two societies merged into the South African Opera Federation in 1958.³⁸⁴ It received R600 from the Department of Education, Arts and Science, which was the first step in state sponsorship of opera in South Africa.³⁸⁵ The federation would later receive funding from the government, the provinces and city councils.

The Pretoria Opera Group was formed in 1955 to provide local Pretoria singers with the opportunity to perform in operas, and to fill a gap in the city’s cultural life. The group received its income from honorary members.³⁸⁶ Before the establishment of the arts councils, four opera societies therefore existed over a number of years: the National Opera Association of South Africa (English with a strong Italian influence), the Opera Society of South Africa (supporting Afrikaans performances), the South African Opera Federation (the merger of the two aforementioned organisations), and the Pretoria Opera Group. In 1957 the Afrikaanse Kultuurraad (Afrikaans Cultural Board) of Pretoria also started an opera society called the Opera-organisasie van Suid-Afrika (Opera Organisation of South Africa). Its aim was to negotiate with government about the performance of opera across the country, and it urged opera organisations in the major South Africa cities to affiliate to this new organisation. The idea was that collectively they could put pressure on the government to establish a state opera.

All these organisations focused on bringing opera to white audiences and engaging white singers to perform in their productions. Although not meant as a counter-action, it was during the same period that in Cape Town a group of coloured opera singers performed

³⁸² Kapp, 2008:18.

³⁸³ Dommissie, 2001:69.

³⁸⁴ Roos, 2010:47.

³⁸⁵ Malan, 1979-1986:312.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid*: 313.

their first opera. The Eoan Group, started in 1933 as a welfare organisation for the coloured community of District Six, performed its first opera, Verdi's *La traviata*, in 1956 – the first time in South Africa's music history that an exclusively coloured cast performed in an opera.³⁸⁷ Already by 1963, its contribution to opera was hailed as “an unprecedented achievement in the short history of South African culture”.³⁸⁸ They consistently received excellent reviews, and by 1962 Eoan was the only cultural organisation in South Africa, barring the University of Cape Town, that was able to present a full arts festival comprising opera, operetta, children's operetta and dance.³⁸⁹

The group, with a membership of about 2 000 people at 15 branches across the Cape Peninsula, originally presented elocution classes, physical education, while drama and ballet classes were added later. Lectures and talks on literature, arts, leadership and marriage guidance were also presented. In 1940, the brothers John and Dan Ulster started a choir for the group, and three years later, an Italian immigrant Joseph Salvatore Manca, the son of a Sicilian barber, took over as conductor of the choir. He was an amateur musician who was a bookkeeper at the Cape Town municipality.³⁹⁰ Over the next thirteen years, Manca developed the choir into an opera company.³⁹¹

After the success of its first arts festival in 1956, the Eoan Group held a further ten opera seasons over the next twenty years. It developed a huge following among Cape Town audiences soon after its first production. Performances were praised by all who attended them, and glowing reviews of productions were published in the local press.³⁹² The Eoan Group focused on Italian operas and performed works by Verdi, Puccini, Rossini, Mascagni, Leoncavallo and Donizetti. In their second arts festival, Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* was included – the only German work in their repertoire.³⁹³ Manca conducted the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra for the group's productions, which were usually staged in the Cape Town City Hall. Eventually, in another travesty resulting from apartheid legislation, the

³⁸⁷ Badenhorst, J. 1963. “The success story of the Eoan Group”. *Lantern* 13:28-31, December 1963.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid*: 28.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid*: 30.

³⁹⁰ Badenhorst, 1963:29.

³⁹¹ Eoan History Project, 2013:12.

³⁹² *Ibid*:158-162.

³⁹³ *Ibid*: 124-130.

group was moved out of Cape Town's cultural centre to Athlone on the Cape Flats, where they built the Joseph Stone Auditorium, which became their new base.

The Eoan Group consisted of only coloured singers, because apartheid legislation forbade them to perform with white singers. In general, apartheid legislation also constricted and guided their operations. These laws determined where they could occupy accommodation (for instance on their two national tours), and where they could perform, because certain buildings and facilities were for whites only. It also determined for whom they could perform – some performances were only for whites, while others were for coloured people; or where both races were in the same venue, they had to sit in different wings of the hall, but only once an application for such a performance had been approved. Besides being hailed for their operatic performance, the romanticised stories of the singers also captured people's imagination. It was seen as improbable for coloured people to be singing opera during the apartheid years. Newspaper articles were written about these coloured factory workers who did manual labour by day and at night graced the opera stage – a lifestyle full of contradictions even the performers admitted to.³⁹⁴

The singers were portrayed as passionate people who gave up meals and wages to attend rehearsals. Badenhorst attributes their success to “the natural feeling for harmony and rhythm that the coloured people possess [and] their inborn ability to adapt themselves to situations”.³⁹⁵ Most of these singers also did not have any tertiary education in music, or could even read musical notation. While this had been the case for some, many of the singers received professional singing lessons, and some applied for special permission to study at the University of Cape Town. The Eoan Group's success during the apartheid years amidst great political obstacles is indeed phenomenal. However, many of the Eoan Group members chose to ignore the politics of the time to focus on singing. Manca was quoted as having said, “Politics is a dirty word”.³⁹⁶

The cooperation between the Eoan Group and the University of Cape Town's opera company had been very close and fruitful. Besides Gregorio Fiasconaro's involvement,

³⁹⁴ Eoan History Project, 2013:35-36.

³⁹⁵ Badenhorst, 1963:30.

³⁹⁶ Roos, 2010:224.

Stephen de Villiers from the university's Art Department worked on costumes and sets, while Stanley Glasser served as ballet conductor. Reflecting on his work with the Eoan Group, Fiasconaro recalled that there had been a "lack of mental discipline and seriousness of some of the singers". Other singers he described as professional, admitting that there were some "wonderful" voices. However, he ascribed this "lack of seriousness about opera" to the knowledge shared by the performers that in the South Africa of their day, they would never be able to fully reach their potential. Fiasconaro had yet another problem with the group, in that the media praised them excessively, in his opinion purely as a political ploy. The media compliments, he said, gave them the idea they were too talented to attend rehearsals. Furthermore, he criticised Manca's ambitions for the group, saying they were unrealistic, because by overseas standards the Eoan Group was "extremely poor".³⁹⁷

In 1975, the Eoan Group performed its last opera – Verdi's *La traviata*, which was also their first opera and the one they were best known for. This was the end of opera for the Eoan Group, although the group still exists today in the Joseph Stone Auditorium in Athlone. It is unclear exactly why the group stopped performing opera, but members attribute it to internal squabbles.³⁹⁸ In a sense, the demise of the Eoan Group also meant the end of amateurism in opera in the Cape.

The National Party government announced the establishment of the provincial arts councils on 12 June 1962, when the dissolution of the National Theatre Organisation was announced in Parliament. Within each council separate committees for opera, music, ballet and theatre would be set up to take responsibility for productions.³⁹⁹ In 1963, the arts councils started functioning – one in each of the four former South African provinces and one in the then South West Africa, now Namibia. Cape Town was the main base for the Cape Performing Arts Board, or CAPAB, with an opera section that focused mainly on the standard Italian and German repertoire.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁷ Fiasconaro, 1982:70-71.

³⁹⁸ Eoan History Project, 2013:228-235.

³⁹⁹ Dommissie, 2001:136.

⁴⁰⁰ Mears *et al*, 2001.

During the 1960s, Cape Town was well served by a variety of opera activities. Besides big national tours, presented by African Theatres, the University of Cape Town Opera Company continued their regular opera performances at the Little Theatre; the Eoan Group performed their opera seasons at the City Hall; and in that decade the Performing Arts Councils were formed – a move Gobbato has called a “major event that shaped South African operatic history”.⁴⁰¹ CAPAB’s first opera, Smetana’s *The bartered bride*, was staged in the Alhambra in February 1965. In the first five years of the existence of the provincial arts councils, an average of three operas and/or operettas were performed by each of the councils. Later, CAPAB staged eight to ten opera productions per year.⁴⁰² Often the CAPAB opera company (like the other arts divisions at CAPAB), would tour the province as “Opera for All”, staging scenes or excerpts from operas.⁴⁰³

The arts councils provided a stable income and full-time employment for only white artists, which in effect transformed artists’ “trades” into professions. Although the arts councils amalgamated arts organisations and channelled arts funding, their founding was also the result of the government’s awareness of the cultural needs of the white population. The arts councils were indeed established to serve sectional Afrikaner interests.⁴⁰⁴ They gave the National Party government a means to appropriate Western European art forms such as opera as part of Afrikaner culture, showing that Afrikaners had attained a certain level of sophistication and that the culture of Afrikaners was deeply rooted in that of Europe (where the arts is fully funded by the state). During the 1970s and 1980s, the arts councils thrived and was well funded, but not necessarily because the government had any interest in the arts; rather it was a means to demonstrate to the world and “to persuade white South Africans” that the country was “civilised”.⁴⁰⁵

According to Roos, the government of the day did not control the arts councils, and the councils were merely a means of providing structured support for the arts. She does, however, state that the Ministers of Cultural Affairs during that time appointed the

⁴⁰¹ Coetzee-Klingler, 2012.

⁴⁰² Roos, 2010:54.

⁴⁰³ Coetzee-Klingler, 2012.

⁴⁰⁴ Raditlhalo, 2012:589.

⁴⁰⁵ Allison, J. 2010. “Worlds apart”. *Opera News*, 74(11):34-36, May 2010.

management of each arts council.⁴⁰⁶ Editor of *Scenaria* magazine, Julius Eichbaum, writes that the directors of arts councils were often “susceptible to the whims of politicians”, because these politicians controlled the budgets of the arts councils.⁴⁰⁷ No operas exploring African indigenous culture were staged during this time. Roos points out the irony of the apartheid government’s ambitions towards funding and creating European (or Western) art to express apartheid ideology, only to encounter international cultural boycotts that isolated South Africa culturally rather than build the country’s ties with Europe.⁴⁰⁸ Although many overseas singers travelled to South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s to perform here, many others refused, while funding from abroad was difficult to source.⁴⁰⁹

The Eoan Group continued its seasons in Cape Town and functioned separately as an opera company to CAPAB until its opera activities ended in 1975. Because of apartheid legislation, the arts councils could employ only white singers and perform to white audiences, which left Eoan singers with no operatic home.⁴¹⁰ At the start of the 1980s, coloured people were allowed as chorus singers at CAPAB, but black people were not able to receive training as opera singers, let alone perform on an opera stage. Soprano Virginia Davids, currently professor of singing at the University of Cape Town, was the first singer of colour to play a lead role for CAPAB, namely the title role in Verdi’s *Aida* in 1988.

With the arrival of a new democratic dispensation in the 1990s, opera was also in transition, with black performers given chances to sing in CAPAB’s opera company. The arts councils were officially disbanded in June 2000 by the then Minister of Arts, Culture and Science and Technology, Dr Ben Ngubane, due to the particularly slow transformation in “Eurocentric art forms”.⁴¹¹ When CAPAB was dissolved, a non-profit section-21 company, the Cape Town Opera Company, was established in 1999.⁴¹² Today, it is the only opera company to produce operas in Cape Town, with some productions in conjunction with the University of Cape Town’s Opera School.

⁴⁰⁶ Roos, 2010:134.

⁴⁰⁷ Eichbaum, J. 1982. “Should our arts councils be restructured?”. *Scenaria*, 29:23, January 1982.

⁴⁰⁸ Roos, 2010:193.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid*: 192

⁴¹⁰ Roos, 2010:51.

⁴¹¹ Dommissie, 2001:296.

⁴¹² Gobbato, 2011.

Cape Town Opera is Southern Africa's first independent professional opera company.⁴¹³ It was born out of a necessity to ensure that opera survives in Cape Town as the art form was viewed as part of the city's cultural identity. Michael Williams, former CEO of Cape Town Opera, recounts an emergency meeting in 1996 at Gobbato's home with role-players interested in saving opera after the government had announced that the funding for the provincials arts councils would be phased out over the next three years and the councils would cease to exist. In 1999, Cape Town Opera was registered as a section-21 company, and the CTO Training Trust registered as a section-18(a) company. Williams attributes the company's success in its first ten years to its relationships with its close partners, of which the Artscape Theatre Complex and the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra are among the most important. Funding from the Western Cape Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport and the National Lotteries Distribution Trust Fund has been essential to the company's operations.

The choral training programmes, started in the 1990s by Gobbato as part of CAPAB, evolved into a permanent opera chorus providing full-time employment. Its training arm is the CTO Studio, which provides training and performance opportunities to young soloists. Although standard Italian opera remains part of the company's repertoire, it has become the opera company that has produced the most indigenous operatic works in the history of opera in South Africa. There has also been an increase in the production of musicals by this company. These performances (most of them abroad) constitute a departure from past practices.⁴¹⁴

For some years now, the Cape Town Opera Company has had international networks that are eager to invite a group of black opera singers to perform, among them in Berlin, Nuremberg, Oslo, Malmö, Cardiff and Monte Carlo.⁴¹⁵ The collaboration with these companies has also led to the composition of new works, notably *Poet & Prophetess*, an opera staged in conjunction with NorrlandsOperan. It is clear from looking at the company's list of productions since its inception that the number of operas staged in Cape Town has decreased, while an increasing number of productions toured to other countries. This could

⁴¹³ Coetzee-Klingler, 2012.

⁴¹⁴ Williams, M. 2009. Programme Notes. *Cape Town Opera, Tenth Anniversary Gala Concert*, 19 April 2009.

⁴¹⁵ Allison, 2010:36.

possibly be attributed to budgetary constraints in South Africa, compared to the more lucrative option of being contracted by a foreign opera company.

In recent years, the Isango Ensemble has made an impact on Cape Town's opera scene, starting with an "Africanised" production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (*Impempe Yomlingo*, 2007), as well as isiXhosa film versions of Bizet's *Carmen* (*U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, 2005) and Puccini's *La Bohème* (*Breathe – Umphefumlo*, 2015). A smaller company, Umcolo (founded in 2010), has performed smaller works (often semi-professional productions) with schoolchildren and young opera singers in Cape Town and Johannesburg, with a particular focus on educational productions.

Following the historical trajectory of the establishment of opera societies, organisations and companies, it is evident that these structures ensured a space where opera activities could be formalised and thereby professionalised. How these structures were formed also reveals thinking directed towards formalisation and transforming opera into an industry providing employment. The initial societies and organisations were more informal and members' aims were merely to mobilise support for opera and possibly raise money to stage productions. With the establishment of the provincial arts councils, the opera industry became an employer due to it being fully state funded. This funding, however, made the councils political acquiescent and their loss of artistic independence compromised the projects they launched, including the operas they staged. Today, Cape Town Opera functions fairly independently, mostly guided in their choices regarding production by their budget constraints. In a sense, the private corporate structure of opera companies in South Africa today ensures a further level of professionalization where the arts and political forces exist in a less compromising tension.

PART 3

The introduction and dominance of nineteenth-century opera

Along with the expansion of European colonial powers across the world, came the spread of their culture – opera being one of the art forms exported to the colonies. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, contemporary French and Italian opera dominated the operatic scene in Europe, and Paris became a hub of musical culture with its many performance spaces.⁴¹⁶ The French travelling theatre companies, who were the first to stop over at the Cape, brought contemporary repertoire to the city. During most of the nineteenth century, those French and British travelling companies only performed contemporary nineteenth-century operas – from *opéra comique* to grand opera – and no earlier (or historic) operas were staged.

In the 1830s, *opéra comique* was extremely popular with audiences in France, but the genre was injected with an Italian influence, which made it more exportable than previously.⁴¹⁷ This was an era when “Parisian” opera was regarded as an “international style”.⁴¹⁸ As European powers expanded their imperial ambitions during the latter half of the nineteenth-century, opera, and in particular contemporary nineteenth-century Italian opera, started spreading across the world. It was especially the works of Rossini and later Verdi that were performed in countries far away from Europe. By 1850, Italian operas could be heard in North, Central and South America, as well as Australia, India and South Africa.⁴¹⁹

The nineteenth century was marked by opera exploring more romantic or sentimental subject matter and blending some comedy with more serious themes. Rossini’s operas were received well, with the comic operas, like *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, having been continually performed at opera houses since its premiere in 1816, while the serious operas were only revived during the twentieth century. The nineteenth century also became the era when an

⁴¹⁶ Rink, J. 2002. The opera industry, in *The Cambridge history of nineteenth-century music*, J. Samson (ed), p.63.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid*: 109-110.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*: 116.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid*: 88.

operatic repertoire developed, because works were performed several times during a run, and staged again at different opera houses, whereas earlier operas were performed only a few times.⁴²⁰ This started the development of a canon of works.

Opera also came to portray and represent the “exotic” nations in the East, Africa and the New World where the European powers had invaded countries, ostensibly as a means of showing these far-off worlds to people in Europe. Examples are *Les Huguenots* (Meyerbeer), *Le roi de Lahore* (Massenet), *L’Africaine* (Meyerbeer) and *Aida* (Verdi).⁴²¹ Spurring on the spread of Italian opera was the printing of vocal scores in the latter half of the nineteenth century. With scores that were easily available, performances were possible for a far larger market across the world, especially with the availability of published operatic transcriptions. Although opera did not become popular in our modern sense, it did become a phenomenon worldwide.⁴²² During the first half of the twentieth century, nineteenth-century operas were not particularly fashionable, but later in that century these operas, especially Italian operas, regained popularity. Since the middle of the twentieth century, there has been a revival of the nineteenth-century Italian operas of especially Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and early Verdi, to the extent that this part of the repertoire has eclipsed all other operatic forms, such as the *Singspiel* and *opéra comique*.⁴²³

The first operas that were performed in the Cape were the contemporary works that came from Europe during the nineteenth century, and unlike comic opera, many of the serious operas returned to the repertoire in later years. By the early twentieth century, Cape Town audiences had experienced a wide range of repertoire, which included operas by Wagner, Puccini and Verdi, today perceived as the standard repertoire. These works have become an aesthetic pinnacle of opera within the South African context as benchmarks testing performance standards, aesthetic merit, and as a general standard and value of what “the grandness of opera” means.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid*: 96-99.

⁴²¹ Grey, T. 2002. The opera industry, in *The Cambridge history of nineteenth-century music*, J. Samson (ed), p.393-396.

⁴²² Rink, 2002:88-89.

⁴²³ *Ibid*: 91.

This part of Chapter 2 discusses the repertoire performed in the Cape over a period of two hundred years by different travelling companies and local opera societies and companies in order to explain how nineteenth-century opera came to dominate the local repertoire. Travelling companies from Europe arrived at the Cape to perform contemporary operas and in this way introduced these nineteenth-century works to audiences. Although the specific works changed, nineteenth-century repertoire continued to dominate the repertoire choices of the opera companies that existed throughout the twentieth century in Cape Town.

European travelling companies

When one considers the flourishing state of opera during the nineteenth-century in Europe, it is not surprising that the success theatre companies had experienced with contemporary works there, especially with regard to *opéras comiques*, would be “exported” to the colonies. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Paris seemed to have been the capital of opera in Western Europe, and it was also mostly French travelling companies that visited Cape Town during that time. Although *opéras comiques* were popular, contemporary Italian opera found equal favour with local audiences. This was the repertoire of both professional and amateur companies in Europe, and it was this repertoire that travelling companies from Europe brought to the Cape.

During the 1840s in Cape Town, Italian operas were “in popularity” and Rossini’s operas were “prominent in the repertory”.⁴²⁴ At the time, there were no opera companies in Cape Town to perform these works, but overtures, choirs and arias by Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini, for instance, were included in the programmes of music concerts. Newspapers at the time reported that singers sang arias from contemporary operas, such as Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor*.⁴²⁵ Italian operatic music was also incorporated in theatre, and in 1824, the opera settings by both Rossini and Giovanni Paisiello of Pierre-Augustin Beaumarchais’s *Le barbier de Séville* were used in a performance of this play, translated into Dutch. The aria “Di

⁴²⁴ Bouws, 1966:118.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

tanti palpitti” from Rossini’s *Tancredi* was also heard in a concert performance by the English garrison.⁴²⁶ In the latter part of the nineteenth-century, the British military music corps gave regular performances in the Company Gardens and elsewhere, and often included contemporary opera music that had become well-known in Europe, like that of Verdi, in their performances.

Although there were no regular performances of opera during the first half of the nineteenth-century in the Cape, it seems that operatic music that was popular in Europe found its way into the cultural life of the city through music concerts and theatre performances by travelling groups. In addition, the public seemed to have developed a taste for not only instrumental music, but particularly also for small light operas and ballets. According to Stead the *opéras comiques* were performed in the original French, as had then been the fashion.⁴²⁷ French travelling companies on their way to Mauritius had introduced new French operas to Cape audiences, with the first of these companies visiting the Cape around 1803 to 1806, and the last visiting the city around 1833 when performing arts started to flourish in the Cape.⁴²⁸ By then, typically, comic operas and theatre works were performed in English and French, even after British companies had started touring to the Cape in the latter half of the century. Contemporary composers, of whom some visited the Cape, composed these works, although some of them contained music that was borrowed from other works.⁴²⁹

The many travelling opera and theatre companies brought an array of operetta and comic operas, as well as serious opera to South Africa, and all of them visited the Cape for performances. The Italian Calli Opera Company visited Cape Town in 1876 and performed mostly Italian operas, of which the performances were met with much excitement. Performing mostly operettas and theatre works, the well-known Frank Wheeler’s company travelled to Cape Town and Johannesburg around 1884. The dynamic Luscombe Searelle and his company, who visited the Cape from 1887 onwards, were very prolific, performing

⁴²⁶ Roos, 2010:36.

⁴²⁷ Stead, 1963:9.

⁴²⁸ Malan, 1979-1986:350.

⁴²⁹ Roos, 2010:35-38.

twenty different operas in a year in the Cape, Natal, Transvaal and Rhodesia.⁴³⁰ Wheeler and Searelle presented the same repertoire as that encountered on European opera stages, including works by Sullivan, Verdi and others. The Arthur Rousbey Opera Company visited Cape Town in 1899, performing a Wagner opera for the first time in the city. Among the other popular travelling companies were the D'Oyly Carte Company, the Royal Australian Opera Company, the Carl Rosa Group from London, the Massimini Italian Opera Company and the Quinlan Opera Company.

Local companies performed contemporary operas too. All the World's a Stage was the first local company to present a serious opera, Weber's *Der Freischütz*, in 1831.⁴³¹ Other companies included the Musical and Dramatic Society of Woodstock, which staged Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* in 1887.⁴³² In 1889, the Verdi Opera Company was established in Cape Town. An amateur group, called the Cape Town Operatic and Dramatic Society, had success with *The Gondoliers*, also by Gilbert and Sullivan, in March 1911.

The repertoire of the touring companies that travelled between the middle of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, consisted of about fifty-five operettas and comic operas, and a total of twenty-nine serious operas from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is clear that during that time the emphasis was on popular and lighter music.⁴³³ The travelling companies often performed Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, notably popular ones such as *HMS Pinafore*, *The pirates of Penzance*, *The Mikado*, and *The yeoman of the guard*. Offenbach's operettas too were popular, for example *Madame Favart*, *The grand duchess of Geroldstein*, and *La Périchole*. Although Gilbert and Sullivan's works were popular, a larger variety of French operetta was performed. Furthermore, Searelle's company performed five of his own compositions: *Estrella*, *Bobadil*, *Isadore*, *The wreck of the Pinafore*, and *The kisses of Circe*. From Malan's list, it is evident that contemporary operettas and comic operas of the time (nineteenth

⁴³⁰ Stead, 1963:10-13.

⁴³¹ Bouws, 1966:153.

⁴³² Stead, 1963:14.

⁴³³ Malan, 1979-1986:362.

century) were performed regularly and one can surmise that it had a favourable reception with audiences because performances were repeated consistently.

During this time, the travelling companies also performed serious contemporary nineteenth-century operas. In Malan's list of the twenty-nine serious operas that these companies brought to the Cape, the oldest work is Daniel Auber's *Fra Diavolo*, which was first performed in 1830 in Paris. Most of the operas performed were composed by Verdi, Donizetti and Bellini, and the list includes, among others, Verdi's *Il trovatore*, *Rigoletto* and *Un ballo in maschera*; Bellini's *La sonnambula* and *Norma*; and Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. In later years, Puccini's operas *La bohème* and *La fanciulla del West* were also staged, respectively sixteen and two years after these works had their world premieres. Among the French operas, Gounod's *Faust* and Bizet's *Carmen* were then also popular, while Wagner operas came into the repertoire at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴³⁴ In fact, as part of the Wagner Centenary in 1913, the Quinlan Opera Company held a Wagner festival in Cape Town and Johannesburg, performing *Die Walküre* (sung in English), *Tristan und Isolde*, *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. The festival was of great significance and much anticipated, because in the weeks leading up to the performances, a Capetonian from Yorkshire, Ramsden Balmforth, presented a series of lectures on Wagner's work at the Free Protestant Church (or Unitarian Church) on Sunday evenings.⁴³⁵

In Malan, the list of works performed by the travelling companies who visited South Africa shows that the operas they had performed in this country had all been between thirty and forty years old by then, and some of the composers of these works were still living and creating new operas. In the case of Verdi and Puccini, the timespan between their operas' first performances and their staging in South Africa was shorter. The focus of these travelling companies must therefore have been on contemporary operas, and Malan does not list any operas dating from previous centuries. It would seem that the operas from the

⁴³⁴ Malan, 1979-1986:358-359.

⁴³⁵ Hale, 2013:60.

Classical and Baroque eras only came into the repertoire once local opera companies had been established in the Cape during the first half of the twentieth century.

The introduction of serious opera to this country in the nineteenth century had been through the music of the contemporary composers of that time. As with most opera companies in the world, these operas remained in the repertoire of the opera companies that were later formed in South Africa. Nineteenth-century operas, and mostly Italian operas, still dominate the repertoire of all South African opera companies. Although nineteenth-century opera is still most often performed today across the world, it is an interesting fact that the repertoire first introduced in South Africa became and remained the dominated repertoire.

The South African College of Music and UCT Opera Company

Formal music training had started at the beginning of the twentieth century in Cape Town and by the 1920s, local singers were able to receive vocal training here. The South African College of Music (SACM) had been incorporated into the University of Cape Town in 1923, although the UCT Opera Company would only be established in 1951, and the UCT Opera School in 1954. However, as part of the vocal training, the SACM began staging operas in 1929. While the SACM and later the UCT Opera Company made huge contributions to the performance of nineteenth-century repertoire, and in particular Italian repertoire, it staged a diverse range of works. Along with lesser-known operas, many South African operas and works with small casts were staged. Talbot provides an extensive list of the operas performed by the SACM from 1929 until 1978.⁴³⁶ The detailed list gives dates and full cast lists, including the conductor, producer and/or director, and the venue.

The first opera production the SACM staged in 1929 was a nineteenth-century Italian opera, Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. It was only four years after this first opera that the College produced its next opera, Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto*. Thereafter, it staged at least one opera per year, but in most cases, there had been more than one production. The standard

⁴³⁶ Talbot, 1978:156-175.

Italian repertoire was often repeated several times over the course of fifty years, notably Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, Puccini's *Tosca* and *Turandot*, Verdi's *Falstaff*, and Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Among the other Italian works staged were Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, Bellini's *La sonnambula*, Puccini's *La bohème*, and in the early years Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*. The only German operas listed are Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*. (It is unclear whether these were actually performed in German, because the role names and titles are given in English.) A number of English-language operas were performed, especially the works of Menotti, including *The telephone*, *The medium* and *The consul*.

Many of the operas in the SACM's repertoire were ensemble works and lesser-known operas but they were suited for opera students and small casts, such as Mozart's *Der Schauspieldirektor* and *Bastien und Bastienne*, Pergolesi's *La serva padrona*, Puccini's *Sour Angelica*, Menotti's *Amahl and the night visitors*, Bartók's *Bluebeard's castle*, and Arne's *The cooper*. The repertoire suggests that the choices were based on suitable music for young singers and the availability of certain voice types.

Operas by local composers were staged too, and among them are the world premieres of John Joubert's *Silas Marner* in 1961 and three of Erik Chisholm's operas.⁴³⁷ Apart from work by Chisholm, who was employed by the SACM, operas by the College's founder, William Henry Bell, were also performed. Bell conducted the 1934 performance of his opera *Hatsuyuki*, as well as two of his other operas, *The wandering scholar* and *The pillow of kantan*, in 1935. In 1952, Chisholm's *Dark sonnet* was staged, with the composer as conductor and the production directed by Gregorio Fiasconaro. The following year Chisholm's *The inland women* had its premiere. Another local composer, Péter-Louis van Dijk, had his opera, *The contract*, premiered by the SACM in 1973, followed by another of his operas, *Die noodsein* (The emergency signal), in 1975.

The company was prolific and its range of repertoire is only matched by the work currently done by Cape Town Opera. Besides the UCT Opera Company's regular seasons, it also undertook several tours across the country, as well as to Zimbabwe and Namibia. The

⁴³⁷ Mears *et al*, 2001.

company's first tour was in April 1952 through the Eastern and Western Cape, visiting Port Elizabeth, King William's Town, Umtata, Queenstown, as well as Worcester, Paarl and Stellenbosch, among others. Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, Pergolesi's *La serva padrona*, and Menotti's *The telephone* and *The medium* were performed. Its second major tour to four Zimbabwean cities consisted of six operas – besides the mentioned Pergolesi and Menotti operas, also Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, Wolf-Ferrari's *Il segreto di Susanna* and Chisholm's *Dark sonnet*. A tour to London and Glasgow was undertaken in 1956/1957 and to Lusaka and Kitwe, as well as South African cities such as Bloemfontein, Kimberley, Johannesburg and Pretoria. Regular performances were also held in Paarl and Stellenbosch.

With these tours, the UCT Opera Company's reach had been significantly extended and their diverse repertoire exposed their audiences to a wide range of local and sometimes obscure operas. However, most of its repertoire consisted of Italian works by Puccini, Verdi and Mozart. Talbot, who was a lecturer at UCT, became well known for her portrayal of Puccini's *Tosca*, and this work was performed often in Cape Town. Because staff members of UCT were involved in the productions as conductors, directors and singers, and because works had to be chosen for student training, the UCT Opera Company was able to stage a diverse repertoire, which in other circumstances would probably not have drawn audiences. Balancing this repertoire with the standard Italian repertoire made the company popular with audiences. As a case in point, Talbot quotes Ruth Thackery in an article in *The Argus* as saying that, "if you put on *Bohème*, *Butterfly* or *Traviata*, even with fifth-rate singers, you can be sure Capetonians will flock to them. Sad but true." These Italian operas always received capacity audiences, "because Cape Town seldom goes to see operas which it does not know".⁴³⁸

Opera societies

Although the four opera societies established in South Africa – the National Opera Association of South Africa, Opera Society of South Africa, South African Opera Federation,

⁴³⁸ Talbot, 1978:143.

and the Pretoria Opera Group – mainly focused on staging operas in the northern provinces of South Africa, their reach also extended to the Cape. All these societies performed predominantly nineteenth-century Italian and German opera, with Verdi's *La Traviata* and Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* being two of the first operas it staged. Between 1957 and 1962, the National Opera Association performed, among others, Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, Verdi's *Un ballo un maschera* and Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*. Many of the works were performed in English and Afrikaans, and were staged in Johannesburg, Kroonstad, Benoni, Rustenburg and Kimberley.⁴³⁹

The Opera Society – Malan does not list any of the works they performed – undertook concert tours to rural districts where they presented extracts from operas in costume. The company started presenting full-length operas from 1958, mostly in towns and cities on the Witwatersrand. It ended its activities in 1963 when the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT) was established. In the first year of staging operas, 1958, the Opera Federation presented nineteenth-century works such as Verdi's *La traviata*, Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* in Afrikaans, and Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, along with the South African composer John Joubert's *In die droogte*. Over the next five years, it staged more Italian repertoire from the nineteenth century, often in Afrikaans translation.

At the same time, the Pretoria Opera Group was active, performing mostly nineteenth-century operas such as Leoncavallo's *I pagliacci*, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, as well as Bizet's *Carmen*. The group performed these operas alternatively in Afrikaans and English. Although these opera societies only existed for between five and seven years, they produced regular performances of mostly nineteenth-century operas, thereby contributing to the dominance of this repertoire. Because most of the operas were performed in Afrikaans or English, these societies added to this repertoire's popularity among its audiences.

⁴³⁹ Malan, 1979-1986:312.

The Eoan Group

For the Eoan Group's amateur singers who had little, if any, musical training, not much knowledge of opera and no understanding of the Italian language, conquering Italian opera was a triumph. The factory workers and labourers found themselves in foreign territory when they sang grand opera night after night on the stage of Cape Town's City Hall. Indeed, Badenhorst describes their "unprecedented achievement" as being able to learn songs in a foreign language, to act and sing simultaneously on stage, and do that with expression.⁴⁴⁰ While those criteria are what one would expect of any South African (or non-Italian) opera singer regardless of pigmentation, the Eoan Group was a fascinating phenomenon within the cultural and political contexts during which it had its greatest operatic successes from the 1950s up until the 1970s.

By the time the group had tackled Verdi's *La traviata* in 1956 for their first performance of an opera, Italian opera (especially works from the nineteenth century) had already had a performance history in South Africa. Joseph Manca, an amateur musician, was the choirmaster of the Eoan Group, and his Italian roots may explain why the group took on Italian opera and specifically an opera by Verdi to be its introduction as an opera company to Cape Town audiences. One must keep in mind that at the time the University of Cape Town Opera Company, consisting mostly of students and some singing teachers, was the only other full-time company staging opera in the city. Manca was described as strict, controlling, excellent, kind, down-to-earth and clever by Eoan singers.⁴⁴¹ He was a man with much ambition for the group to achieve great musical heights, but he also had personal ambition, which was rewarded by, among other achievements, an honorary doctorate in music from the University of Cape Town.⁴⁴²

The Eoan Group's emphasis was on Italian repertoire, and mostly works from the nineteenth century. After the success of the first arts festival in 1956, the Eoan Group had ten additional opera seasons over the next nineteen years during which mostly nineteenth-century Italian operas were staged – works by Verdi (*La traviata*, *Il trovatore*,

⁴⁴⁰ Badenhorst, 1963:30.

⁴⁴¹ Eoan History Project, 2013:50-56.

⁴⁴² Badenhorst, 1963:29.

Rigoletto), Puccini (*Madama Butterfly*, *La bohème*), Rossini (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Mascagni (*Cavalleria rusticana*), Leoncavallo (*I pagliacci*), and Donizetti (*L'elisir d'amore*). In their second arts festival Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* was added to the company's repertoire – the only German work they performed.⁴⁴³

Having performed these composers' works, which form the bulk of standard Italian opera repertoire, the Eoan Group had perpetuated the dominance of nineteenth-century opera in the Cape. Roos argues that the acceptance of Italian opera by the Eoan Group as “a site of music-making, self-confirmation and shared humanity” is an example of the indigenisation of Italian opera and of making it a South African genre. Indigenisation, she continues, does not only constitute concrete changes to a foreign work, but by merely performing and accepting Italian opera, Eoan made Italian opera an indigenised South African practice.⁴⁴⁴ In contradistinction, Roos argues that CAPAB's productions of Italian opera cannot be viewed as indigenisation as they were associated with apartheid elitism and high culture. Both these arguments could be made differently, of course. Eoan's acceptance and performance of Italian opera could also be described less laudably as a form of cultural appropriation and a manifestation of Stockholm syndrome, whereas CAPAB was created by apartheid precisely to indigenise opera – that is if one accepts that white descendants of Europeans (many of them having been in South Africa for many generations) indeed continued the cultural traditions of their European ancestors.

Having staged a number of dance productions since 1937, as well as choir concerts since 1943, the Eoan Group put on their first complete operetta, *A slave in Araby* (composer unknown), in the Cape Town City Hall in 1949. Seven years later, on 10 March 1956, and during the group's first arts festival, it staged its first full-scale opera, *La traviata*. The performance was a great success, and seemed to have ensured that the Eoan Group was now seen as a fully-fledged opera company, albeit a company of amateur singers. *La traviata* would make a comeback in 1958 when the group presented its Second Opera and Ballet Season, held from 10 to 22 March. Added to the repertoire was Mascagni's *Cavalleria*

⁴⁴³ Eoan History Project. 2013:124-130.

⁴⁴⁴ Roos, 2010:151-152.

rusticana. The next year a third opera and ballet season was held, this time with Verdi's *Rigoletto* added to their opera repertoire.

Another year later, in 1960, the Eoan Group had learned an additional Italian opera for the fourth opera and ballet season, Puccini's *La bohème*. At this festival *La traviata*, *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Rigoletto* was also on the programme. In 1962, the fifth opera season saw Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* as new additions to the repertoire. Yet another two nineteenth-century Italian works were added in 1965 during the sixth opera season, Verdi's *Il trovatore* and Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*. For the Fifth Anniversary Republic Festival in 1966, Eoan repeated *La traviata*, which it also did for its seventh opera season, along with *L'elisir d'amore* and *Madama Butterfly*.

It was only in 1969 that they again added new repertoire, again a nineteenth-century Italian opera, namely *Il barbiere di Siviglia* by Rossini. For the group's ninth opera season in 1971, Leoncavallo's *I pagliacci* was included and performed, as is the tradition, along with Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*, which the group had performed for the first time in 1958. The year 1971 was also the tenth anniversary of the Republic of South Africa, and for this occasion, the group was again requested to stage an opera. This time it was *Rigoletto* for an audience consisting only of coloured people. In 1974 and 1975, the Eoan Group performed its last opera seasons, staging respectively Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Verdi's *La traviata*. Performing *La traviata* as their last opera completed a performance circle for the Eoan Group, as this was also their first opera.

With eight nineteenth-century Italian operas in their repertoire, the Eoan Group contributed significantly to the dominance of this repertoire in the performance history of opera in Cape Town. The group's acceptance of nineteenth-century opera and their acceptance of the cultural ambitions of the National Party government was not without controversy. Eoan Group members were criticised by some in the coloured community because the group accepted funding from the apartheid government and implicitly accepted laws regarding racial segregation by applying for permits to perform for segregated audiences. In 1957, however, the group rejected government funding, but it did accept this funding over the next decade. Furthermore, the group's performance at the Republic Anniversaries in 1966 and 1971, a celebration of an achievement of the apartheid government, can be perceived

as supporting the objectives of that government, against whom a resistance was by then quite active within the coloured community.

In this way, nineteenth-century Italian opera served as a vehicle for acceptance by the National Party government, and it was a means of assimilation with the dominant Western European culture that undergirded apartheid ideology. The Eoan Group's contribution to the dominance of this repertoire is that it continued a performance tradition and practice that had its roots in colonial times. Seen as such, it was (unintentionally) complicit with the programme of Afrikaner nationalism to uphold cultural links to Europe. By choosing to perform this repertoire at political events such as the Republic Anniversaries and complying with restrictions regarding segregated audiences, the Eoan Group attempted to assimilate with the dominant white culture of the era.

CAPAB Opera

Although CAPAB Opera's first stage production was the Czech composer Smetana's *The bartered bride*, the opera company's emphasis over the next forty years was on the standard Italian and German repertoire from the nineteenth century.⁴⁴⁵ During the first twenty years of CAPAB's existence, it performed predominantly Italian repertoire.⁴⁴⁶ In fact, Italian opera dominated the repertoire of all four provincial arts councils until the late 1980s, with works of Rossini, Verdi, Puccini, Bellini and Donizetti performed most often. German operas by Mozart, Wagner and Richard Strauss were the second most performed operas, while Bizet's *Carmen* was staged regularly and was popular with audiences.⁴⁴⁷ In 1988, 75% of all operas performed in South Africa were from the standard Italian repertoire. It is not at all out of the ordinary; South African statistics relating to Italian opera were similar to that of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York at the time.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁵ Mears *et al*, 2001.

⁴⁴⁶ Roos, 2010:54.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid*: 57

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid*: 229-231.

Until 1971, CAPAB Opera staged its productions at the Alhambra Theatre, and when the company moved into their new home, the Nico Malan Theatre Complex, their choice fell on an Italian opera, Verdi's *Aida*, for the opening performance. During the rest of the 1970s, Verdi's operas were performed most often, along with other nineteenth-century Italian works of Donizetti and Rossini. What stands out during this period is Offenbach's *opéra bouffe*, *La périchole*, which had its world premiere on 6 October 1868 at the Théâtre des Variétés in Paris and is set in Lima, Peru. CAPAB Opera staged this opera in 1975 and 1977. Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* was also performed both in 1976 and 1978.

With the appointment of Murray Dicky – who moved from Vienna, where he had been singing for thirty years – in 1982, CAPAB Opera's repertoire expanded, especially concerning the works of Wagner. Dicky was responsible for developing singers from chorus members to principal singers, as well as employing the company's first two coloured soloists, Virginia Davids and Sidwell Hartman, who had been young members of the Eoan Group. The Eoan Group's last opera performance had been in 1975, and many of the singers had nowhere to continue their careers. In 1980, CAPAB Opera decided to employ many of these singers as chorus members. They remained in the chorus, and it would only be in 1988 that Virginia Davids became the first singer of colour to perform a principal role, the title role in Verdi's *Aida*, for CAPAB Opera.

From the list of works performed during Dicky's tenure, it is clear that there was an emphasis on Mozart operas, as well as German opera, notably Wagner operas. Among these German works were Wagner's *Die Walküre*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, as well as Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*. During this time, more Puccini operas were also staged than in the previous decade. Barring a few exceptions – like Nicolai's *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor*, Britten's *The turn of the screw* and Richard Strauss's *Der Zigeunerbaron* – the company's repertoire during the 1980s consisted of only standard Italian and German operas, which CAPAB opera had already performed in earlier years. The 1980s began with CAPAB Opera reportedly having financial difficulties.⁴⁴⁹ Looking at the repertoire performed during this time, it would seem that “safe choices” were made.

⁴⁴⁹ Eichbaum, 1981:3.

The majority of the operas staged would have been familiar works to Cape Town audiences, as by then they had had a performance history of at least ten years. With these repertoire choices, the chances of attracting a paying audience would be better.

With the demise of apartheid and the associated socio-political changes in South Africa in the 1990s, this decade would bring an array of changes for CAPAB Opera, and by the end of the decade, the opera company would cease to exist. Whether planned or not, the performance of Beethoven's "freedom" opera, *Fidelio*, in January 1990 seems rather serendipitous, as only a few weeks later, on 11 February 1990, Nelson Mandela was freed after serving twenty seven years as a political prisoner.⁴⁵⁰ This only opera of Beethoven would in later years become a symbol for the celebration of South Africa's democratic transition. Four years later, on 27 April 1994, the country's first free elections were held, and in the same month, CAPAB Opera again staged *Fidelio*.

The opera company's emphasis on nineteenth-century Italian repertoire, however, continued into the 1990s, with some lesser-known works such as Offenbach's *La belle Hélène*, Britten's *Peter Grimes* and Menotti's *The consul* also staged. Two anniversaries were held with performances of a series of the relevant composers' operas. In 1991, Mozart's death two hundred years earlier was commemorated with the composer's operas *Così fan tutti*, *Don Giovanni*, *Die Zauberflöte* and *Le nozze di Figaro* staged between July and November. The next year, Rossini's birth in 1792 was celebrated with the performance of three of his operas, *Wilhelm Tell*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *Il Turco in Italia*.

Before 1994, the arts councils did not commission any local opera compositions – the first locally composed opera performed by an arts council was Roelof Temmingh's *Enoch, prophet of God*, which CAPAB Opera staged in February 1995.⁴⁵¹ The opera is significant, because for two centuries, opera flourished in South Africa without any tangible reference

⁴⁵⁰ A body of literature exists on Beethoven's *Fidelio* as a political opera performed for political celebrations, especially in Germany. In this regard, see: Bokina, J. 1997. *Opera and Politics: From Monteverdi to Henze*. Yale University Press, United States of America. Bokina, J. 1991. "Opera and Republican Virtue: Beethoven's 'Fidelio'". *International Political Science Review*, 12(2), p.101–116, April 1991. Cerf, S.R. 1993. "Fidelio, Ideology and the Cold War". *Opera News*, p.20–22, 11 December 1993. Dennis, D.B. 1996. *Beethoven in German Politics, 1870–1989*. Yale University Press, United States of America. Lockwood, L. 2006. "Beethoven's Leonore and Fidelio". *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 36(3), p.473–482, Winter 2006. Meyer, S. 2002. "Terror and transcendence in the operatic prison, 1790–1815". *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 55(3), p.477–423, Fall 2002.

⁴⁵¹ Roos, 2010:60.

to indigenous cultures.⁴⁵² The opera's libretto was written by Michael Williams and revolves around the Bulhoek massacre of 1921 in the Eastern Cape. This true story is of an evangelist called Enoch Mgijima, who led a cult whose members named themselves the Israelites. He prophesied that the end of world was upon them and the followers should dispose of their belongings and stop working. After government intervention in their occupation of farmland, the police moved in and killed 200 members. Temmingh's opera would be the first to draw its libretto from an indigenous African story and be staged in Cape Town. Temmingh followed *Enoch, prophet of God*, with another indigenous story in *Sacred Bones* in 1997, and *Buchuland* in 1998 (which was only staged in Pretoria). While the composition of local opera, especially with libretti based on stories from previously ignored histories, has enriched the opera landscape of Cape Town, the performance lifespan of the works was short-lived. Most of these operas composed by South Africans and performed in Cape Town only had one season on stage.⁴⁵³

By 1996, CAPAB Opera's choral training programme, established by Angelo Gobbato to train young black singers to perform with the CAPAB opera chorus, had already delivered a number of soloists who could perform leading roles. Because of the great number of black opera singers, CAPAB Opera was for the first time in the history of opera in South Africa able to perform Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, because the composer had stipulated that only black singers may perform the lead roles. Over the next twenty years, this opera became one of Cape Town Opera's signature productions to be staged abroad in, among other countries, France, Germany and Argentina.

In the latter half of the 1990s, state funding for opera decreased each year, and by June 2000 all the provincial arts councils had been disbanded and CAPAB Opera ceased to exist. The company's contribution to the dominance of nineteenth-century opera in Cape Town was enormous, as this was their staple repertoire. For the most part of its existence, CAPAB Opera introduced only a few new operas, even lesser known works by the "great masters", and its focus remained on repertoire familiar to the local audience. While this focus on

⁴⁵² *Ibid*: 149.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid*: 71.

Western European operas suited the socio-political contexts of its first thirty years of existence, it also informed its demise once the new ANC government came into power.

This, coupled with the difficulties of securing government funding for opera, makes it clear that CAPAB, and the other arts councils, were impractical structures within a new dispensation where arts funding was not exclusively channelled towards the promotion of Western European art forms. It was evident that drastic changes regarding new funding models and associated changes in repertoire were necessary for opera's survival. This realisation prompted Angelo Gobbato to hold a meeting in his lounge and discuss the future of opera in Cape Town with role-players. In 1999, a new opera company, The Cape Town Opera Company, opened its doors and in many ways changed the course of the performance history of opera in the city.

Cape Town Opera

In 2009, Cape Town Opera celebrated its tenth year with a gala concert in the Artscape Opera House, their home since the company's inception. In the event's glossy programme booklet, the company listed all its productions – both those performed in Cape Town and abroad – and it shows a diverse repertoire. What is striking is a list of indigenous works that the company staged in its ten years – a list that ten years earlier would have consisted of two operas, but in 2009 claimed eleven productions (both operas and musicals), and between 2009 and 2015 another four indigenous works. It is evidence of a major shift towards the inclusion of local compositions, a step that during the 1980s and early 1990s would possibly have been frowned upon because it was an era when the works of the “great masters” had priority. However, this is not to say that Cape Town Opera did not continue to contribute to the dominance of nineteenth-century opera.

In its first year, Cape Town Opera performed seven standard-repertoire operas: *Le nozze di Figaro* (Mozart), *Madama Butterfly* (Puccini), *L'elisir d'amore* (Donizetti), *Carmen* (Bizet), *Aida* (Verdi), *Hänsel und Gretel* (Humperdinck), and *Elektra* (Richard Strauss). Apart from *Le nozze di Figaro*, all the other operas were by nineteenth-century composers and would have been known to Cape Town audiences because they had been performed in earlier years.

Although the casts had changed from predominantly white singers to predominantly black singers, according to Gobbato the choice of repertoire remained based on the quality of the available voices and their ability to sing and interpret the roles and operas.⁴⁵⁴ However, the new voices had given the company the possibilities to explore new repertoire and create new work for the available singers.

In its second year, Cape Town Opera staged its first local opera, a new work, *Amarantha*, by the Hungarian-South African composer Thomas Rajna. The libretto was based on a short story by an American author, Wilbur Daniel Steel, and is set in the 1930s in the American state Virginia. It tells of a murderer who falls in love with a girl called Amarantha and kidnaps her. Although this opera was not based on an indigenous story, it was the first of a series of operas by local composers staged almost annually. In this way, Cape Town Opera changed the course of the local performance tradition. While in the previous thirty years, local opera received little attention, if at all, its role in the new socio-political dispensation changed in that it became all the more important for the company to showcase local works and thereby ensure that it identified itself as an essential part of local opera production.

Along with a move towards local opera compositions based on indigenous stories, Cape Town Opera also embraced expanded styles of theatre music. In earlier years, only operas in the style of Western classical music were performed, but musical theatre in other styles were now also created. Denzil Weale's jazz opera, *Love and green onions*, in 2001 was a means of including new styles of music in the opera company's repertoire. This work was based on local novelist Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* and was first performed at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown before it had a run at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town. The music included indigenous styles such as kwela, kwaito and marabi songs, and it combined singing by a jazz and an opera singer.

While there had been, by 2001, a trend towards localising standard repertoire operas by setting them in a local milieu, the adaptations mostly related to the dramatization of the opera and not the musical essence. But with Cape Town Opera's production of Verdi's *Macbeth*, composer Péter-Louis van Dijk adapted the music to fit an Africanised version of

⁴⁵⁴ Coetzee-Klingler, 2012.

the opera, directed by Brett Bailey. In 2007, this version of *Macbeth* was staged again as *macbEth: the opera*. Van Dijk was also involved in the composition of *earthdiving*, an opera to which Martin Phipps and Mokale Koapeng contributed music and which was staged in 2003. Two new local operas were presented in 2005, Thomas Rajna's *Valley Song* and Hans Huyssen's *Masque*, both addressing cross-cultural relations in the new South Africa. *Valley song*, based on a play by Athol Fugard, tells the story of a young coloured woman who was raised by a white farmer in the Karoo. *Masque* combines classical, African and baroque ensembles in its scoring, coupled with a cast of European and African singers and masked dancers to portray arts in a multi-cultural setting. Alan Stephenson's *The orphans of Qumbu*, a mini-opera with a libretto by Michael Williams, was stage in 2007, and it too addressed themes of oppression, negotiation and liberation – themes that seem to resonate with an audience in the new South Africa.

Stories about the country were also explored in Mats Larsson Gothe's *Poet and Prophetess*, for which Michael Williams wrote the libretto. Its story combines two real-life figures in Swedish and Xhosa history. The story revolves around a fictitious meeting between the 19-year-old Swedish poet Bengt Lidner and the Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse (renamed Jula, a slave girl) on board the vessel Terra Nova sailing around the Cape of Good Hope. Nelson Mandela's life was the subject of *Mandela Songbook*, a work combining different musical styles and consisting of three parts, which were individually composed by Alan Stephenson, Mike Campbell and Roelof Temmingh.

A new series of commissioned local operas based on indigenous stories were started in 2010 with the short operas (marketed as "bonsai" operas) that formed part of *Five:20 Operas made in SA*. Five South African composers – Péter-Louis van Dijk, Peter Klatzow, Hendrik Hofmeyr, Bongani Ndodana-Breen and Martin Watt – each created a 20-minute opera based on a local story and related to a specific social grouping in South Africa. The apparent success of this concept led to two similar projects. A smaller version with two 30-minute operas, *Two:30*, brought together a minimalistic Swedish work with electronic music and an opera about living and working on a South African mine. Carl Unander-Scharin composed the first, *Sing the body electric!*, and Phillip Miller the latter, *Between a rock and a hard place: An anatomy of a mining accident*. In 2015, Cape Town opera presented another edition (and to date the last) of this opera series called *Four:30*. In these four 30-minute

operas contemporary issues (bureaucratic red tape), indigenous stories (a blue-eyed Xhosa woman), family troubles (the questioned paternity of a child), and the murder of the South African tenor Deon van der Walt were explored in works by Robert Fokkens, Sibusiso Njeza, Angeliqye Mouyis and Adrian More. Also in 2015, a new opera by Neo Muyanga, *Heart of Redness*, was presented. Its libretto is based on the novel *The heart of redness*, which also tells the story of the Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse.

Cape Town Opera has made an indelible impact on local opera composition by commissioning the above-mentioned works. Besides giving local composers opportunities to have their works performed and telling indigenous stories in which emerging black singers could be employed, the move towards staging local operas diversified the repertoire and steered it into a new direction that aims to address South African society through opera. Whereas local opera production in the middle of the twentieth century almost exclusively focused on canonised nineteenth-century repertoire, the new socio-political context allowed composers to create a South Africa operatic sound world that encapsulated elements from different cultures.

Cape Town Opera's significant contribution to local opera composition does, however, not imply that the company did not also contribute to the dominance of nineteenth-century opera. Since its inception, the standard Italian operas from that era, notably works by Verdi, have remained prominent in each season. Rarely performed works were introduced or staged after a lengthy absence. In 2000, the company presented Wagner's *Tannhäuser* – the first time in 25 years that this opera was staged and the first Wagner opera since 1993. Other works included *Les pêcheurs de perles* (Bizet), *The bartered bride* (Smetana), *Andrea Chénier* (Giordano), *La rondine* (Puccini), *Manon* and *Werther* (Massenet).

Whilst its predecessor, CAPAB Opera, seldom staged twentieth-century opera or introduced rarely performed works from other eras, Cape Town Opera has done much to expose audiences to these works. Examples are *A midsummer night's dream* (Britten), *The cunning little vixen* (Janáček), *Dead Man Walking* (Heggie) and *Il viaggio a Reims* (Rossini). Baroque opera had not been performed for more than forty years in Cape Town, but in 2004, Cape Town Opera staged Handel's *Alcina*, followed by Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* in 2008 and *L'Orfeo* in 2017. While the localisation of opera – setting it in contemporary South

Africa – was popular during the 2000s, the music or libretto was not changed, except for the *Macbeth* production already mentioned. One instance where the text and (to a lesser extent) the music was adapted for a production, was Léhar's *Die lustige Witwe*, for which the title was changed to *The merry widow of Malagawi* (performed in 2015).

In these varying ways, Cape Town Opera influenced the course of opera production in Cape Town, while still maintaining the dominance of nineteenth-century works. With these changes in the repertoire the company has furthermore challenged local audiences' conception of what constitutes opera by creating contemporary works with indigenous stories and introducing new forms of musical theatre by including musicals and semi-staged oratorios. Whereas the repertoire Cape Town audiences were exposed to in the forty years prior to the establishment of Cape Town Opera was mostly standard works of the "great masters", the new opera company had shaped the repertoire into a diverse array of stage works.

Conclusion

Amid calls for the decolonisation of histories in and about South Africa, researchers on opera in South Africa are challenged in devising new ways of organising historical “facts” and present them in coherent and comprehensive ways. This chapter posits a hermeneutic shift in the treatment of available historical narratives and attempts a convergence of historical perspectives generated from different perspectives. Certain historical patterns have been identified by the current researcher that represent different viewpoints, or perspectives, into how this history may be investigated in future. Consequently, this chapter provides an interpretation of the interpretation of history by previous researchers. Therein also lies the main purpose of this research project – to construct a reception history of opera in Cape Town – because reception is a collection of views on art over a certain period in history.

Historical writing on opera in Cape Town has over the course of more than a century developed into a historiography that bears the imprint of the socio-political context within which it was written. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this history was viewed from a British imperialistic perspective, and later in the century from the view of Afrikaner nationalism. Recent historiography has aimed to address certain historical themes, such as indigenisation or composition, but a broad historical account of opera history has been absent. This chapter was not born out of a need to write an extended history of opera, but rather out of necessity and to serve as a basis for the construction of a reception history that would otherwise not have had historical justification.

The historical account given in this chapter is therefore a means of situating the reception history covered in Chapter 3. It draws its information from an array of historical writing in different forms and formats, and attempts to structure the historical facts both thematically and chronologically. Secondary sources such as academic articles, memoirs, books and dissertations have been used to construct this history, and no claim is made that this history is based on an investigation and reinterpretation of primary sources. This chapter does,

however, provide a new view on the historical writing on opera and what those sources focused on and how and what it could contribute to the history of opera.

Probably the biggest contribution this chapter aimed to make towards the historiography of opera in Cape Town is the identification of historical patterns from the facts scattered across the vast number of secondary sources. The three patterns concern the impact of politics, the professionalization of opera, and the introduction and dominance of nineteenth-century opera in the repertoire. These patterns provide perspectives from which the history of opera in South Africa can be approached. While the same facts may be present in all these different perspectives or patterns, each perspective provides a different interpretation of those facts. The impact of the political contexts over two centuries on opera production can also be seen in the trajectory of professionalization of opera and in the development of the operatic repertoire in this space. Likewise, aspects of the professionalization of opera alludes to political contexts and the development of repertoire within that space.

A history of opera seems inconceivable without realising that music is a social construct with a political context. It is therefore not surprising that contemporary and retrospective views of the same historical facts differ vastly because the influence of the socio-political context is so strong when applied to art. It is impossible to write historically about opera in South Africa without locating it within the contexts of colonialism, Afrikaner nationalism, and the emergence of a new Africanist nationalism over the past twenty years. Indeed, these changes in political contexts inform the scope of professionalization of the opera industry. Over time, the cultural and political importance of opera has led to the building of theatres, the training of singers, the solicitation of state funding, and the establishment of opera societies and companies. These developments represent indicators of the professionalization of opera and show a drive to establish an industry that is economically, socially and politically viable and sustainable. It was in the midst of a political will and a professional drive that the operatic repertoire in Cape Town took shape. The influences of politics on the composition of new South African operas is indisputable, as well as the indicators of professionalization on the choice of repertoire by opera companies. While certain types of repertoire could gain political and social favour, the professional nature of the industry created an environment in which certain repertoire could be performed,

because of the availability of spaces, technologies, funding and trained artists. These historical patterns and perspectives have clear interlinks that could shape future histories.

Although this history does not necessarily present new facts from forgotten archives or other primary sources, it does provide an interpretation of the interpretation of historical facts over the past century. History remains an interpretation of the past, and essentially, this chapter critically interprets how previous writers of opera history have interpreted the facts at their disposal. It therefore provides contemporary and retrospective views on opera history and how it has been written within particular socio-political contexts. I would argue that such an interpretation of interpretations – which are in fact value judgements – also represent reception. In its broad definition, reception deals with “the history of social responses to art”. The secondary sources used in this study can be viewed as written social responses to opera and the development of the art form over a number of years. This chapter has drawn from those social responses, perceptions and interpretations in order to construct a history of opera in Cape Town.

What the historical narrative in this chapter has shown is that there are certain perspectives from which to approach the history of opera in South Africa and that this history begs for further research into primary sources. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 1, the historiography of opera in this country is burdened with the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, and in most cases reported only from those perspectives. Although it seems evident that colonialism and apartheid have been instrumental in the development of opera in South Africa, the devastating effects of those political systems have resulted in a history that exalts the triumphs of the white population in conquering European art forms in Africa and ignoring the contribution of others and most certainly indigenous art forms.

CHAPTER 3

Negotiating a new operatic aesthetic

Introduction

In August 2003, Angelo Gobbato, then managing director of Cape Town Opera and head of the opera school at the University of Cape Town, delivered his inaugural lecture as professor in opera at the university. Nicknamed Cape Town's "Mr Opera" – having also been a singer in and producer and director of many operas performed in the city – Gobbato's lecture was titled, *Towards the creation of a transformed South African operatic aesthetic*. In his presentation, Gobbato focused on the creation of a new operatic aesthetic in an industry where local opera companies would produce operas that are distinctly South African. In a news report on the lecture, published in *Die Burger*, Gobbato was hailed for being at the forefront of the transformation of opera, having established a choral training programme and an opera studio specifically for emerging black singers.⁴⁵⁵

According to this article, at the start of South Africa's new democracy, opera was viewed as an "old-fashioned, expensive, elitist Eurocentric art form" that was of little importance to the majority of the country's population.⁴⁵⁶ The establishment and development of Gobbato's Choral Training Programme and the cooperation between Cape Town Opera and the University of Cape Town's opera school eventually ensured that "Cape Town has a stronger opera industry than any other South African city".⁴⁵⁷ But, said Gobbato, the best singers were leaving the country because of a lack of funding for performances. Also, the rise of realism in opera at the start of the 2000s had prevented black singers from performing because opera characters are seldom, if ever, black.⁴⁵⁸ If black singers – by then possibly the majority of opera singers in the country – were to be cast in local productions,

⁴⁵⁵ Maas, G. 2003. "Transformasie het opera omgekeer". *Die Burger*, Tuesday 26 August 2003, p10.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid*: 10

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid*: 10.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid*: 10.

new repertoire and a new aesthetic in the performance of Western European operas would have to be investigated and developed.

Over the course of the thirty years this research project covers, there had indeed been fundamental changes in the operatic repertoire, and the staging of those operas have resulted in the development of a South African “way of doing” opera. Tracing the repertory changes – the formation of a canon – and changes in the performances of operas – the aesthetics of opera – is the focus of reception histories, and indeed the focus of this research project. In this chapter, the research results are presented and constructed as a reception history that follows the development of this distinctly South African operatic aesthetic. The chapter therefore traces repertory changes and changes in the aesthetics of opera performances, specifically in Cape Town.⁴⁵⁹

While the reception studies referenced in Chapter 1 of this dissertation have specific works or a group of works by a single composer as subject, this research project investigates opera as an art form and as an industry in Cape Town. It therefore deals with the performance of a body of work by a number of composers over a specified time and in a specific space. This makes the current research project, both conceptually and methodologically, more complex than a focus on a single composer or group of works would allow. The research involved collecting opinions and views that relate not only to performed operas or their composers, but also to the performance practices and perceptions of opera as an art form in the South African context.

In this chapter, I document how opinions of operas, composers, socio-political contexts, artists and interpretations of those works interject and converge. It is at that point of convergence where historical significance in reception is found. The reception history constructed in this study is therefore a collection of the ideas, impressions, stereotypes, interpretations and performance traditions of the works, their composers and the art form’s function and status in society that illustrates how those variables changed or how they had

⁴⁵⁹ The operas discussed in this chapter were all performed at the Artscape Opera House, previously known as the Nico Malan Opera House, unless otherwise specified.

remained intact over time. Collectively, the research results represent the development of what may tentatively be called a distinctly South African operatic aesthetic.

Two concepts are central to the presentation of the research results, both of which have been discussed in the introductory and first chapter of this dissertation: First, the concept of reception, and second, the concept of history. Reception, as Dahlhaus theorises, traces changes in aesthetics over time, while history, as Stanford views it, is constructed in narrative form by identifying historical patterns, which consist of historically significant events (what Stanford calls history-as-account). It follows that these historically significant events – specific performances of operas that contributed to the changes in aesthetics over time – are the contents of the historical patterns.

Following the structure of Chapter 2, where Stanford's approach is used to construct history by identifying historical patterns in events of the past, this chapter is also structured around the patterns found in the repeated opinions and views on opera in Cape Town. The researcher has identified four historical patterns that dominate the reception history presented in this study and that frame the process of the development of a distinctly South African operatic aesthetic. First, the reigning aesthetics of Western European opera serves as a point of departure, in that it became the impetus for the development of a new South African operatic aesthetic, yet remains the aesthetic measure applied to future developments. Second, the transformation of the opera industry amidst the political changes in South Africa ensured the emergence of black opera singers and associated repertory changes. Third, strategies towards making opera relevant for a contemporary South African audience led to changes in the performance practice of opera. Last, the composition and performance of indigenous South African operas aimed to create an operatic aesthetic different from that of Western European opera. Collectively, these historical patterns illustrate the development of a discernible South African operatic aesthetic.

The notion of historical significance – i.e. the notion that not all that happens over time is considered historical – served as a means of choosing certain opera performances that illustrate the patterns in this reception history. Over the course of thirty years, certain operas have been instrumental in bringing about changes in the repertoire and performance

practice, and to illustrate how these changes had manifested, these specific opera performances have been selected as historically significant points in the development of a distinctly South African operatic aesthetic. Therefore, this chapter does not discuss the reception of each work that was performed between 1985 and 2015, but looks at the reception of those works that have been historically significant in changing the course of operatic expression in Cape Town.

The primary sources for this study, which constitute the only source material used in this chapter, are articles and music criticism on the performed operas in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015 that were collected from the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*⁴⁶⁰ and that were analysed by using content analysis as methodology. A vast number of opinions and views relating to opera was collected from these articles and music criticism, but not all proved to be historically significant. The repetition of certain stereotyped opinions, or “topoi” to use Dahlhaus’s term, used in rhetoric over time – the most salient and frequently repeated opinions published in the two selected newspapers – are used to construct this reception history of opera in Cape Town.

The identified historical patterns inform the structure of this chapter and how this reception history is presented. The first part of the chapter focusses on the reigning aesthetics of opera and serves as a background and point of departure for the changes in the aesthetics of opera over the course of thirty years. As discussed in Chapter 2, nineteenth-century Western European operas dominated the repertoire. Repeated opinions and views of composers by opera critics have shaped society’s thinking about operatic expression within a local context. The discourse on opera in the two selected newspapers portray canonical opera as a grand and spectacular affair, and epitomises these works and the composers while conveying that aspiration towards and a comparison with European “standards” and aesthetics is the guiding principal for good taste and success. This part of the chapter is

⁴⁶⁰ Texts quoted from *Die Burger* in this chapter were translated from the original Afrikaans into English by the current researcher (who is a language practitioner by vocation). The original Afrikaans texts of extensive (indented) quotations are provided as footnotes. However, the original Afrikaans texts of partial quotations used within sentences have not been provided.

based on broad reception themes identified through a reading of all the primary source material.

In the second part of this chapter, arts transformation is addressed as a historical pattern in the development of a distinctly South African operatic aesthetic. The major political changes that commenced in the 1980s with the demise of apartheid initially led to the inclusion of coloured singers in the professional opera arena, while black singers were still excluded. But the establishment of the Choral Training Programme by CAPAB Opera in 1993 was aimed at employing black opera singers, while it also served a political purpose in dispelling the discourse on opera as an elitist, Eurocentric art form aimed only at the white population of South Africa. The emergence of black singers brought about specific repertory changes.

The third part of this chapter discusses strategies towards the contemporary relevance and Africanisation of opera in a changing South African context. The reception of a number of opera productions in which the European settings had been localised to make them relevant to a South African audience, is discussed. In the case of Beethoven's only opera, *Fidelio*, its contemporary relevance lies in its performances that were aimed at addressing socio-political issues. The Africanisation of opera has become an identifiable strategy in local opera production as a means of achieving contemporary relevance. In this process of Africanising opera, not only the *mise en scène* and costuming of the operas have typically been contemporised, but adaptations to the libretti and scores of certain standard repertoire operas are also common. While making opera plots more contemporary, this strategy has also encouraged the crossing of boundaries between European art music and African musical elements.

The reception of indigenous South African operas is the focus of the fourth part of this chapter, and may be viewed as the last step in the development of a distinctly South African operatic expression. While there had been an absence of South African operas in the repertoire of most local opera companies – even CAPAB Opera since its establishment in 1963 – seventeen local operas were staged in Cape Town between 1995 and 2015 (none were stage between 1985 and 1994). All these works have been historically significant in shaping the conceptualisation of a local operatic aesthetic. These works relate local stories in local settings with characters in local contexts resonating with contemporary South

African audiences. The composition and performance of South African operas represent what Gobbato had envisioned in 2003 when he urged the opera industry as a whole to explore a new operatic aesthetic that is distinctly South African.

This chapter, however, not only provides a history of the reception of opera in Cape Town, but also looks critically at what has been documented in the two selected newspapers and how reviewers through their use of language had documented opera in these publications. In writing about the language of criticism in the context of the aesthetics of music, Roger Scruton explains that works of music are seldom judged in simple terms, such as “good” or “bad”, but are described in terms of their aesthetic character.⁴⁶¹ He adds that “the language of criticism and evaluation has become so complex that we cannot hope to embrace it within a single unified theory of aesthetic discourse”. Scruton does, however, provide examples of ways in which language is used in criticism. Relevant to the current study, is the way in which affective language is used in music criticism.

Affective language refers to how language is used to describe the effect music has on the listener (in this case, the opera critic). But, argues Scruton, these descriptions are not aimed at the writer; rather they represent the writer’s way of suggesting to listeners how they should feel about the music: “In describing a work as moving, we are suggesting that the listener should be moved by it: not to be moved is to fail to respond as the work demands [...] Affective language is normative – proposing a ‘standard of taste’, an ideal of discrimination.”⁴⁶² The critic therefore uses language as a persuasive device because, as Scruton explains, the good critic is “the one who alters our perception of the thing we hear, so as to persuade us of his judgement”. However, there are works of music that have, in the course of reception, become considered great works and possibly beyond criticism. These, says Scruton, become “a monument to what is possible”, and effectively holds an aesthetic to which all other works should be judged.

In these ways, the opera critics of the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* have used affective language to shape perceptions of opera performances. Canonical works have been held in

⁴⁶¹ Scruton, R. 2009. *The aesthetics of music*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 371.

⁴⁶² *Ibid*: 371

their place as the beacons of aesthetic aspirations, while new works have been judged according to the purported standards represented by these great works. In the changing aesthetics of opera performances in Cape Town – in the course of the development of what could be referred to as a distinctly South African means of operatic expression – the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* have used affective language to persuade their readers to accept a new kind of opera that is rooted in Africa and entails an engagement between African and Western art music styles. This reception history of opera in Cape Town and a critical analysis of the documentation thereof reveal that these opera critics had negotiated with their readers – because the media is quite literally a medium of negotiation between what is happening in arts and the consumers of art – the changing arts landscape in the country.

PART 1

The reigning aesthetics of Western European opera

In its frequency of performance and its representation of an ideal aesthetics of operatic expression, the Italian repertoire of the nineteenth century occupies a prime position among the operas performed in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015. It is clear from the list compiled by the researcher of these staged operas that the choice of works was particularly focused on the “great works of the great masters”.⁴⁶³ In its reception, it is furthermore evident that opera critics aimed to preserve the performance practice of Western European operas that had been ingrained in South Africa’s cultural landscape. In the third part of Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the dominance of nineteenth-century opera in South Africa was discussed, as well as how several South African opera companies and societies over more than a century ensured the preservation and survival of nineteenth-century Western European operas in the local canon.

The aim of this part of Chapter 3 is not to discuss the reception of the multitude of nineteenth-century operas performed between 1985 and 2015 in Cape Town, but to give an impression of the main themes identified from a broad critical reading of all the collected primary source articles published in the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* over this period. It therefore represents a reception that reveals certain views and perceptions of opera within the context of a social space and timeframe. This overview of the reception themes over a thirty-year period serves as a point of departure to address the shift towards the creation of a distinctly South African operatic aesthetic. Hence, it forms a foundation for and an historical point from which to trace the aesthetic changes in opera performance in Cape Town over the course of three decades.

From this broad view of the reading of the source material, it is evident that certain composers and certain operas had played an indelible role in defining opera and the views and perceptions thereof as an art form and cultural commodity in the South African context.

⁴⁶³ The complete list of operas performed in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015 is included as Addendum A.

Simplistically, these works and composers represent the epitome of operatic expression within this context. The research has also revealed that these works have been among the most performed operas in Cape Town over the thirty years. The choice of operas discussed below is not only based on a critical yet subjective and broad observation of the various views and opinions on opera as expressed by music critics in the selected newspapers, but also a reception history of operas that were most popular with opera companies and their audiences.

As can be expected, and as is true of the repertoire in opera houses worldwide, Italian opera dominates locally, and in the case of Cape Town, specifically the works of Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini. Of the Verdi operas performed in Cape Town, *La traviata* (produced ten times between 1985 and 2015) and *Aida* (produced seven times) hold a central position. *La traviata* occupies a special place in the consciousness of Cape Town operagoers because it had been a staple in the city, memorably made popular by the Eoan Group, who gave the group's first performance thereof in 1956. Indeed, the *Cape Times* reviewer Deon Irish wrote of the 1997 production that "Cape Town has a seemingly unquenchable appetite for this evergreen product of Verdi's most productive decade".⁴⁶⁴

When *La traviata* was produced in 2004, Irish wrote, "The staging is true to the Verdian concept of the glittering and sophisticated hostess..."⁴⁶⁵ Also, *Die Burger's* critic Wayne Muller⁴⁶⁶ said of the 2011 production that "Verdi's *La traviata* is opera staple food – an ever-popular story with melodies that have enchanted for 150 years, and has been a favourite in Cape Town for more than 50 years".⁴⁶⁷ When the opera was performed by Cape Town Opera in 2015, the *Cape Times* reported, "The frequency with which Verdi's *La*

⁴⁶⁴ Irish, D. 1997b. "Exciting singing in Verdi opera". *Cape Times*, Tuesday 19 August 1997, p15.

⁴⁶⁵ Irish D. 2004b. "Visually engaging and musically satisfying". *Cape Times*, Wednesday 15 September 2004, p5.

⁴⁶⁶ References in this chapter to the author Wayne Muller refers to the current writer, who has been a music and opera critic for *Die Burger* from 2007 until the publication of this thesis. The researcher's own opera reviews are included in this study and he critiques them in a similar way as those of other critics over the period covered by this study. On reflection, this process challenged the researcher to create a critical distance between himself and his own work. While it is impossible to remove one's own biases towards one's own work, the analysis of all the articles centres on the written content and does not interrogate the writers' intentions, aims, outcomes, biographical context or personal ideologies. In this way, the methodology ensured a measure of objectivity. However, whether this was done successfully cannot be judged by the researcher but rather by the reader, who is able to reflect critically on this thesis as a whole.

⁴⁶⁷ Muller, W. 2011b. "La traviata bied luistergenot". *Die Burger*, Thursday 13 October 2011, p14.

traviata has been staged in Cape Town over the past four decades is testimony both to the work's popularity and to its abiding artistic merit".⁴⁶⁸

Verdi's *Aida* became a pinnacle of grand opera. Its 1985 production was described by Irish as "grand opera" and spectacular with an exotic setting.⁴⁶⁹ *Die Burger's* reviewer, Louis Heyneman, also considered this production "a true spectacle", adding that the performance adheres to all the requirements of "the tradition of Grand Opera", and that this production is comparable to those in "bigger opera houses with a much longer tradition".⁴⁷⁰

With the production's revival in 1988, Irish wrote that *Aida* is "Verdi's most exotic opera",⁴⁷¹ while *Die Burger's* reviewer Pieter Kooij called *Aida* "always an opera experience" in his review of the 1991 performance.⁴⁷² Irish described the costuming of the new 1999 production by Christine Crouse as "striking and suitably evocative". He continued, "Grandeur is as grandeur does and the social hierarchy is neatly caught in costuming which matches economies of scale and visual impact. The lighting design is smoothly efficient and, as in the Nile scene, creates some lovely effects".⁴⁷³ When the production returned in 2008, Muller in *Die Burger* praised its "welcoming simplicity – stripped of mere theatricals, but decorated in the style of Grand Opera."⁴⁷⁴

With its six productions between 1985 and 2015, Puccini's *La bohème* had also been revered by opera critics of the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*. In reviewing the 2012 production, Irish wrote:

Every time I leave an auditorium at the conclusion of another *La bohème*, I am quite decided that this is the perfect opera. Of course, other works vie for that title; but I really do doubt that there is another that engenders such an overall sense of gratification. The libretto is multi-faceted and

⁴⁶⁸ Irish, D. 2015. "Mpofu exceptional in impressive La Traviata". *Cape Times*, Tuesday 6 May 2015, p9.

⁴⁶⁹ Irish, D. 1985. "Vocally rewarding". *Cape Times*, Monday 18 March 1985, p7.

⁴⁷⁰ Heyneman, L. 1985b. "Aida 'n ware lus vir die oog en oor". *Die Burger*, Monday 18 March 1985, p4.

⁴⁷¹ Irish, D. 1988. "Standing ovation for Davids – an operatic singer of quality, power". *Cape Times*, Monday 15 August 1987, p6.

⁴⁷² Kooij, P. 1991b. "Hartman verras as Radames in heropvoering van Aida". *Die Burger*, Friday 26 April 1991, p4.

⁴⁷³ Irish, D. 1999. "Aida receives hearty applause". *Cape Times*, Wednesday 6 October 1999, p7.

⁴⁷⁴ Muller, W. 2008c. "Treffer met puik Verdi-stemme". *Die Burger*, Saturday 4 October 2008, p15.

engrossing and Puccini's score superb. Given as attractive a staging as this Christine Crouse production, the combination is theatrically alluring.⁴⁷⁵

When *La bohème* was staged again in 1990, Irish's review centred on the idea of a supposed ideal staging of the opera, saying that this production "remains honest to the intentions of the librettist and composer. It is firmly verismo in its thrust, sets and costumes determinedly recreating the period with some measure of authenticity".⁴⁷⁶ With this statement, Irish gave the impression that there is an ideal performance practice when it comes to opera, especially of works that occupy such a prime position in the repertoire.

Cape Times reviewer Mareliz Truter opined that *La bohème* personifies Puccini as composer: "The wonderful, built-in contrast of the frivolity in the beginning of scene four, and the tragedy of Mimi's death in the end, portrays the full glory of Puccini's talent". Furthermore, she wrote that the opera has "remained a favourite with Capetonians for more than 25 years".⁴⁷⁷ In *Die Burger*, Heyneman called the music in *La bohème* "so beautiful" and the composer's orchestration "so resourceful and subtle". In fact, he stated that it might be a sin not to be enthusiastic about a performance of a "masterpiece" like *La bohème* because of the work's stature in the canon.⁴⁷⁸

For Kooij, *La bohème* counted among the three most popular operas (the other two being *Aida* and *Carmen*) and that "it has been described as the best lyrical opera ever composed". According to him, although inexperienced singers had performed in the 2001 production, the "fact is that *La bohème* always makes a strong impact on the audience". Kooij continued:

The music is melodious and compelling and wonderfully alternates between dramatic and comedic scenes. The story of Rodolfo and Mimi's love, the farewell and her death may be worn, but it is still striking.^{479 480}

⁴⁷⁵ Irish, D. 2012b. "La Bohème hits all the right notes". *Cape Times*, Tuesday 8 May 2012, p10.

⁴⁷⁶ Irish, D. 1990c. "All Capetonians in fine Bohème". *Cape Times*, Monday 12 November 1990, p6.

⁴⁷⁷ Truter, M. 1995. "Intensity of Bohemian life". *Cape Times*, Monday 25 September 1995, p9.

⁴⁷⁸ Heyneman, L. 1995. "Gevaarligte flikker in flou opvoering". *Die Burger*, Saturday 23 September 1995, p4.

⁴⁷⁹ Kooij, P. 2001c. "Opera verloop seepglad". *Die Burger*, Monday 3 December 2001, p4.

⁴⁸⁰ Original Afrikaans text: "Die musiek is melodieus en meesleurend en daar is wonderlike afwisseling tussen dramatiese en komiese tonele. Die verhaal van Rodolfo en Mimi se liefde, die afskeid en haar dood kan dalk verslete wees, maar is steeds treffend."

When the opera was staged in 2012, Muller wrote that the music in *La bohème* is so beautiful that “you will never need a breath-taking set or theatrical tricks” to keep the audience’s attention.⁴⁸¹

Among the other Italian composers whose operas have been performed in Cape Town, Gioachino Rossini, and especially his comic opera *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (staged four times over thirty years), had been regarded as a composer of stature. When *Il barbiere* was staged in 1987, Irish wrote that the opera “is now firmly established as an operatic ‘top of the pops’ and so much of the effervescent score is instantly familiar that it presents a daunting comparative test to any singer”.⁴⁸² Heyneman in *Die Burger* called Rossini not only the “master of the comic opera, but also the master of orchestration and the voice”. He added that although his music is considered superficial by some, it is highly listenable.⁴⁸³ *Die Burger* reviewer Mary-Anne van Rensburg wrote that *Il barbiere di Siviglia* is “one of the most difficult operas to sing”, and that it requires “good singing skills and diction”.⁴⁸⁴ When the opera was again performed in 2013, Muller wrote that the production was “vivid, smart and funny”, saying the comedic aspects has made the work popular with Cape Town audiences.⁴⁸⁵

Over the thirty years this study covers, Mozart had consistently been portrayed as a genius composer and his opera *Don Giovanni* as an expression and most pertinent example of his genius. However, although this opera seemed to be viewed as a peak in Mozart’s compositional efforts and a highpoint in his operatic outputs, reviewers perceived all of his operas over the thirty-year timeframe as an expression of the composer’s genius. Besides *Don Giovanni*, *Le nozze di Figaro* (produced six times) had been viewed as “a highlight of eighteenth-century opera buffa”,⁴⁸⁶ “not a score to be trifled with; in its transparency and required delicacy, precision and balance”,⁴⁸⁷ and “undoubtedly one of Mozart’s most well-known and most loved operas”.⁴⁸⁸ The opera score “is genius from the first note to the last”

⁴⁸¹ Muller, W. 2012c. “Musiek bly bobaas in eenvoudige produksie”. *Die Burger*, Monday 7 May 2012, p10.

⁴⁸² Irish, D. 1987a. “Congratulations all around on Il Barbiere”. *Cape Times*, Monday 26 January 1987, p4.

⁴⁸³ Heyneman, L. 1987. “Barbiere is goed, maar kan beter”. *Die Burger*, Monday 26 January 1987, p4.

⁴⁸⁴ Van Rensburg, M-A. 2002. “Onderskat dié barbier nie”. *Die Burger*, Saturday 14 September 2002, p4.

⁴⁸⁵ Muller, W. 2013c. “Barbier verveel allermins”. *Die Burger*, Friday 22 November 2013, p14.

⁴⁸⁶ Heyneman, L. 1986a. “Figaro vol lewe en sprankel”. *Die Burger*, Tuesday 18 February 1986, p4.

⁴⁸⁷ Irish, D. 2006a. “Worthy tribute to Mozart”. *Cape Times*, Wednesday 23 August 2006, p8.

⁴⁸⁸ Kooij, P. 2006. “Huwelik van Figaro sprankelende produksie”. *Die Burger*, Wednesday 23 August 2006, p15.

and it shows “many facets of Mozart’s sparkling genius laid out for our delectation”.⁴⁸⁹

Similarly, *Così fan tutte* is an expression of Mozart’s “rich creativity” and “the richness ... of his musical creative power is shown at best” in this opera.⁴⁹⁰

But among the performances of six of Mozart’s operas in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015, *Don Giovanni* (produced six times) had occupied a specific position as a definitive Mozartian opera. Heyneman, in a review of the 1985 production, wrote that this opera was Mozart’s “great masterpiece”. To support his statement, he added that *Don Giovanni* is a masterpiece because of the way in which Mozart “alternates between humour and serious drama, the lifelike characterisations and the geniality of the music”, which have ensured that audiences still marvel at this work after two centuries.⁴⁹¹

Composer Peter Klatzow, in his review in the *Cape Times* of the 1993 production of *Don Giovanni*, wrote, “The real point here is that *Don Giovanni* is an opera in which perfection is attainable (probably together with *Figaro*) while any production of *The Magic Flute* can only present a part of its multi-faceted character.”⁴⁹² The focus of Muller’s review in *Die Burger* of the 2008 production again focused on the opera’s juxtaposition of humour and serious drama:

Mozart describes his opera *Don Giovanni* as a “dramma giocosa” – a comical drama. Yet, most often the focus is on the “dramma” and the “giocosa” is neglected. In this production, Marcus Desando [the director] manages to find a balance between drama and comedy throughout the opera: the gloomy happenings are presented in bright colours; the silly characters joke with the unhappy; and the unhappy keep the silly ones in line [...] And therein lies the success of this production.^{493 494}

⁴⁸⁹ Irish, D. 2014. “Mozart would be delighted”. *Cape Times*, Wednesday 22 October 2014, p7.

⁴⁹⁰ Kooij, P. 1998. “Ryk kreatiwiteit van Mozart ten beste vertoon”. *Die Burger*, Monday 27 April 1998, p4.

⁴⁹¹ Heyneman, L. 1985c. “Die haakplekke moet nog uit!”. *Die Burger*, Saturday 9 February 1985, p4.

⁴⁹² Klatzow, P. 1993. “Endangered species that’s worth seeing”. *Cape Times*, Thursday 26 August 1993, p4.

⁴⁹³ Muller, W. 2008b. “Komedie hier met erns gepak”. *Die Burger*, Tuesday 2 September, p10.

⁴⁹⁴ Original Afrikaans text: “Mozart beskryf sy opera *Don Giovanni* as ’n “dramma giocosa” – ’n komiese drama. Tog word dikwels meer op die “dramma” gefokus en die “giocosa” is ’n bysaak. Marcus Desando [die regisseur] kry in dié produksie dit reg om die balans tussen drama en komedie deurgaans vol te hou: die sombere gebeure word in helder kleure uitgebeeld; die verspotte karakters trek gegriefdes se been; en gegriefdes hou die verspottes in toom. [...] En daarin lê die sukses van dié produksie.”

Muller presented this description of the production as a means to possibly explain that Desando's staging has done justice to Mozart's genius, and by implication that there is an ideal performance practice of this opera that would be in line with the composer's intention (although today we can certainly not know what the composer's intentions could have been). When a new production of *Don Giovanni* was staged in 2013, Muller opined that each time he hears the opera, he realises again what a masterpiece it is, "but also how long it is".⁴⁹⁵

Of all the German operas performed in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015, the works of Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss, specifically his *Der Rosenkavalier*, had been performed most often. In the view of local opera critics, German opera embodies the epitome of nineteenth-century Romanticism. As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this thesis, Weber's *Der Freischütz* had been the first fully locally produced opera when it was staged in 1831, but in the thirty-year period this study covers it had only been performed once (in 1990). Yet, in the reviews of this 1990 production of *Der Freischütz* it seems that this opera had been perceived as an important expression of German Romanticism, as Irish wrote in his review:

With the first production of *Der Freischütz* in 1821, the school of German Romantic opera may be said to have come into being. As is so often the case with artistic prototypes, it is significant more for its originality of conception than for its abiding artistic merits, considerable though they may be.⁴⁹⁶

In his review, Kooij wrote that this production of *Der Freischütz* opened "with much interest" from operagoers, adding that the work was once very popular in Cape Town and "was performed in Cape Town a few years after it was written".⁴⁹⁷ However, this 1990 production of *Der Freischütz* was the last performance of this opera in Cape Town to date.

⁴⁹⁵ Muller, W. 2013b. "Don Giovanni vra nog 'n rapsie wulpsheid". *Die Burger*, Thursday 22 August 2013, p14.

⁴⁹⁶ Irish, D. 1990b. "Music Fine – the rest a disaster". *Cape Times*, Tuesday 4 September 1990, p4.

⁴⁹⁷ Kooij, P. 1990b. "Koor, orkes en Catzel laat dié Freischütz tref". *Die Burger*, Monday 3 September 1990, p6.

Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* has had a special connection with Cape Town because it is set around the coast of the Cape of Good Hope. The opera has been produced thrice in Cape Town. Johann Cilliers, in his review of the 1986 production in the *Cape Times*, under the heading "Fliegende Holländer is a winner", wrote that this opera "is the last and best opera written in the romantic manner of *Der Freischütz*".⁴⁹⁸ *Die Burger* called this staging of *Der fliegende Holländer* "spectacular in all aspects" – the production had "imaginative illusions" that made the action so lifelike, "you would not believe your eyes".⁴⁹⁹

The production of Wagner's *Der Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in 1987 equally ensured a place for the composer's works in the local repertoire. Like *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser* and *Tristan und Isolde* it had only been staged once in Cape Town, but was the first of these operas to be performed. Both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* considered this production an important performance, with the *Cape Times* leading with a heading "Dickie has pulled off a local coup" and *Die Burger's* heading reading, "Meistersinger great success". In the latter newspaper, the production was called the "most important opera in Cape Town this year". Irish wrote in the *Cape Times* that the production was "an almost unfailing visual treat, both from the staging aspect and from the set and costume designs".⁵⁰⁰ Heyneman wrote in *Die Burger* that the most important aspect of a Wagner opera is the orchestra, and cautions operagoers to read the libretto beforehand as preparation because it was "undoubtedly the most important opera" of that year.⁵⁰¹

In 1986, Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* was performed in South Africa for the first time, and from the onset the work was hailed as a masterpiece. In his review in the *Cape Times*, Irish wrote that "this is certainly a prestigious production and refined members of Cape Town society simply won't count if they haven't seen it".⁵⁰² Heyneman, in *Die Burger*, called Strauss's music ingenious and innovative, adding that director Murray Dicky followed the librettist Hofmannsthal's notes to the tee.⁵⁰³ When the opera was again staged in 1991, Kooij, in *Die Burger*, thought that the production was visually successful, and that the décor

⁴⁹⁸ Cilliers, J. 1986. "Fliegende Holländer is a winner". *Cape Times*, Monday 31 March 1986, p8.

⁴⁹⁹ Heyneman, L. 1986b. "'n Spookskip land in die Nico". *Die Burger*, Monday 31 March 1986, p.4.

⁵⁰⁰ Irish, D. 1987b. "Dickie has pulled off a local coup". *Cape Times*, Tuesday 25 August 1987, p5.

⁵⁰¹ Kooij, P. 1987. "Meistersinger groot sukses". *Die Burger*, Monday 24 August 1987, p5.

⁵⁰² Irish, D. 1986a. "Dicky Scores a notable success". *Cape Times*, Monday 25 August 1986, p5.

⁵⁰³ Heyneman, L. 1986c. "Der Rosenkavalier is 'n grootse mylpaal". *Die Burger*, Tuesday 26 August 1986, p4.

had been “stylish and luxuriant”. The opera was also perceived to be “a very demanding work”, and the fact that it was staged with only two overseas singers was seen as an achievement for CAPAB Opera.⁵⁰⁴ In a review of the 2010 staging of *Der Rosenkavalier*, Irish wrote that it was a complex opera, explaining as follows:

There should be no doubt in any operagoer’s mind as to the complexity of this huge work for both cast and orchestra. The work is unforgiving in its demands – but the rewards of success are enormous, since the work marries a superior libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal to one of Strauss’s most depictive and evocative scores.⁵⁰⁵

The French operatic repertoire had not been popular in Cape Town but, as in most opera houses worldwide, Bizet’s *Carmen* had been a staple opera, with four productions staged between 1985 and 2015, as well as two seasons of Peter Brook’s shortened version, *La tragedie de Carmen*. Irish’s comment in his review of the 2005 production of *Carmen* adequately summed up the standing of this French opera:

This opera has every right to lay claim to being – at least for now – the world’s favourite opera. For, even if the *Traviatas* and *Butterflys* of the genre get the audience vote, this is the opera which is best known by the wider public for its infectious, colourful and unforgettable orchestration. Certainly both the Toreador’s Song and the Habanera are among the best-known operatic tunes ever written, and the public’s continuing affection for these arias and orchestral pieces is justified.⁵⁰⁶

Irish, however, added that although *Carmen* is popular, the opera is “decidedly uneven as a theatrical piece, being in reality little more than four scenas strung together in episodic, chronological fashion”. Regarding the 2005 production, Irish commended the director, Michael Williams, for maintaining “the intended dances, and the Spanish choreography with its obligatory castanets is as flamboyant as the composer undoubtedly intended”.⁵⁰⁷ This

⁵⁰⁴ Kooij, P. 1991a. “Andrea Catzel en buitelanders skitter in Rosenkavalier”. *Die Burger*, Thursday 28 March 1991, p6.

⁵⁰⁵ Irish, D. 2010a. “Conductor shows fine grasp of complex opera”. *Cape Times*, Tuesday 1 June 2010, p7.

⁵⁰⁶ Irish, D. 2005b. “A magnificent mix of Grand Opera”. *Cape Times*, Tuesday 27 September 2005, p10.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid*: 10.

comment reveals a preference for a traditional staging of the work, and a supposed ideal performance practice for this opera.

Muller, in his review in *Die Burger* of the 2011 restaging of this production, wrote that Carmen is a singular and the most enigmatic character in the repertoire, and that the opera is one of the most popular and most performed operas in the world. Furthermore, the score contains many tunes popular with the public.⁵⁰⁸ In 1995 and 1996, Brook's *La tragedie de Carmen* was staged at Artscape. Kooij, in his review in *Die Burger*, called this version "an experiment based on a masterpiece", while in his opinion the original opera is "far more dramatic and exciting". He ended his review by saying that this production "stabs Bizet in the back".⁵⁰⁹ This points toward a preference for the preservation of standard repertoire opera in its original format.

It is evident from these examples of nineteenth-century Western European operas, and a broad reading and identification of reception themes in the source material, that opera had a certain standing in the local context, and that a certain performance practice and aesthetic was favoured. The concept of "Grand Opera" had been perpetuated over the course of the thirty years in describing the works of especially Verdi and Puccini as exotic and portrayed in a setting that conveyed grandeur and would make an imposing visual impact on an audience. In many of the reviews, a successful opera production is described as one that enchants operagoers and is theatrically alluring.

A preference was expressed for opera situated in traditional settings – traditional according to European staging practices. Especially during the 1980s, modernised productions had not been favoured. Musically, big voices and big orchestrations were expected as true representations of "Grand Opera". Reviews were often critical of singers who did not possess large voices that soared through the opera houses. Conductors were commended for following the composer's (or editor's) instructions in the score to the letter, which would be seen as an ideal reading of the score.

⁵⁰⁸ Muller, W. 2011a. "Speelse Carmen verlei net haar Don José". *Die Burger*, Friday 11 March 2011, p14.

⁵⁰⁹ Kooij, P. 1995b. "'n Carmen wat jou sommer die josie in maak". *Die Burger*, Saturday 28 January 1995, p.4.

The impact of the concept of “operatic masterpieces” had an influence on the perception of what opera entails within the social context. For a Cape Town audience, the works discussed here engendered what an opera is – spectacular, grand, enchanting and alluring. The most popular pieces in the repertoire, which came with an inherited and accepted European performance practice, had artistic merit, and were in some cases even above any form of criticism. As one of the examples presented here has shown, opera – with its artistic complexity – was an art form for a refined audience who had particular knowledge of opera.

With these views and perceptions of opera, as well as the aesthetics thereof noticeable in the descriptions of opera critics in the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*, it is understandable that opera during the 1990s had increasingly been perceived as an elitist, European art form. As this part of the chapter shows, this image of opera had, over the course of thirty years, been perpetuated by opera critics of the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* who favoured the “great operas” of the “great masters”. Within the context of racial segregation in South Africa, opera was, because of its European connection, associated with the country’s white population. Indeed, the Eoan Group’s opera company functioned separately and black singers were excluded from professional opera. Similarly, black audiences were not allowed into the country’s opera houses.

But the socio-political changes brought about by the demise of apartheid in the 1990s would break down these barriers built around a refined audience who exclusively experienced opera. Within a new political dispensation, opera critics of the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* too argued for the preservation of opera in the new South Africa. But in a country where politics had changed the arts landscape dramatically, the survival of the art form now depended on the transformation of opera towards an inclusive and truly South African art form.

PART 2

Transforming the face of opera

By 1985, South Africa was in political turmoil, having experienced several states of emergency. Protests agitating for the fall of the apartheid government abounded, and while the National Party was still in power, it started losing its grip on the country. Several restrictive apartheid laws had been scrapped, but South African society was still strongly divided along racial lines – black, coloured and white people still lived in separate neighbourhoods and their children attended separate schools. In the field of arts, the doors to performance opportunities had however already opened. In 1981, CAPAB Opera allowed the first coloured singers to join the company as members of the opera chorus, although it was still rare to find coloured people in the audience in the former Nico Malan Opera House. Black people had still been wholly excluded from opera activities, both as performers and audience members.

Until 1988, coloured singers had only sung in the chorus and a few had sung minor roles. But in August of that year, a revival of Angelo Gobbato's 1985 production of Verdi's *Aida* was staged – the first opera performance in Cape Town in which a coloured singer was cast in a lead role: Virginia Davids as Aida. The *Cape Times* called this a “production of Verdi's most exotic opera”, stating that the performance provided a stimulating evening of musical entertainment to “a packed and appropriately enthusiastic opening night audience”. But, as was the case in *Die Burger's* review, the attention in the *Cape Times's* review was primarily on Davids's debut. In the review's heading, the *Cape Times* announced, “Standing ovation for Davids – an operatic singer of quality, power”⁵¹⁰, while *Die Burger* wrote in a subheading, “Star status for Virginia Davids”.⁵¹¹

⁵¹⁰ Irish, 1988:6.

⁵¹¹ Kooij, P. 1988. “Verruklike Aida met trefkrag”. *Die Burger*, Monday 15 August 1988, p4.

Cape Times reviewer Irish wrote that Davids's debut was an occasion "with a deal of electricity in the air", but mentioned that he went into the performance with some trepidation:

When I sat down for this performance, it was with a degree of scepticism as to how well a local girl, launched centre stage out of the chorus, was going to handle this vocally and emotionally taxing role. Well, her first appearance was promising. She moved well, established her character pretty immediately and delivered some powerful and pleasing tones in the conversation with Amneris. But it was the concluding aria of the first scene that demonstrated her stature: the *Ritorna vincitor!* and succeeding *L'insana parola* had fire, drama and intonational security. Not just security, but real quality and considerable power."⁵¹²

The review continued reporting that Davids will mature into the role with time, but that she "possesses a voice of certain beauty and a remarkable authoritative operatic presence". Davids had received a standing ovation, which Irish thought was a sign that she had received "first rank status in the world of South African opera". Irish was, however, not blind to the realities of South Africa and its racial politics, and mentioned that one has "to see the extent to which racism dares impede her advance".⁵¹³

Die Burger, although giving her "star status", was less enthusiastic about Davids's debut. She was described as being one of a number of "ordinary" chorus members who had been promoted to sing an important lead role. Kooij wrote that the role is taxing and that Davids was for the most part successful, especially in the first two acts. However, in the third-act aria, "Oh, patria mia", she was not as successful, "but inadequate it certainly was not". Again, mention was made of the enthusiastic standing ovation that Davids received.⁵¹⁴

Both newspapers, whether overtly or subtly, viewed this performance of *Aida* as significant because of Davids's debut and the largest part of their reviews had been dedicated to her

⁵¹² Irish, 1988:6.

⁵¹³ *Ibid*: p6.

⁵¹⁴ Kooij, 1988:4.

portrayal of the title role. Although Kooij did not express, as Irish had, any scepticism about Davids's debut, the tone of his review suggested that he had reservations about her abilities, for instance in calling her an "ordinary" chorus member. Irish's reference to a "local girl" would today be seen as a rather derogatory statement, because the word "girl" had in that time often been associated with a maid or household servant. It is not possible to derive from the review whether this was Irish's intention in using the particular reference, although there had been other local female singers who had made the leap from chorus member to singing a lead role.⁵¹⁵

This production had cemented the idea that, amid South Africa's politics of race, opera was not the sole preserve of the white population. Although the Eoan Group had performed operas with only coloured singers, their productions had not been deemed professional. Davids's progression into the professional opera arena and her success in this performance of *Aida* had opened up the doors for other singers of colour, and the reviews expressed an acceptance of the transformation in opera that was about to happen. Davids went on to reprise her role in a further four consecutive productions of *Aida*, in 1991, 1993, 1999 and 2002. Joining her in 1991 as Radames was the second coloured singer to sing a lead role, tenor Sidwill Hartman. He had also started as a chorus member, but had sung several smaller solo roles for CAPAB Opera until his first lead role as Radames in *Aida*. In this role, he had received favourable reviews (even overshadowing his female lead). The *Cape Times* review of the 1991 performance described his voice as being "a voice of warmer hue, full-throated in projection and more reliable in intonation".⁵¹⁶ In *Die Burger*, Hartman's performance was described as a "pleasant surprise", and although he had (in other roles) showed progress, there was still room for improvement.⁵¹⁷

Judging from the newspaper headings when Hartman repeated the role opposite Davids in 1993, it was clear that he had become the focus of the production, and not his leading lady:

⁵¹⁵ A particular case is that of Patricia Sadan, a CAPAB Opera chorus members who sang the lead role of Violetta in Verdi's *La traviata* in 1985. The *Cape Times* merely mentioned that it was "her first major role", while *Die Burger* reported that she "had previously not sung the role of Violetta". In this regard, see: Cilliers, J. 1985. "Sensational Sadan in Nico La Traviata". *Cape Times*, Monday 8 April 1985, p4; and Heyneman, L. 1985a. "Onbekende Violetta steel die harte". *Die Burger*, Monday 8 April 1985, p4.

⁵¹⁶ Irish, D. 1991. "Musically fine 'Aida' need better backup". *Cape Times*, Saturday 27 April 1991, p22.

⁵¹⁷ Kooij, 1991:4.

the *Cape Times* heading read, “Hartman shows his winning form in *Aida*”⁵¹⁸, while *Die Burger* proclaimed, “Hartman the hero in this *Aida*”. Irish wrote in the *Cape Times* that Hartman “was in top form as Radames” and that the applause after singing his first aria, “Celeste Aida”, was “as long a post-aria ovation as I can recall at this house”. Kooij also described Hartman’s rendition of “Celeste Aida” as “enchanting”, saying the audience responded with applause, whistling and bravos that did not seem to end. He added that Hartman’s voice shone, and that he looked younger, slimmer and comfortable on stage.⁵¹⁹

Amidst the vast socio-political changes brought about by the end of apartheid at the beginning of the 1990s, major shifts on the arts landscape seemed inevitable. The media discourse on arts at the end of the 1980s and the start of the 1990s focussed on the survival of Western European art forms and its place in South Africa’s cultural milieu. The demise of apartheid became a reality with the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990, after he was sentenced to life in prison for treason in 1963. After his release, negotiations between political leaders started at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), which led to the first democratic elections of 1994. The new political dispensation delivered by this election aimed to negotiate a place for all forms of artistic expression in the country’s new arts landscape, especially for those with its roots in indigenous cultures, although much debate centred on a diminished impact and role of Western art forms that dominated during apartheid.

Already at the start of the 1990s, arts reportage in the media started shifting from a survivalist approach to the creation of a space where different voices searched for solutions that would ensure the survival of Western European art while ensuring a rightful place for indigenous arts and providing access to the arts for all citizens. This was the beginning of a broad collective debate on the transformation of the arts sector in South Africa. In an article in *Die Burger* in 1990, Merwe Scholtz wrote that it is difficult, “even in these times of crisis”, not to image a “beautiful and especially enthralling arts dispensation”.⁵²⁰ He opined that in

⁵¹⁸ Irish, D. 1993. “Hartman shows his winning form in *Aida*”. *Cape Times*, Wednesday 29 September 1993, p7.

⁵¹⁹ Kooij, P. 1993. “Hartman dié ‘Aida’ se held”. *Die Burger*, Wednesday 29 September 1993, p4.

⁵²⁰ Scholtz, M. 1990. “Boeiende toekoms vir kunste voorspel”. *Die Burger*, Wednesday 29 August 1990, p12.

South Africa there had remained a large number of people wanting to experience the spectacle of opera, and even in townships this interest seemed promising.

However positive that outlook may have seemed, the arts discourse continued to centre on the dichotomy of Eurocentric arts versus indigenous culture. But, wrote Arnold Blumer, the essence of that debate was equity, providing “equal access to human and material resources, and this basically entails an equitable subsidising of the performing arts by the state”. Yet money for the arts was seen as a luxury in South Africa, where billions needed to be spent on education, housing, medical care, and the likes. CAPAB, Blumer added, had been trying for years to get rid of the consequences of apartheid, but concluded that the organisation had not tried hard enough.⁵²¹

Establishing an arts dispensation in which all cultural groups would have equal access to resources inevitably steered the debate towards the funding of the arts and the role of the arts councils in future. Blumer called for the disbanding of the arts councils and a shift from exclusive to inclusive thinking, where it is not “us and their arts” but “our arts”. For this to happen, “drastic restructuring” was needed.⁵²²

Eurocentrism became an obstacle in the path of a new arts and culture dispensation. Marilyn Martin argued in *Die Burger* for a new definition of “culture” in the South African sense – a concept that in the local context should not only include arts and civilisation.⁵²³ She added that South African arts expression should, in a new dispensation, not be judged according to European standards, and that the notion that Western art forms are considered better than those in Third-World countries should be questioned. The angst around a perceived onslaught on Western art forms seemed, according to Martin, irrelevant because South Africa never had a cultural policy, culture was never on the agenda, and little money had been spent on it.⁵²⁴

⁵²¹ Blumer, A. 1991. “Die skyngeveg van gelykberegtiging vir die kunste in NSA”. *Die Burger*, Thursday 5 September 1991, p8.

⁵²² *Ibid*: 8.

⁵²³ Martin, M. 1991. “Suid-Afrika moet besin oor kulturele prioriteite”. *Die Burger*, Friday 10 May 1991, p13.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid*: 13.

In an interview in *Die Burger* in June 1994, Dr Ben Ngubane, then Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, said his department had a clear vision for the arts, including redefining the role of the arts councils. Regarding funding, he was adamant that more money should be sourced from the private sector. He was quoted as saying:

Until recently, there had been calls for the disbanding of [the arts councils]. I don't think that is still the general consensus [...] If there is a need to perform *Romeo and Juliet* in Zulu, the arts councils should make it happen [...] In the same vein, opera companies can be sponsored on national level to tour throughout the country [...] For me, it is about the discovery and development of talent, which will lead to the creation of a national culture.^{525 526}

However, in 1995, a new era seemed to dawn when *Die Burger* reported on its cover page, "Final curtain for CAPAB".⁵²⁷ The Western Cape Task Team for Arts and Culture had suggested that CAPAB should be disbanded and the name of the Nico Malan Theatre Complex be changed. One of the principal proposals in the task team's report was to close down "bureaucratic CAPAB" by March 1996 and establish "three streamlined, independent, state-funded companies for opera, ballet and theatre". The article reported that, "these are to operate with less money than under the present CAPAB umbrella, so there will still be cash in the state's arts coffers to foster other groups and theatres previously denied funding".⁵²⁸

One of the task team's members, Pieter Toerien, then also a CAPAB board member, was quoted by the *Cape Times* as saying that the plan placed "the performing artist centre stage, whereas in the previous dispensation they were waiting in the wings with the bureaucrats in the limelight". It was reported that it "came out loud and clear" that CAPAB should be

⁵²⁵ Joubert, E. 1994. "Dr. Ngubane wil kultuur gesond maak". *Die Burger*, Wednesday 2 February 1994, p4.

⁵²⁶ Original Afrikaans text: "Tot onlangs nog is vir [die kunsterade se] afskaffing gepleit. Ek dink nie dis meer die algemene gevoel nie [...] As daar 'n drang is om *Romeo en Juliet* in Zoeloe op te voer, dan moet die kunsterade sien dat dit gebeur [...] So ook kan operageselskappe op nasionale vlak geborg word om deur die hele land op te tree [...] Vir my gaan dit oor die ontdekking en ontwikkeling van talent, wat sodoende tot die skepping van 'n nasionale kultuur sal lei."

⁵²⁷ Breytenbach, W. 1995. "Gordyn begin sak vir Kruik". *Die Burger*, Saturday 26 August 1995, p1.

⁵²⁸ Chisholm, F. 1995b. "New Capab board all set". *Cape Times*, Wednesday 1 November 1995, p13.

disbanded but that Western arts such as opera, ballet and drama should have a place in the new dispensation:

[The task team members] feel CAPAB has to go because it has been the sole recipient of public funding for 32 years and came out of the apartheid era. The all-white Nico stigma is still around even though the complex has been open to all for years. To many, CAPAB equals apartheid. We had to face what we hear and the only answer is that CAPAB must go, but not the art forms.⁵²⁹

A new White Paper on Arts and Culture was developed, which Gobbato, then the head of opera at CAPAB, described as “full of double speak” and a “pie in the sky”.⁵³⁰ But, as the task team suggested to Gobbato and the head of CAPAB Ballet, Veronica Paeper, it was time to envisage how an opera (and ballet) company would function in the new South Africa. In the case of opera, it required a transformation that addressed the perception of opera as being Eurocentric and elitist, making opera accessible to all South Africans, and ensuring its relevance in contemporary society.

Established by Gobbato in 1993, CAPAB’s Choral Training Programme became the first step in the transformation of opera in South Africa. This programme, specifically aimed at training black opera singers, was established to counter the discourse at the time that black people had no interest in opera, although opera music had been sung in choral competitions in townships. Gobbato visited townships in Cape Town to audition black singers for the Choral Training Programme. Over more just than a year, the programme had success with the performance of Roelof Temmingh’s *Enoch, Prophet of God* in 1995.

In an interview with the *Cape Times* in 1995, Gobbato explained how the Choral Training Programme aimed to address issues regarding arts transformation, specifically opera:

I can’t accept change in terms of standards or in the quality of our work, but there should be the opportunity for all to take part in opera and this we have already been trying to do for the past three years [...] Opera calls for long-term training. Sidwill Hartman and Virginia Davids didn’t just

⁵²⁹ Chisholm, F. 1995a. “‘Not one rand’ will be wasted in new arts plan”. *Cape Times*, Monday 28 August 1995, p14.

⁵³⁰ Chisholm, F. 1996. “White Paper ‘pie in the sky’”. *Cape Times*, Monday 1 July 1996, p12.

happen; they came up through the permanent chorus, which we have reduced to fifteen. It takes years to establish a group whose members have grown to trust each other and can finally produce singers of magnitude, so funding must be on a sustained basis or the group falls apart.⁵³¹

In this sense, the establishment of the Choral Training Programme is a continuation of CAPAB's ongoing model to support singers' "promotion" from the chorus to a position of soloist. This is a convention in the opera industry across the world – most singers are first appointed as chorus members and then progress to, firstly, small roles and later possibly lead roles in opera productions. The Choral Training Programme is therefore a continuation of a European model and philosophy of training opera singers. While it seemed to be a novel concept, Gobbato effectively used CAPAB's already existing training model, but created a separate entity that would specifically focus on giving black singers access to opera. Because most of the black singers who auditioned had no formal music training, the Choral Training Programme differed from the CAPAB permanent chorus in that the former also provided elementary music training.

During its first few years, CAPAB was able to secure funding for the Choral Training Programme. In July 1997, a "historic agreement" was struck between the Western Cape Department of Labour and CAPAB to fund the training of black opera singers. This funding had been specifically channelled to the Choral Training Programme "to train unemployed, historically disadvantaged people in music, arts and culture and provide them with employment afterwards".⁵³² The Choral Training Programme became the focal point of the transformation of opera in Cape Town. While chorus members had appeared in CAPAB productions and the programme had produced soloists, some singing minor roles, suitable repertoire had to be performed in which the large number of black singers could be accommodated. Gobbato's choice fell on George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*.

In 1996, *Porgy and Bess* was included in the new opera season. Gershwin stipulated that only black singers may perform the principal roles in English-speaking countries. For CAPAB,

⁵³¹ Fletcher, J. 1995. "Capab changing with times, say arts chiefs". *Cape Times*, Thursday 8 June 1995, p11.

⁵³² Morris, R. 1997. "Labour dept, Capab strike blow for arts with new deal". *Cape Times*, Wednesday 23 July 1997, p2.

this opera became a showcase of the successes of the Choral Training Programme in training black soloists and choir singers. On two levels, *Porgy and Bess* was historically significant. First, it was the first opera to be performed in Cape Town with a full cast of black singers. Second, and following from this, *Porgy and Bess* became a work that was associated with the transformation of opera in South Africa. While it highlighted the success of the Choral Training Programme, *Porgy and Bess* also embodied the transformation of opera in South Africa, thereby charting the first steps in changing the discourse on and history of opera.

About two weeks before the South African premiere of *Porgy and Bess* on 30 March 1996 in Cape Town, *Die Burger* published an article to contextualise and give background of the work to their readers. Melvyn Minnaar wrote that the upcoming performance would be historical, not only because it would be the first performance of *Porgy and Bess* on the African continent, but because it had an “interesting and serious political element”. Its significance, wrote Minnaar, is that this performance would be the first in which black singers from Africa would portray Gershwin’s characters. The heading of the article declared, rather optimistically, that “CAPAB’s *Porgy and Bess* proves [South Africa’s] cultural maturity”. The article commenced with prophetic words that would only prove true in later years when *Porgy and Bess* would become an international signature work for Cape Town Opera:

With this performance of *Porgy and Bess*, important aspects of intercultural ties in the world of the arts come under scrutiny. Perhaps it is precisely for this reason that there is so much international interest into what is currently happening at the Nico [Malan Theatre Complex]. George Gershwin had been accused of racism several times because of his masterpiece, and this debate gets an integrated ironic dimension with the CAPAB performance.^{533 534}

⁵³³ Minnaar, M. 1996. “Kruik se ‘Porgy and Bess’ bewys kulturele mondigheid”. *Die Burger*, Saturday 16 March 1996, p11.

⁵³⁴ Original Afrikaans text: “Belangrike aspekte van interkulturele bande in die wêreld van die kunste kom met die opvoering van *Porgy and Bess* onder die loep. Straks is dit juis daarom dat daar soveel internasionale belangstelling is in wat in die Nico gebeur. George Gershwin is vele kere van rassisme met sy meesterwerk beskuldig en hierdie debat kry ’n integrerende ironiese dimensie met die Kruik-opvoering.”

For those in the South African arts industry, the political changes in the country meant an end to the cultural boycotts and international exclusion experienced during the 1980s. By the mid-1990s, the idea of building “intercultural ties in the world of arts” became a priority as a means of returning to the arts world after years of exclusion. Minnaar argued that “Gershwin’s mastery” had built bridges in America by reaching out and building a sense of humanity. For an opera company in the cultural context of the new democratic South Africa, choosing this work provided a similar means of building cultural bridges between local citizens. Minnaar explained as follows:

Because of the unique occasion of a first performance in Africa – the continent of the original heritage of those submissive characters in Gershwin’s classic opera – the cross-pollination of cultures attains a new rich nature. Can there be any better proof of our cultural maturity in South Africa than this CAPAB production?^{535 536}

When Gershwin’s opera opened two weeks later in the then Nico Malan Theatre Complex, the *Cape Times* announced in the heading of its review of the opening night: “Black ‘folk opera’ arrives”.⁵³⁷ In his opening paragraph, Irish wrote that it had taken sixty years and five months since the opera’s premiere in New York’s Alvin Theatre for it to reach Cape Town, adding that it also took fifty years for the opera to reach the Metropolitan Opera, also in New York. Irish ascribed its “delay” on the local stage to the “musical medium” the composer uses, opining that the musical score is “extremely difficult”. In this way, he refrained from any comment on the fact that Gershwin stipulated that only black singers should perform the roles in English-speaking countries, which would have made it impossible to stage this opera during apartheid. The comment also seems to imply that, although CAPAB’s Choral Training Programme had been in place by then, it would have

⁵³⁵ Minnaar, 1996:11.

⁵³⁶ Original Afrikaans text: “Danksy die unieke gebeurtenis van ’n eerste opvoering in Afrika – die vasteland van oorspronklike herkoms vir daardie gedweë karakters in Gershwin se klassieke opera – vind die kruisbestuiwing van die kulture ’n nuwe ryke aarde. Kan daar ’n beter bewys wees van ons kulturele mondigheid in Suid-Afrika as juis hierdie Kruik-aanbieding.”

⁵³⁷ Irish, D. 1996. “Black ‘folk opera’ arrives”. *Cape Times*, Tuesday 2 April 1996, p12.

taken the mostly untrained black singers an extensive period of time to prepare for this performance.⁵³⁸

Irish described the score as “richly evocative”, adding that Gershwin’s approach was to create “original Negro folk music”. The score, he wrote, “has its primary lyrical impulse in the spiritual tradition, its accompaniment in the composer’s own elevated jazz style”. For the local performers to master this style “was accordingly considerable”, and Irish assumed that the American singers performing in this production – Simon Estes, Cynthia Clarey, Ronald T Smith and James Butler – had not had this hurdle to overcome. However, local singers Virginia Davids (as Serena), Sibongile Mngoma (as Clara) and Miranda Tini (as Maria) were praised for their contributions. Mngoma, Irish wrote, gave a “suitably satiny” rendition of the “big tune, ‘Summertime’ ”. While the musical aspects were satisfactory, the set, portraying the Charleston waterfront, were not, and the lighting design “left a great deal to be desired”, leaving the audience with “a rather static impression” of the production.⁵³⁹

While the *Cape Times* review gave the impression that the changing South African cultural landscape and arts transformation, or race for that matter, had had little influence on the opera’s eventual inclusion in CAPAB’s repertoire, *Die Burger* urged audiences to orientate themselves politically before seeing this production of *Porgy and Bess*. Kooij started his review as follows:

Before one attends this production, it would be wise to get your head politically orientated on a few points. Because political correctness does not bring you any closer to appreciation. Gershwin has been “politically correct” enough with his work. It is only the black characters who sing; the “real” people.^{540 541}

Kooij indeed clarified to the readers Gershwin’s stipulations that only black singers may perform in the opera in English-speaking countries, remarking about “such absurdity” that

⁵³⁸ *Ibid*: 12.

⁵³⁹ Irish, 1996:12.

⁵⁴⁰ Kooij, P. 1996. “Formidabele Porgy and Bess ’n triomf vir musiek se politiek.” *Die Burger*, Monday 1 April 1996, p4.

⁵⁴¹ Original Afrikaans text: “Voordat ’n mens na hierdie produksie gaan kyk, is dit nuttig om jou kop eers op ’n paar punte polities reg te smokkel. Want politieke korrektheid bring jou hierso nêrens naby waardering nie. Gershwin was reeds voldoende ‘politiek korrek’ met sy werk. Dit is net die swart karakters wat sing, die ‘regte’ mense.”

blue painted singers could perform the work in Czech. For Kooij, the jazz musical style of *Porgy and Bess* seemed to be born out of a stereotypical view that jazz is purely black cultural heritage, adding that “white people had equally helped to shape” jazz music.⁵⁴² Both these comments exude an annoyance with the idea that only black singers should sing in this opera, and the remark echoes with the rhetoric of reverse racism prevalent in the Afrikaner (and by implication *Die Burger’s*) political discourse during the 1990s shortly after democratisation and the implementation of policies aimed at black economic empowerment.

In describing Gershwin’s music, Kooij referenced Puccini and Wagner – a means of explaining this lesser-known opera to his readers who are mostly familiar with the operas of nineteenth-century composers. The duet “Bess, you is my woman now”, is described as something Puccini could not have composed better. With reference to Gershwin’s choruses, Kooij wrote that Verdi had not written such “extremely touching” choruses for any of his operas. The melody of “Summertime” is described as a theme that is “more heavenly” than any of the recurring thematic music Wagner had composed. Despite being vexed about his sense of what he called the opera’s political correctness, Kooij seemed to be in awe of the music, thereby persuading his readers to regard Gershwin’s music as they would that of Puccini or Wagner.

Throughout the review, Kooij ensured that the reader remain conscious of the political drive behind the performance of this opera in Cape Town, something that the *Cape Times* avoided in its review. Kooij urged operagoers to experience the opera “in its only politically correct meaning, and this is in the rich culture of music”. The audience should therefore think of *Porgy and Bess* only in musical terms and steer away from any socio-political or cultural relevance this production might have. Kooij argued that political correctness does not exist in the arts; it is merely a form of support. This “support”, he continued, was also noticeable in CAPAB’s performance of Beethoven’s *Fidelio* in 1990, which coincided with the release of

⁵⁴² Kooij, 1996:4.

Nelson Mandela from prison, as well as the creation of an African opera such as Roelof Temmingh's *Enoch, Prophet of God*, which had its premiere in 1995.⁵⁴³

Kooij was critical of the view that this opera's relevance is of a political nature or a means of giving black singers access to the opera stage and an industry from which they had previously been excluded. He ended his review by saying that one could view this opera as a work that was politically "created and preserved" for black singers, but operagoers should attend the performance to "watch, enjoy, and listen, because this is a formidable opera, with formidable artists".⁵⁴⁴ This is an idealistic view and ignores the fact that, with the limitations set by Gershwin's stipulations, only political change and arts transformation in South Africa could have made it possible to stage *Porgy and Bess* in this country.

Five years after this premiere, in 2001, Gershwin's opera returned to Cape Town, this time as a production by the then fledgling Cape Town Opera company. It was a new production, created in 1997 by Angelo Gobbato for the Pretoria State Theatre. Irish's review of this performance focused on the "barrage of local talent" singing in the opera which, according to the heading, "provides a perfect soiree".⁵⁴⁵ Although there were two overseas singers in the principal roles, which Irish referred to as "imports", he used the performance of the local singers – remarking they had portrayed their characters "marvellously" with "arresting singing" and receiving an "enthusiastic audience response" – to make a political statement on the funding of arts in South Africa:

Against these two imports, there is a barrage of local talent, which demonstrates that opera is very much alive and flourishing in South Africa. It's just a pity that the national arts agencies haven't realised that yet, although it is pleasing to note that the Western Cape government has supported this production.⁵⁴⁶

The nature of Gershwin's music forms the core of Mary-Ann van Rensburg's review in *Die Burger* of this 2001 staging of *Porgy and Bess*. She gave impressions of the work by

⁵⁴³ Kooij, 1996:4.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid*: 4.

⁵⁴⁵ Irish, D. 2001a. "Porgy provides a perfect soirée". *Cape Times*, Monday 28 May 2001, p6.

⁵⁴⁶ Irish, 2001a:6.

providing insight into the creation of the opera. Gershwin's music is described as "fiery emotional music", which is "sometimes exuberant, raw, earthy, sometimes woeful, light-hearted, or achingly fragile". She remarked that the composer aimed to create a link between jazz, symphonic and conventional operatic music. For this reason, his "own folk music and own spirituals" were used in the composition of the opera. Furthermore, Gershwin's music is described as "attractive melodies", influenced by the blues and several jazz rhythms. "Summertime" is singled out as a melody that achieved great popularity.⁵⁴⁷

In explaining the opera's prevalence in Cape Town Opera's repertoire, Van Rensburg wrote that it is a community-based opera, meaning that the stage is constantly filled with a crowd of people – the choir. Quoting Gobbato, she wrote that the choir forms the backbone of this opera. With Cape Town Opera's chorus at the time being well developed, it could ensure that *Porgy and Bess* in future remains in the repertoire. Gershwin's choral writing and the chorus's performance is described as follows:

The beautiful voices rise and drop as a perfect lamentation at the funeral, incitement and dismay at the duel, joy as worshipping, and rejoicing at the picnic.^{548 549}

It is clear that in their reviews of the 2001 staging of *Porgy and Bess*, both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* steered away from the politically infused opinions that were aired at the premiere production. One can surmise the reason being that over the five years since that premiere production, the arts landscape and the challenges facing opera in the country had changed. In 1996, it was a rarity to see a full stage of black singers performing in an opera, but with the successful soloists that the Choral Training Programme had produced, blackness on the South African opera stage had become "normalised". It opened up the possibilities for reviewers to focus on the local talent and the music of Gershwin, as Irish and Van Rensburg had in 2001, thereby engaging with readers on the musical merits and performance of the opera rather than any political motives.

⁵⁴⁷ Van Rensburg, M-A. 2001. "Puik spanpoging sorg vir ware 'Porgy'". *Die Burger*, Saturday 26 May 2001, p4.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid*:4.

⁵⁴⁹ Original Afrikaans text: "Die mooi stemme styg en daal as perfekte treursang by die lykwaak, aanhitsing en ontsteltenis by die tweegeveg, jubel as aanbidding, en juig plesierig by die piekniek."

Porgy and Bess made yet another return to the Artscape opera stage in 2006, with the reviewers of both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* respectively describing the opera as “a masterpiece” and the performance as an “enriching opera experience”. Noticeable is how this work went from being an unknown opera in 1996 to a masterpiece by its third local performance in 2006. But Gershwin’s opera, although very successful since its introduction to Cape Town audiences, had not entirely lost its image of a work that became part of the local repertoire because of the historico-political context and for showcasing the transformation in the opera industry over the previous decade. Regarding its performances since 1996 in Cape Town, Irish wrote:

The reason for this frequency of exposure is explicable. The work is peculiarly suited to performance by a black cast – that was what the composer specified – and [Cape Town Opera] is essentially a black company. Secondly, the production is primarily intended for a European tour, rather than for local consumption. The reason is the insufficiency of local funding to support an opera company of international standing. Fortunately, Europe has fewer problems recognising quality and paying for it.”⁵⁵⁰

In 2005, Cape Town Opera commenced what would become a series of European tours of *Porgy and Bess* performances. In the week following this 2006 staging of the opera, the production left for Sweden, with Irish writing that it gives “Capetonians but scant opportunity of seeing [the opera]”. The *Cape Times* review reiterated the impressions of the score that had been instilled since the work’s introduction to the repertoire in 1996, thereby creating musical stereotypes perpetuated over the years that the opera had been part of the repertoire. Irish again focused on the image of a score that consists of folk tunes, including spirituals, but scored in a complex manner to create music that combines different styles, especially jazz, in an ingenious way:

⁵⁵⁰ Irish, D. 2006b. “Production should be first rate after a few performances”. *Cape Times*, Wednesday 27 September 2006, p14.

Gershwin's evocation of "original" Negro folk music produced a richly evocative score, heavily reliant on the Spirituals as well as the secular blues traditions. The score is an extremely taxing one, and conductor [Ira] Levin's careful preparation was evident in a well-executed accompaniment, crafted to demonstrate as much the lyrical, even elegiac, episodes in the score as the jazzy.⁵⁵¹

The description of *Porgy and Bess* as a work containing Wagnerian elements – also used in Kooij's review of the 1996 staging – is repeated in *Die Burger's* review of the 2006 production. Under the heading "Jazz opera has Wagnerian proportions", Mathildie Thom quoted Gobbato as having said that many people think of *Porgy and Bess* as a musical, but its theme, proportions and tonal idiom gives the opera Wagnerian proportions.⁵⁵² She too referred to the "difficult musical material", and wrote that because the libretto is in English and the opera addresses social problems (of poverty, violence, drug abuse and repression), the singing and acting of the main characters carry equal weight. This perpetuates an idea present in the reception of Wagner's operas which, although in German and often about mythical characters, are described as musical dramas. *Porgy and Bess's* Wagnerian proportions in this sense, Thom argued, are what make this production of the opera satisfying for an audience:

On the one hand, the "heavyweight" element gives the work a deep expressiveness, so that you go home with much to ponder on; and on the other hand, the large scale of the production with its exclusively South African cast (except for one role that is sung by an American) becomes an even more praiseworthy accomplishment.^{553 554}

Furthermore, Thom wrote, although the set and costumes draw subtle parallels between 1930s America and the political instability of the 1960s in South Africa, its themes delve

⁵⁵¹ Irish, D. 2006b: 14.

⁵⁵² Thom, M. 2006. "Jazz-opera is van Wagneriaanse omvang". *Die Burger*, Saturday 23 September 2006, p14.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid*: 14.

⁵⁵⁴ Original Afrikaans text: "Enersyds verleen die 'swaargewig'-element aan die stuk 'n diep seggingskrag, sodat jy met heelwat stof tot nadenke huis toe gaan, en andersyds maak die groot skaal die produksie met sy uitsluitlik Suid-Afrikaanse rolverdeling (behalwe een rol wat deur 'n Amerikaner gesing word) 'n des te meer lofwaardige prestasie."

deeper than politics. “It is about the issues of pain, and commends man’s willpower and determination in times of adversity,” wrote Thom.^{555 556}

For Cape Town Opera, *Porgy and Bess* had become a lucrative touring production. After three years of touring in Europe, they still received a great reception from European audiences. In 2008, a *Cape Times* heading read, “City opera enthralled Berlin audiences”, and the article reported that this production was met with standing ovations.⁵⁵⁷ For the first time, Cape Town Opera had taken its *Porgy and Bess* production to the German capital, where more than 18 000 people saw the production. The *Cape Times* reported that the usually critical audience, “renowned for its booing”, gave the performance a warm and standing ovation – the first standing ovation in the theatre in five years. The applause lasted 20 minutes.⁵⁵⁸

But this *Porgy and Bess* production also found itself embroiled in a political debacle when it toured to Tel Aviv, Israel in 2010, with calls for the company to cancel its tour because of the oppression of Palestine by Israel. Among the most vocal opponents were Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, who wrote a letter to Cape Town Opera requesting them to cancel their tour because they should not perform in an area where not all citizens enjoy equal rights. References were made to Israel being an apartheid state, and the irony was pointed out that an opera company from a country with a history of apartheid performs an opera about oppression in a city where “apartheid” and cultural division were still the order of the day. Critics accused Tutu of a one-sided view on Israel and, saying that he tended to argue narrowly from the vantage point of the history of apartheid.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁵ Thom, 2006:14.

⁵⁵⁶ Original Afrikaans text: “Dit gaan oor die kwessie van pyn, en besing die mens se wilskrag en deursettingsvermoë in tye van teenspoed.”

⁵⁵⁷ Chisholm, F. 2008. “City opera enthralled Berlin audiences”. *Cape Times*, Tuesday 22 July 2008, p7.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid*: 7.

⁵⁵⁹ In this regard, see: Muller, W. 2010b. “Kaapstad Opera gaan tóg na Israel”. *Die Burger*, Thursday 28 October 2010, p10; Scholtz, L. 2010. “Moenie Israel boikot, al pleeg sy regering onreg”. *Die Burger*, Friday 29 October 2010, p.18; Muller, W. 2010c. “Tutu gekap oor hy ‘haat aanvuur’”. *Die Burger*, Friday 29 October 2010, p.14; Bennun, M.E. 2010. “Cape Town Opera in invidious position”. *Cape Times*, Tuesday 9 November 2010, p9.

Cape Town Opera's managing director, Michael Williams, reacted by saying that the company had a contractual obligation to perform and would not take a political position of breaking cultural ties with Israel and Palestine. He commented to *Die Burger*:

Abroad, our artists are ambassadors for a democratic South Africa. We believe that *Porgy and Bess* will in fact be a thought-provoking work for an Israeli audience to experience. We are aware that it might seem as though we are choosing sides, but Cape Town Opera is currently busy with negotiations to perform our productions in the Arabic world as well.^{560 561}

The tour to Tel Aviv went ahead despite a further outcry from pro-Palestine groups in South Africa, and the reception of the Israeli audience was favourable. But *Porgy and Bess* never reached the Arabic world.

In the European summer of 2012, Cape Town Opera's production of *Porgy and Bess* reached the United Kingdom, again to critical acclaim. The company undertook a seven-week tour, during which they performed *Porgy and Bess* in Birmingham, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Canterbury and Southampton. In the *Cape Times* it was reported that the production "spins heads in London".⁵⁶² The opera's connotation with the political context of South Africa and the work's significance in the transformation of opera in the country was addressed in a quotation from an article published in *The Guardian* in London:

Today, South Africa still has a long way to go to reach the Promised Land so fervently sought by the anti-apartheid movement, but Cape Town Opera is a fine example of what can be achieved when you finally give talent the chance to flourish.⁵⁶³

With the production's return to South Africa in 2012 after tours in Europe, the United Kingdom and Australia between 2010 and 2012, both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* promoted the performances in articles that reported on the opera's overseas reputation

⁵⁶⁰ Muller, 2010b:10.

⁵⁶¹ Original Afrikaans text: "Oorsee is ons kunstenaars ambassadeurs vir 'n demokratiese Suid-Afrika. Ons glo juis dat *Porgy and Bess* vir 'n Israelse gehoor stof tot nadenke sal bied. Ons is bewus dat dit kan lyk asof ons kant kies, maar Kaapstad Opera is ook reeds besig met onderhandelings om in die Arabiese wêreld ons produksies te gaan opvoer."

⁵⁶² Dungeni, B. 2012. "Porgy and Bess spins heads in London". *Cape Times*, Tuesday 17 July 2012, p6.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid*:6.

and favourable reception. *Die Burger* announced in the heading to an article that “*Porgy and Bess* is back”, and that South Africans can now get to see the “acclaimed tour production”.⁵⁶⁴

Along with this article, extracts from three reviews published respectively in *Mail on Sunday*, *The Observer* and *The Guardian* were quoted. The production, which director Christine Crouse had set in Soweto (a Johannesburg township) and not the original Catfish Row, was described by *Mail on Sunday* as “little short of a triumph”, adding that “it’s hard to imagine Gershwin’s masterpiece better done”. Most notable is the three British newspapers’ focus on the “entirely African cast” and their “natural rhythmic élan”.⁵⁶⁵

When the production opened on 29 September 2012 in the Artscape Opera House – to date the last staging of *Porgy and Bess* in Cape Town – it was again met with acclaim. The *Cape Times* announced in its heading: “Last chance to see top *Porgy and Bess* show”. *Die Burger*’s heading read, “Energetic *Porgy and Bess* impresses”. As in his first review of this opera in 1996, Irish characterised the score as a “fusion of classical and popular musical traditions”, which “makes it difficult to sing even though it is loaded with wonderful hits”.⁵⁶⁶ The production’s setting in a South African township found favour with the reviewer, who pointed out that the narrative with themes covering from drugs and jealousy to love and bullying is relevant in any setting. Of the chorus, central to the success of this opera, Fiona Chisholm wrote, “the chorus singing with their hearts and their bodies bring energy, vitality, limitless volume and a visual excitement that lifts this production to another level”.⁵⁶⁷

The chorus was equally lauded in the review published in *Die Burger*, which commented that the chorus immersed themselves in their portrayal of their characters and that they sang and danced excellently. Muller’s review focused on the theatrical aspects of the production rather than Gershwin’s music. The director’s choice to set the opera in a South African township was commended, especially the detail of including typical South African branded products. However, the unchanged libretto with its American references was

⁵⁶⁴ De Vries, W. 2012. “*Porgy & Bess* terug”. *Die Burger*, Monday 17 September 2012, p10.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid*: 10.

⁵⁶⁶ Chisholm, F. 2012. “Last chance to see top ‘*Porgy and Bess*’ show”. *Cape Times*, Wednesday 3 October 2012, p7.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid*: 7.

criticised as “feeling out of place”, as was the American Southern accents in this South African setting.⁵⁶⁸ In this review, the writer did not focus on the musical material of the opera nor the political history and context pertaining to the opera. This represents a move away from previous accounts of the opera’s performances, suggesting that readers of *Die Burger* had become familiar with the musical material and the work’s performance history in Cape Town.

The introduction of Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* to Cape Town audiences – and the first performance of this opera in Africa – undoubtedly had its roots in the changing cultural context of South Africa and the socio-political shifts that brought about these changes. Debates on the Eurocentric nature of arts production in the country and the exclusion of indigenous art and black artists in mainstream arts organisations prompted the establishment of CAPAB’s Choral Training Programme. While Gobbato had been lauded for the transformation that this programme brought about in South Africa, it could also be perceived as a means of preserving Western art forms in South Africa.

In the opera’s reception in South Africa there are two major aspects that had been the focus of the reviews published in the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*. First, the reviewers’ interpretation and description of the music, which in 1996 would have been mostly unknown to the local Cape Town audience. The reviewers had addressed the accessibility of the music for the audience, thereby persuading them to experience Gershwin’s opera. Repeated stereotypical characteristics, or *topoi*, in this reception history of *Porgy and Bess* are the descriptions of the music as taxing for the musicians, and Gershwin’s score as incorporating different musical styles, especially elements of jazz and blues.

The score was often described as difficult musical material, and the fusion of different musical styles and elements is what reviewers considered to make the music taxing for the performers. Furthermore, comparing Gershwin’s score to the operas of Wagner, Verdi and Puccini became a device in explaining to their readers the musical nature of the opera. Similarly, this device aimed to situate *Porgy and Bess* as an opera of the same stature as the

⁵⁶⁸ Muller, W. 2012d. “Energieke ‘Porgy and Bess’ imponeer”. *Die Burger*, Monday 1 October 2012, p10.

standard repertoire operas (of European composers) that the local audience had been familiar with.

Second, the favourable reception of *Porgy and Bess* in South Africa and abroad had often been linked to the cast of black singers, especially the large chorus. The exoticism of blackness on the South African opera stage was often referred to, also in the quoted reviews in the British newspapers. The reception reveals that its significance in the local repertoire has political roots and the choice to perform the opera in subsequent years had socio-political relevance and significance. For a European audience, the black singers from Africa on the opera stage would probably have been even more exotic. It would not be farfetched to surmise that the subsequent tours and success of the overseas performances rested on the stereotype that blackness on the opera stage is a form of exoticism, also giving the foreign opera houses a marketing and promotional hook.

Locally, the positive reception of the overseas *Porgy and Bess* performances was used by the South African media as an element of nation building. The reportage in the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* lauded the creative team and performers as the country's ambassadors in the international opera arena. This represents a shift in the opinion of opera as art form – while in the early 1990s opera supposedly had no place in South Africa, it had now become an exportable cultural commodity in which South Africans could (indeed, should) take pride.

While *Porgy and Bess* generally had a positive reception in both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*, the manner in which these newspapers introduced and over time negotiated a place for this opera in the local repertoire, show nuanced differences. In a seemingly politically correct way, the *Cape Times* had initially steered away from the political context of its first performances, but in reviews of subsequent performances, the opera's particular South African socio-political context had been discussed. *Die Burger*, from the onset, had situated the opera firmly within the context of the changing political and arts landscape in South Africa. Although both newspapers had in their reception of *Porgy and Bess* at some point aimed to persuade their readers to look beyond the political signification of the opera, its impact on transformation in South African opera has been inescapable.

The reception of *Porgy and Bess* in Cape Town illustrates the opera's pivotal role in the transformation of the opera industry. It not only introduced local audiences to a new work

that had not yet been performed in Africa, but notably facilitated the participation of black opera singers in an arts space they had been denied under apartheid. In this way, Gershwin's opera began a process of quite literally transforming the face of South African opera, thereby enabling the exploration of other means of operatic expression that would suit, represent and be relevant to the societal and arts context that had been ever-changing since the start of democratisation. What remained, was to find ways in which Western European operas could find resonance in a culturally diverse South Africa.

PART 3

Strategies towards contemporary relevance and Africanisation

Changing the face of opera required more than a literal interpretation of this phrase. Black faces on the opera stage in Cape Town only proved that, contrary to apartheid ideology, all people are capable of practicing European art forms such as opera. An opera like *Porgy and Bess* created access for black singers to an art form that they had previously been excluded from. But despite the case of Gershwin's opera and other standard repertoire in which black singers performed after the establishment of the Choral Training Programme, opera remained a foreign art form in South Africa in the sense that its topics and characters were rooted in European society and culture. Casting black singers in opera did not counter the emerging discourse during the 1990s on opera as a Eurocentric, elitist art form with no place in Africa.

Over the course of almost thirty years, the major opera producers in Cape Town, CAPAB Opera and later Cape Town Opera, had developed a number of strategies to ensure the survival of opera in South Africa. The fundamental impetus for the development of such strategies was the view that Western European opera had to survive as an art form with a place in the new South Africa – an aspect addressed in Part 1 of this chapter. The strategies employed were aimed at giving opera contemporary relevance in the local context and Africanising productions – by including African cultural references (such as rituals and costumes) in the production – to eliminate opera's tainted image of a remnant of a culture of exclusion and elitism.

Three such strategies have been identified by the researcher and are discussed in this part of the chapter. First, standard repertoire operas were given a local setting, for instance Cape Town instead of Vienna, or Soweto instead of Paris. Translating libretti, which had been done since the 1960s in South Africa, was also aimed at ensuring contemporary relevance. Second, amid the major political changes in South Africa, opera too needed to establish its political significance. Beethoven's *Fidelio* became an apt choice to convey a political

statement, and its staging at significant moments in South Africa's liberation struggle in 1990, 1994, 2004 and 2012, contributed to the opera's contemporary relevance.

While the above strategies did not in any way alter the composers' scores or the performance practice, the third strategy was aimed at Africanising the musical texts by combining Western and African instrumentation and musical styles. In essence, this created novel, contemporary and local work through merging original scores with the addition of African musical elements.

Creating local settings

Already in 1988, CAPAB staged a production of Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* that was set in Camps Bay, an affluent seaside neighbourhood on Cape Town's Atlantic seaboard. The action took place in a big villa in Camps Bay, as *Die Burger* reported in the heading of its review.⁵⁶⁹ Heyneman started his review by saying that this staging was done "in an effort to make opera and operetta even more accessible" specifically for those who have not been "initiated" into opera. But he added, possibly sarcastically, that *Die Fledermaus* is the most well-known and most popular of all operettas in the repertoire.

This staging did, however, receive a favourable reception in *Die Burger*, as Heyneman remarked, "And for those who sneer at CAPAB Opera's artistic freedom taken in this performance are denying themselves some fun".⁵⁷⁰ In a subsequent paragraph, Heyneman wrote that CAPAB had proven that it is able to produce an excellent "standard" production of *Die Fledermaus*, implying that these "credentials" gives the opera company scope to explore new and novel interpretations of standard repertoire. He opined that because the operetta, based on a French farce, has a universal theme, it seems logical that it "justifies" setting the operetta in "a different culture". "Why not set a *Fledermaus* in Camps Bay, Constantia [or] the Castle [of Good Hope]," Heyneman asked.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁹ Heyneman, L. 1986d. "Mimi en Gé is deeglik op stryk in hul groot villa in Kampsbaai". *Die Burger*, Monday 15 December 1986, p.6.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid*: 6.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid*: 6.

The dialogue had been adapted to incorporate not only German, but also English and Afrikaans. Heyneman mentioned that a typical bastard version of English and Afrikaans was used “as one usually hears around you in Cape Town”, but that the mixture of three languages was acceptable. For reviewer Irish, the mixture of languages and accents were, however, an anomaly, negatively affecting the characterisation. He seemed unconvinced about the localisation of *Die Fledermaus*, because it did not contribute to the contemporary relevance of the work. Irish wrote:

“[Aviva] Pelham’s Adele doesn’t work. Not because she doesn’t work hard, but because (whatever 19th-century Viennese maids might have been capable of) one cannot believe that a local maid, initially displaying a Capey [a derogatory term referring to coloured people from Cape Town] accent and minimal acting abilities, could pass herself off as an Arabian princess who speaks (and sings) impeccable English.”⁵⁷²

The production’s poor reception in the *Cape Times* was due to the fact that the setting was localised, but the musical interpretation (both the performance of the orchestra and that of the singers) was generally well received. Irish summarised the production as a “missed opportunity”, adding that the production was “a basically sound concept that, in execution, had gone awry”.⁵⁷³ Heyneman too wrote that the production was not in the slightest a milestone in CAPAB Opera’s history, but it was a production that is a “fun operetta for the festive season”. This reception shows that a departure from the performance traditions and practices of Western European operas was not favoured, although the opera company’s aim was towards creating a production that would be relevant to and find favour with a contemporary Cape Town audience.

Two means of ensuring the contemporary relevance of opera are evident in these reports on this localised performance of *Die Fledermaus*. First, the locale of the opera was changed from Vienna in Austria to Camps Bay in Cape Town, making it possible for the audience to experience the characters and music in a setting familiar to them. Secondly, adaptations

⁵⁷² Irish, D. 1986b. “Coertse: Nicely judged”. *Cape Times*, Monday 15 December 1986, p5.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid*: 5.

were done to the libretto to incorporate the local languages English and Afrikaans, then the only two official languages of South Africa. By setting the action in Cape Town and incorporating English and Afrikaans in the libretto, a cultural connection was established that in turn endeavoured to make the operetta relevant for a local audience. This step in localising *Die Fledermaus* reveals that localisation was seen as a means of engaging and drawing audiences by focussing on that which is thematically universal yet culturally applicable.

It would be eleven years later – after the demise of apartheid and the first democratic election in South Africa – that another localised, “Africanised”, opera production would be staged in Cape Town: Puccini’s *La bohème*, renamed *La bohème noir*, in 1997. By this time, CAPAB had established its Choral Training Programme, some of its members had become soloists, and the first South African opera of the new South Africa, Roelof Temmingh’s *Enoch, prophet of God*, had been staged in 1995. While these contributions made major inroads to ensure that singers from all cultural backgrounds have access to the opera industry, the discourse on opera had changed to focus on how standard repertoire operas could be relevant in the new South African arts landscape. It would seem that in order to ensure the survival of Western European opera, these operas would have to be adapted to be relevant in an arts landscape where indigenous art forms now had equal standing to that of European art forms such as opera.

Having adapted the title of *La bohème*, the setting was also changed from Puccini’s original Paris to Soweto, a township in Johannesburg, and cafés in Paris were replaced with shebeens in Soweto. Furthermore, the action takes place on 16 June 1976, the day of the Soweto student uprising in which hundreds were shot and killed. In an interview with *Die Burger*, director Michael Williams said the decision to rewrite the libretto (adapted by librettist Hal Shaper) was born from the approach that operas “are not museum pieces” and can be made relevant for a contemporary audience “because the music will always be exciting”.⁵⁷⁴ Williams added that CAPAB Opera had been looking for another production (after *Enoch, prophet of God*) in which members of the Choral Training Programme could

⁵⁷⁴ Wasserman, H. 1997. “Soweto opera net reg vir vandag”. *Die Burger*, Saturday 13 December 1997, p.4.

perform. It was also with trepidation that the opera company embarked on the *La bohème noir* project, and at first it tested the production with high school pupils. These pilot performances found favour with the young audience, and the project was taken to the professional opera stage.

Questioned on whether such experiments to Africanise opera would be the only way opera in South Africa could work, Williams answered:

Opera is pure escapism – you sit still and let the music flow through you. If we can create music that does this, we are on the right path. The visual aspects are of secondary importance. Also, one cannot repeatedly present audiences with local operas. You can experiment by making operas relevant for South Africa, but in the end, it is about the universal truths in opera.^{575 576}

On 17 December 1997, *La bohème noir* opened in the Nico Malan Theatre Complex, with the *Cape Times* announcing the production with the heading, “*La Bohème* with African face”.⁵⁷⁷ The review, however, questioned the necessity for the adaptation, as well as the billing of the opera as a “world premiere”. Irish remarked that this production felt as familiar as Puccini’s original opera, because the majority of the libretto had only been translated into English. He reported that new elements, settings and roles had been introduced, and that although the political significance of 16 June 1976 was incorporated, it was “not an overtly political reworking”. Furthermore, Irish added that the dramatic matter remains the same and that the plot is essentially still that of a romantic relationship between two characters.⁵⁷⁸

In his analysis, Irish put much focus on the fact that the reworking of this opera was minimal and therefore almost insignificant. His insistence that these adjustments are minor and of

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid*:4.

⁵⁷⁶ Original Afrikaans text: “Opera is pure ontsnapping – mens moet stil sit en die musiek deur jou laat vloei. As ons musiek kan skep wat dit doen, is ons op die regte pad. Die visuele deel is van sekondêre belang. ’n Mens kan ook nie die gehoor die hele tyd oor die kop slaan met plaaslike operas nie. Jy kan eksperimenteer om operas relevant te maak vir Suid-Afrika, maar dit gaan uiteindelik oor die universele waarhede in opera.”

⁵⁷⁷ Irish, D. 1997c. “*La Bohème* with Africa face”. *Cape Times*, Tuesday 23 December 1997, p19.

⁵⁷⁸ Irish, 1997c:19.

no real impact, seems to put the focus on the value of Puccini's work and its original intention: that of telling a romantic story set in Paris during a snowy winter.⁵⁷⁹ It would seem that certain "unfamiliarities" hampered an otherwise novel interpretation of Puccini's masterpiece. In criticising an aspect of the conducting, he gave conductor Antony Waters the benefit of the doubt by reporting:

He tends to lose forward movement at times, more particularly in the rapid dialogue episodes so characteristic of the writing. To be fair to him, it is not easy to recreate something so narrowly close to the truly familiar, but with the change of text providing ever-present unfamiliarities.⁵⁸⁰

Contrary to Irish's interpretation of the adaptations made for *La bohème noir*, *Die Burger* reported in its review that Shaper's change of setting had stripped the original Puccini story of its sentimentality and brought to the fore a life in a township "which too many people in South Africa conveniently shy away from". The heading of this review, loosely translated as "Black opera show a light in the road ahead", implies a positive reception.⁵⁸¹ The wording of this heading references an Afrikaans expression, "voor in die wapad brand 'n lig", which is the title of a poem by Afrikaans poet AG Visser about the Great Trek (which started in 1835 and lasted until 1846), a historically significant event in Afrikaner history. *Die Burger's* heading therefore brought together a familiar Afrikaans expression and the concept of black opera.⁵⁸² Furthermore, reference was made to the historical Afrikaner figures Paul Kruger and John Vorster, who were respectively referenced in the opera by a painting and in the dialogue – an aspect interestingly not mentioned in the review in the *Cape Times*.

Reviewer Johann Stemmet remarked in *Die Burger* that the English translation of the libretto "falls easy on the ear", and that conductor Waters had his hands full to lead "the mostly inexperienced singers". But Stemmet wrote that *La bohème noir* is "an interesting

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid*: 19.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid*: 19.

⁵⁸¹ Stemmet, J. 1997. "Swart opera wys dat lig dalk voor in wapad brand". *Die Burger*, Saturday 20 December 1997, p4.

⁵⁸² *Ibid*: 4.

experiment”, adding, “[Even] if it did not succeed in all aspects, it gives a possible direction that can be followed: opera became reality and does not remain a museum piece”.^{583 584}

The reception of *La bohème noir* suggests that the adapted opera had charted a way towards a new interpretation of standard repertoire operas. The popularity of Puccini’s opera among Cape Town audiences up until 1997 presented both a risk and an opportunity for the producers to experiment with a localised version. On the one hand, audience members who favoured the preservation of opera in its original form could have shown an aversion to this modernised version. On the other hand, because audience members would know the opera well, they could welcome a novel interpretation of a familiar work. Both these perspectives are rendered in the reception of *La bohème noir* in the respective reviews of the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*. Irish’s review can be read as a conservative reaction that favours the original work, suggesting that a contemporary localised version is problematic. On the other hand, Irish’s remark could be viewed as a call for an adaptation that is further away from Puccini’s original than a version in which the dramatic matter remains the same. Stemmet in *Die Burger* was clear that *La bohème*’s familiarity and popularity contributed to a favourable reception of *La bohème noir*. He argued that this adaptation in fact shows the way forward for creating contemporary relevance for opera as an art form through Africanisation.

Apart from translating the libretto and setting the opera in a South African milieu, as was the case in 1986 with *Die Fledermaus*, the producers of *La bohème noir* used a further strategy to ensure local relevance: adding historical relevance to the plot. Setting the opera at the time of the Soweto uprising of 16 June 1976 situated the opera in a politically and historically significant period in the country’s history – an historical event ignored by the apartheid regime, but embedded in the local historical imaginary after 1994 when 16 June became a public holiday. *La bohème noir* was therefore not only made relevant by presenting it in a local language and within a familiar setting, but the historical and political relevance gave the opera a theatrical significance in that it served to engage the

⁵⁸³ Stemmet, 1997:4.

⁵⁸⁴ Original Afrikaans text: “As dit nie in alle opsigte geslaag het nie, dui dit tog ’n rigting aan wat gevolg kan word: opera word werklikheid en bly nie net ’n museumstuk nie.”

predominantly white audience with a controversial past that had been far removed from them. The opera shifted the boundaries from strategies directed towards creating contemporary relevance, to openly embracing an ideal of Africanisation, choosing an African (or in this case South African), vantage point from which the opera's themes are explored. Mere translation and a local setting had become insufficient, and *La bohème noir* indicated that in future opera could be Africanised by situating its plot within the socio-political context of Africa and its people.

The political significance of *Fidelio*

An opera about a political prisoner who had been wrongly incarcerated found resonance in the context of the socio-political changes in South Africa at the end of the 1980s. By this time, calls for the release of Nelson Mandela, imprisoned for life for treason by the apartheid government, had intensified. At the start of 1990, former president FW de Klerk announced that Mandela, who had served most of his imprisonment on Robben Island, would be released from prison after 27 years. Two weeks before his release, CAPAB Opera staged Beethoven's only opera, *Fidelio*. That this performance and the release of Mandela from prison happened within weeks of each other seems more than just coincidence.

The similarities between Mandela's incarceration – by the time of his release deemed to have been wrongly imprisoned for his fight for liberation – and that of the story of Florestan in Beethoven's opera, are evident. Also, Leonora, Florestan's wife who disguises herself as Fidelio in order to infiltrate the prison to set him free, was as insistent on her husband's release as Mandela's wife at the time, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. The themes of liberation in *Fidelio* would in future prove to be a rich link to the political history of South Africa. Over the thirty years covered by this study, *Fidelio* was performed four times, and each time it is possible to establish a connection between the opera and South Africa's political history.

While in 1990 *Fidelio*'s performance coincided with the release of Mandela, the 1994 staging came a week before South Africa's first democratic election in April of that year. Ten years later, in 2004, Cape Town Opera performed *Fidelio* as a celebration of ten years of democracy in the country. The most recent performance of Beethoven's opera to date, in

2012, was staged at the Castle of Good Hope – a colonial fort housing a former prison for slaves – with a production that focused on the slave history of the Cape and the impact of colonialism against the background of looming debates on decolonisation. All four performances therefore had contemporary relevance in that the opera was performed at times that were significant to South Africans, and the productions established – whether subtly or overtly – a link between the opera’s story and contemporary issues.

Although the significance of the 1990 performance seems clear in hindsight, neither the *Cape Times* nor *Die Burger* made any mention of the connection between the performance and what would become the first step in South Africa’s democratisation. It would only be fourteen years later that *Die Burger* would refer to the connection between this 1990 performance and the release of Mandela from prison. But in February 1990, the only reference to the connection between Mandela’s release and the *Fidelio* performance a bit more than week before his release had been in the *Cape Times* review, which mentioned, “This opera is, most paradoxically, a child of our time”. It can only be surmised that this is a reference to the socio-political changes in the country at the time of the performance. However, the heading of this review, “Superb score, visuals in a *Fidelio* which is a child of our time” is probably a clearer indication that the opera performance aimed to create a sense of contemporary relevance and thereby a connection with local audiences. In discussing the thematic material in its review, the *Cape Times* alluded subtly to the connections of local relevance in this production:

What shines through, however, are themes of sufficient universality to be timeless; more than appropriate in the context of contemporary Eastern European, Chinese and – especially – South African turmoil.⁵⁸⁵

The “turmoil” was certainly a reference to the tumultuous situation before and after Mandela’s release. Up until 1990, South Africa experienced almost a decade of states of emergency, and the political uncertainty lasted until the elections of 1994.

⁵⁸⁵ Irish, D.1990a. “Superb score, visuals in a *Fidelio* which is a child of our time”. *Cape Times*, Saturday 3 February 1990, p24.

In his review, Irish placed the emphasis rather on how the set and props on stage contribute to relating the story. While the visual elements had been a strong component of the production, the score was viewed as being “a more than equal partner”. The set was described as having “grimly realistic elements”, including chains, grilles and portcullis – all making clanging sounds that conveyed the milieu of a prison all the more realistically for the audience. Furthermore, the costumes contributed to establishing a cold and heartless environment where prison guards wore “universal Fascist guard uniforms” in leather, contrasted with the “rags of the dispossessed prisoners”.⁵⁸⁶

Die Burger, similarly, gave prominence to the design of the set and costumes, while also focussing on the performances of the singers. The importance of the latter is emphasised in Kooij’s opening paragraph in which he wrote that much has been written about *Fidelio*, and that one thing is certain, that “the opera requires good singers”.⁵⁸⁷ And this is his major critique of the production:

The quality of the choir, especially the men in the prison chorus, was excellent. But untidy entrances and phrasing marred the otherwise exceptional contribution. The conductor Reinhard Schwarz could not hold the singers and orchestra together. It was mostly the singers’ fault.^{588 589}

However, Kooij described the production design as a triumph, adding that “the visual impact and symbolism in each scene were very striking”. The costumes added to this striking visual impact created by the lighting and the set. The stage direction of Günther Schneider-Siemssen, by then well-known and praised as opera director, did not make an impression on Kooij. He wrote that the singers and choir members looked uncomfortable on stage, and that this made him doubt Schneider-Siemssen’s capabilities and skill as a director. But Kooij

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid*: 24.

⁵⁸⁷ Kooij, P.1990a. “Fidelio ’n prestasie ondanks gebreke”. *Die Burger*, Friday 2 February 1990, p4.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid*: 4.

⁵⁸⁹ Original Afrikaans text: “Die kwaliteit van die koor, veral die mans in die gevangene-koor, was uitstekend. Maar onnette aanvang en frase-eindigings het hierdie andersins voortreflike bydrae belemmer. Die dirigent Reinhard Schwarz kon nie die sangers en orkes altyd bymekaar hou nie. Dit was meesal die sangers se fout.”

concluded with a compliment to the director, saying that his ability to move an audience is undeniable and his set design is undoubtedly thought-provoking.⁵⁹⁰

It is unclear why the political significance and timeliness of this production was ignored by the reviewers of both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*. Perhaps the reviewers viewed Beethoven's music as a construct that has little to do with contemporary politics. On the other hand, there could have been – either “self-inflicted” or enforced by editors – political pressure on these reviewers to steer away from any political relevance this production might have. During the 1980s, the media had been strongly regulated by the National Party government, and at the time of Mandela's release in 1990, the political situation in the country had been volatile. *Die Burger* had strong alliances with the National Party and one can surmise that the political uncertainty at the time put the editorial team in a compromising position because by then it had become clear that the country would face major political changes in the coming years.

Like the media, the arts had also been politically suppressed by the National Party government, with performing arts and literature firmly regulated, and with many productions and books having been banned in the 1980s due to political views that did not support or were critical of the government's apartheid agenda. Under these circumstances, CAPAB Opera had been bold in staging an opera that bore such close resemblance to the contemporary political state in South Africa. The 1990 staging did not seem to make an overt statement about the South African political situation, except possibly for the fascist costumes of the guards. But the choice of staging *Fidelio* at that time, shows a move towards treating opera as politically relevant in contemporary South Africa. That both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* had ignored the political relevance of this production emphasises how music could feign ignorance of politics in the society of the day. Also, it represents a conservative mainstream media industry that was unable to free itself from the political chains of the 1980s or to portray and contextualise the ideological shifts happening in the arts and opera.

⁵⁹⁰ Kooij, 1990a:4.

In April 1994, South Africans were preparing themselves for the country's first democratic election. Much like the short timespan between the 1990 production of *Fidelio* and the release of Mandela, the 1994 performance of Beethoven's opera came almost two weeks before the historical election on 27 April 1994. Symbolically, the "imprisonment" of South Africans by an apartheid government and the cultural isolation of the different racial groups in the country were coming to an end. As in the *Cape Times* review of 1990, the heading in 1994 also hinted at the contemporary relevance of staging *Fidelio* at that specific time: "Familiar *Fidelio* is still within its sell-by date".⁵⁹¹

In the review, reference is made to the 1990 production by Schneider-Siemssen, as this was a revival thereof by director Christine Crouse. Irish praised the director for "powerfully direct images", which he wrote had become more powerful in its restaging. This time, reference is made to the opera's contemporary relevance, albeit subtly:

And, if the libretto does have its moments of implausibility and early Romantic socio-political anachronism ("nicht länger knieet sklavisch nieder" [no longer do we kneel slavishly]), it also recounts a grimly and lamentably contemporary tale of wrongful imprisonment and political murder.⁵⁹²

Irish did not go into further detail with regards to the "wrongful imprisonment" or the "political murder". He praised conductor Reinhard Schwarz and the orchestra for "sterling work" and the conductor specifically for his "immensely insightful" reading of the score, which brought to the fore the "lightness of touch delineating the work's ancestry in the later Mozart operas with telling effect".⁵⁹³

The themes of freedom, justice and love in *Fidelio* are emphasised in *Die Burger's* review of the 1994 restaging. For Kooij, this was the essence of Beethoven's opera, and the symbolism and visual impact of this production aims to compel the audience to contemplate the nature

⁵⁹¹ Irish, D. 1994. "Familiar *Fidelio* is still within its sell-by date". *Cape Times*, Monday 18 April 1994, p9.

⁵⁹² *Ibid*: 9.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid*: 9.

of the opera. He wrote: “It must be a heart of stone that is not moved by the scene with the prisoners. What one sees and especially what one hears, strikes deeply.”^{594 595}

Musically, the performance was a success, with praise for the chorus, especially the men, who impressed. Conductor Schwarz established good cooperation between the singers and the orchestra, although the strings lacked a rich sound in the overture. Although Kooij wrote that all the participants in some way compromised the quality of the production, Beethoven’s “beautiful music” and his universal themes of freedom and love ensured the audience could experience “convincing theatre”. South African soprano Marita Napier, in the title role, was commended for her “high notes that still have a radiant quality and powerful volume”.⁵⁹⁶

Although not overtly, both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* linked the themes of freedom and liberation present in *Fidelio* to the socio-political discourse in a changing South Africa. However, they remained fairly conservative in this regard, and only presented the reader with the thematic material without any broad discussion of the opera’s relevance at that portentous time, as no mention is made of the imminent first democratic elections.

In 2004, South Africa celebrated a decade of democracy. To coincide with this, Cape Town Opera staged a production of *Fidelio* on Robben Island, where most of South Africa’s political prisoners (including Mandela) were incarcerated during apartheid. By 2004, the island had been declared a national heritage site and a tourist attraction that allowed visitors to enter the abandoned prison and the cells of some of the well-known former inmates. Choosing the island as the setting of this new production of *Fidelio* was historically significant, because it gave contemporary relevance to the production and situated it firmly within the socio-political context of the time. Much effort had gone into publicising the event, which was presented only once and therefore even more noteworthy.

It is clear that this production made a significant political statement. It followed a decade of major changes in the arts industry, specifically the demise of CAPAB Opera and the

⁵⁹⁴ Kooij, P. 1994. “Kruik se Fidelio is oortuigende teater”. *Die Burger*, Saturday 16 April 1994, p4.

⁵⁹⁵ Original Afrikaans teks: “Dit moet ’n harde hart wees wat nie deur die toneel met die gevangenes geraak word nie. Wat ’n mens sien en veral ook wat gehoor word, tref diep.”

⁵⁹⁶ Kooij, 1994: 4.

establishment of Cape Town Opera. Also, the changes had been exacerbated by public debates on the relevance of opera as a Eurocentric art form in South Africa. Staging an opera to celebrate a decade of South Africa's democracy also seemed to be a strategy for Cape Town Opera to convey the notion that opera still had relevance in the new South Africa.

Both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* gave prominence in their reviews to the political statement made by staging *Fidelio* on Robben Island. Irish in the *Cape Times* called the performance a musical event "which assume a status". While he was critical of the outdoor setting of this singular staging of *Fidelio* because it influenced the acoustics, the historical significance of this production outweighed that. Irish wrote:

From the purely artistic point of view, it is hardly an ideal venue for the opera, despite the absolute authenticity of the setting. It has most of the disadvantages of an outdoor musical performance – although the screen walls do afford some acoustical assistance. And, of course, entrances and lighting possibilities are also dictated by the venue. But, in the context of this performance, these considerations were more than ameliorated by the fusion of the central theme of the libretto and the personal histories of so many of our current and recent leaders, many of whom were present on this occasion. And surely none of those privileged to attend this event would wish to gainsay the great debt owed by the citizenry of this country to those who bore the interminable deprivation of this place.⁵⁹⁷

Musically, opined Irish, the production was of "unequal quality". He praised the South African-born soprano Elizabeth Connell, who returned to her native country from the United Kingdom to perform in this production. But it was the chorus that impressed most, indicative of the admirable reputation that the opera company's chorus had achieved since the establishment of the Choral Training Programme in the 1990s, in which specifically black singers were trained. The chorus had instilled some pride among local opera lovers, which can be inferred from Irish's statement that the chorus "sang with memorable, full-throated,

⁵⁹⁷ Irish, D. 2004a. "Island opera celebrates freedom with passion". *Cape Times*, Wednesday 31 March 2004, p10.

South African passion". He continued, "In their choral celebration of freedom, these fellow citizens of ours effectively became the real stars of the show".⁵⁹⁸

Die Burger's review opened with a reference to the political significance of the performances in 1990 and 1994, before Mandela's release and before the first democratic elections respectively. At the time of these performances, *Die Burger* had not noticed the political significance. In this review of the 2004 performance on Robben Island, Gottfried Maas gave another reason for this performance of *Fidelio*, besides it being a celebration of a decade of democracy: it had also been forty years since Mandela was imprisoned. In the production, recordings of extracts from Mandela's speeches had also been played.

According to Maas, the production was successful both visually and acoustically. He also praised Connell's singing, although she did not physically convince as a woman disguised as a man. He also had high praise for the other singers, as well as the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra's performance. In concluding his review, Maas remarked on the contribution of this production to the advancement of opera in South Africa:

Let us hope that this great effort for South Africa has won a firm percentage of friends for opera, and that lovers of the art form can look forward to many great productions in the country's theatres.^{599 600}

The reception of the 2004 performance of *Fidelio* on Robben Island was strongly influenced by the political significance thereof, with the reviewers focussing more on the contribution of this production to the contemporary relevance of opera. This represents a shift from the reviews published in 1990 and 1994, which ignored the political significance of those performances of *Fidelio*. Whereas these earlier reviews extensively discussed the performance aesthetics – the music and its interpretation by the musicians and the stage interpretation of the director – the reviews of the 2004 production placed greater emphasis on contextualising this production within contemporary society for their readers. By 2004,

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid*: 10.

⁵⁹⁹ Maas, G. 2004b. "Eiland-'Fidelio' slaag". *Die Burger*, Monday 29 March 2004, p8.

⁶⁰⁰ Original Afrikaans text: "Laat ons hoop dat die groot poging vir Suid-Afrika 'n stewige persentasie vriende vir opera gewen het en dat liefhebbers van dié kunsvorm kan uitsien na vele knap produksies in die land se teaters."

Fidelio's contemporary relevance seemed to have outweighed the aesthetics of the performance.

Cape Town Opera presented yet another site-specific staging of *Fidelio* in 2012, this time in the Castle of Good Hope – the seventeenth-century fort in Cape Town's city centre. It was built between 1666 and 1679 by the Dutch East India Company and housed, besides living quarters and workshops, prison cells where slaves were incarcerated. Today, the fort is the oldest existing colonial building in South Africa. The production was put on in the central space of the fort, and much like the Robben Island production, the building was used as the performance space, although a stage was built where some scenes were performed.

For this production, the setting in the fort aimed to allow the audience to engage with an historic space that was a symbol of colonialism, slavery and oppression. The themes of liberation and freedom in *Fidelio* therefore also resonated with the audience's connotations with this building.

The *Cape Times* reported that this 2012 production was "far more gripping and better sung" than the "famous" *Fidelio* on Robben Island in 2004. Irish opined that the fort was a natural background for an opera set in a prison because of the Castle's history. Furthermore, he commented on how Beethoven's music had been enhanced (even interpreted) on stage through the use of the imagery of slavery and colonial power:

The stairway running to the top of one building provided Don Pizarro with a commanding view of his empire on which he stamped his malevolent authority. His reign of terror with its beatings, whipping and executions, was mimed right through the overture, one of the four Beethoven wrote. This savagery was not only a reminder of what probably happened at the Castle in days gone by, but accentuated Leonore's courage to disguise herself as the young man Fidelio to find out where her husband Florestan had been wrongfully imprisoned by Pizarro.⁶⁰¹

⁶⁰¹ Irish, D. 2012a. "A stirring production of 'Fidelio'". *Cape Times*, Wednesday 7 March 2012, p12.

The setting of this production of *Fidelio* was also the focal point of *Die Burger's* review, which had the heading, "Setting in Castle best for *Fidelio*".⁶⁰² The connection between the country's history of slavery and the thematic material in *Fidelio* was discussed at length, and the opera was described as a "liberation opera". Reference was made to the 2004 performance on Robben Island, which the reviewer described as "a symbol of the liberation struggle in South Africa". Regarding the production at the Castle, Muller continued:

This setting is the best part of Christine Crouse's production. In this way, the opera becomes a reality for the audience and at times filmic. Crouse uses the entire space of a courtyard of the Castle literally as far as the eye can see. The whole Castle therefore becomes the set and the audience finds itself within the drama [...] On the roof a flag is hoisted, a soldier is ready to fire shots, and "ghosts" appear. Inquisitive servants stare through windows, and horses and carriages enter. Crouse creates site-specific theatre by setting the opera at the time of slavery at the Cape. And it works.^{603 604}

Muller, too, discussed the constraints of outdoor opera performances, saying that the balance between the orchestra and soloists was marred, even though microphones were used to enhance the sound. He added that without the acoustics of an opera house, the orchestra and singers sounded "dry".⁶⁰⁵

A clear distinction can be noticed in the reception of the 1990 and 1994 productions of Beethoven's *Fidelio* compared to the 2004 and 2012 productions. For the first two productions, both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* ignored the socio-political context in which the opera was staged, while in the latter two productions the context, setting and staging of the opera received more attention than the musical aspects. It demonstrates a

⁶⁰² Muller, W. 2012a. "Plasing in kasteel beste van *Fidelio*". *Die Burger*, Friday 9 March 2012, p14.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid*:14.

⁶⁰⁴ Original Afrikaans text: "Juis dié plasing is die beste deel van Christine Crouse se produksie. So word die opera vir die gehoor werklikheid en by tye filmies. Crouse gebruik die ganse ruimte van 'n binnehof van die Kasteel letterlik sover as jou oog kan sien. Die ganse Kasteel word dus die stel en die gehoor bevind hom as't ware binne die drama [...] Op die dak word 'n vlag gehys, maak soldate reg om te vuur, en verskyn "spoke". Uit die vensters peul nuuskierige diensknegte, en perde met koetse kom binne. Crouse skep 'n stuk ruimtespesifieke teater, met die opera wat na die tyd van slawerny aan die Kaap verplaas word. En dit werk."

⁶⁰⁵ Muller, 2012a:14.

shift in opera critics' approach to reviewing this opera, and by implication a shift in society's view of the opera. No longer was opera (this production specifically and opera in South Africa in general) purely an endeavour of musical entertainment, but it had become an artistic expression portraying contemporary issues. It therefore became pertinent for the critics to contextualise the production within a contemporary framework. This can, for instance, be noticed in Muller's review of the 2012 production in which he commented that performing *Fidelio* in the Castle made the opera "a reality" for the audience – a reference suggesting the contemporary relevance of opera.

The *Fidelio* performances in Cape Town are unique in the sense that all four productions had clear resonances with the socio-political contexts, giving the work contemporary and local relevance. Although it had only been reported on years later, the first two productions of 1990 and 1994 show a careful awareness of the political changes happening at the time. In the same vein, the 2004 production on Robben Island was – in its setting and along with other commemorations of South Africa's first decade of democracy – a celebration of the liberation struggle. The 2012 production happened during a period in which a discourse emerged that questioned previous South African historical writing and ever-increasing calls for the decolonisation of that knowledge.

The reception of *Fidelio* shows that within the local context, the opera had, over the course of more than two decades, become a work associated with South Africa's liberation struggle, and more recently in 2012 as an artistic expression aimed at addressing the country's complex history and the legacies of colonialism and apartheid.

Crossing musical boundaries

The creation and performance of *La bohème noir* in 1997 was a step towards the Africanisation of opera in South Africa. What had remained mostly untouched in this process towards Africanisation until the end of the 1990s, was the score of the composer. While the language, setting and themes were adapted to create an African *La bohème*, the score had remained relatively intact as Puccini had written it. In 2001, a production of Verdi's *Macbeth* shifted the boundaries of the Africanisation of opera even further by

adapting the score. Irish, in his review, summed up the musical adaptation of *Macbeth* as follows:

Director Brett Bailey and composer Péter Louis van Dijk have taken the Verdi opera, as derived from the Shakespeare play, disassembled it, and put the essential elements back together as a taut, furiously paced African allegory.⁶⁰⁶

Kooij, in *Die Burger*, described it as, “Verdi with voodoo dolls, saxophones and African drums”. It is clear from the reviewers’ descriptions that this version of Verdi’s opera would in many ways be different from the original – although *Macbeth* in its original version had not been staged in the period this study covers (1985 to 2015) and audiences might have been less familiar with it.

This 2001 *Macbeth* was transferred from Scotland to West Africa and set amidst political turmoil. Although it took its themes from the original opera, many of the traditions and conventions of various African cultures were included. The score became a mixture between Verdi’s music and elements of African music. Irish wrote that the drama and the music had been scaled down to “almost skeletal proportions”, to the point where it marred character development. Dramatically, Bailey kept Verdi’s focus on the relationship between the husband, wife, and the witches, with the role of the witches (in this case sangomas) expanded and other characters (Duncan, Banquo and MacDuff) on the periphery. But Bailey had created a version of Verdi’s *Macbeth* that also proved to challenge conventions in the staging of opera, as Irish described:

The staging is enormously engaging; the audience is seated on raised stands running the depth of the stage and the action takes place primarily on the stage revolve, which attains the idiomatic status of a boma or a kraal. With the orchestra sensibly retained in the pit, the action occurs in front of it and attains enormous immediacy.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁶ Irish, D. 2001b. “Africanised Macbeth is a hit”. *Cape Times*, Monday 17 September 2001, p7.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid*: 7.

Irish took a preservationist approach to the musical adaptation by mentioning that Van Dijk “has ensured the retention of the major arias”. He also mentioned that the adaptation and changing of the setting to “a deeply rural Africa somewhere” is “relatively painless”. This comment exposes a view that adaptations of standard repertoire operas should be done with sensitivity towards an audience with a background of Western European opera and its performance traditions and practices. Although he found problems in Bailey’s staging – that it “externalises evil” – the heading of the review suggests a favourable reception: “Africanised Macbeth is a hit”.⁶⁰⁸ Furthermore, he wrote that this production would find favour with “anyone interested in an emerging South African operatic identity” – an indication that this production had changed the course of opera performance in South Africa and that this course would indeed lead to an aesthetics of opera that would be distinctly South African.

Die Burger’s heading suggested a milder reception: “African opera partly successful”.⁶⁰⁹ Kooij wrote that the audience had been captivated by the production on opening night, adding that it is possible that people would either find it a stimulating production or they would hate it. Personally, Kooij liked the idea of such an adaptation, but mentioned that the execution thereof was not always done well. The production was found to be imaginative and singer-friendly.⁶¹⁰ Furthermore, the Africanisation – according to Kooij done for the sake of the black singers – of an Italian opera based on a Shakespeare play about Scottish nobility, is a “fundamental transformation”. This view suggests a cognisance of the divide between African and European arts in South Africa, with the reviewer suggesting that it should rather have been set in South Africa than in a West African country. The only reason that Kooij provided for this suggestion is that the “irritating voodoo doll” would then not have been one of the props.⁶¹¹ But the absence of a good reason coupled with the word “irritating” suggest an ideological resistance, as well as the inability to describe the changing opera performance landscape and how it merges African and European arts and customs.

⁶⁰⁸ Irish, 2001b:7.

⁶⁰⁹ Kooij, P. 2001b. “Afrika-opera slaag deals”. *Die Burger*, Monday 17 September 2001, p4.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid*: 4.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid*: 4.

Bailey's adaptation of Verdi's *Macbeth* returned to the stage in 2007, this time titled *macbEth*. The new title suggested a new production with more elements adapted than in the previous staging of 2001. In the *Cape Times*, reference was made to the fact that the witches had undergone a "metamorphosis" since the 2001 staging. Reviewer Chisholm described the setting as "somewhere in modern Africa, a continent where it is not uncommon for a military leader to spill blood grabbing power, and to shed even more trying to hold on to it".⁶¹² Having seen the 2001 version, Chisholm described this production as an exciting experience that was in no way dull, "a music-drama that pulsates with life". Again, there was a focus on the distance between what had been created and the source text. Chisholm wrote that Verdi's score had maintained its integrity in this version of the opera, while alerting readers that *macbEth* is "a startlingly different version of a familiar tale". This, Chisholm wrote, made the work suitable as a first-time production for someone who has not seen opera.⁶¹³

Under the heading "Masterpiece shines again", *Die Burger* gave a mostly glowing review of *macbEth*, but the subheading "Offbeat approach applied with integrity; does not break down Verdi" suggests that the preservation of Verdi's musical ideals contributed to its success.⁶¹⁴ Reviewer Kobus van der Merwe described the production as "surprisingly sensory", and that in this version a Romantic opera was set in a contemporary African context with ease. In his description of the stage, Van der Merwe wrote about the bodies in white chalk (like Xhosa men at an initiation ritual), soldiers in camouflage wear, a king in a leopard skin, as well as a character resembling the former Zimbabwean dictator Robert Mugabe. Verdi's music contained "African bits", created with subtle inclusion of marimbas and marakkas (an indigenous instrument), as well as a saxophone. He continued that Bailey and Van Dijk's approach was done with integrity, which does not compromise Verdi's original score. He added:

To modernise a classical opera and still convey the core of the original work with success is not an easy feat. With their indomitable vision of *Macbeth*

⁶¹² Chisholm, F. 2007a. "Music drama pulsates with life". *Cape Times*, Tuesday 20 March 2007, p7.

⁶¹³ *Ibid*: 7.

⁶¹⁴ Van der Merwe, K. 2007. "Meesterwerk skitter weer". *Die Burger*, Saturday 17 March 2007, p12.

in Africa and truthfulness in the execution, Bailey and his co-creators makes an old masterpiece sparkle anew.^{615 616}

The positive reception points towards an acceptance of the emerging aesthetic of opera in which African elements and instruments and the original music are combined to create a new way of staging opera in South Africa. In their reviews – both of the 2001 and 2007 productions – the writers embraced the merging of African and Western musical and theatrical elements in creating an operatic aesthetic that has contemporary relevance and is perceived as being from Africa. However, all the reviews compared the adapted work to the original score, and commented on the extent of the adaptation of the score, favouring an approach that remains closely related to the original and represents the original with integrity.

Another opera adaptation was staged in 2002 in which the musical score had been altered to include African musical elements and indigenous instruments, becoming a key production giving direction towards a new operatic aesthetic. In their reviews of a production of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, presented at the Spier Amphitheater outside Stellenbosch, the headings in both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* make specific reference to the combination of elements of African and Western art music. The *Cape Times*' heading read, "Happy blend of African, Baroque art", while *Die Burger's* heading was "Baroque and Africa sounds good together".

In the *Cape Times*, Irish described the production as "rewardingly inventive", and opined that "the meeting of cultures is vividly portrayed in costuming, dancing and music".⁶¹⁷ The production aimed to conjoin the worlds of European and African culture by dressing the Trojans in clothes reflecting "the Baroque fashions of 1680 Europe" which, wrote Irish, would remind South Africans of their own colonisers. On the other hand, the Carthaginian queen Dido and her courtiers were dressed in a "delightful Africanised version of Baroque". According to Irish, this production demonstrated a manner in which other art forms could

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid*: 12.

⁶¹⁶ Original Afrikaans text: "Om 'n klassieke opera so te moderniseer en steeds die kern van die oorspronklike werk suksesvol oor te dra, is nie 'n maklike taak nie. Met hul onverbetelike visie van *Macbeth* in Afrika laat Bailey en sy medewerkers egter met eerlikheid 'n ou meesterwerk splinternuut skitter."

⁶¹⁷ Irish, D. 2002. "Happy blend of African, Baroque". *Cape Times*, Wednesday 16 January 2002, p7.

be Africanised “without being either patronising or historically illiterate”. Of the musical adaptation, which included both Baroque instruments and marimbas and drums, Irish wrote:

This might sound as if taking an irreverent liberty with a minor masterpiece, but, in truth, it mirrors the Baroque period’s own casuistic approach to the inclusion, or alteration, of movements, dances, instrumentation and the likes.⁶¹⁸

In his review in *Die Burger*, Kooij wrote that the mixing of Baroque opera and traditional African music is a combination “that mostly works very good, with some noticeable exceptions”. His reservations were the omission of Purcell’s music to make space for African music, remarking that this was “unnecessary”, and that well-known parts were cut, making the performance rather short. Like Irish, the references of the production’s costumes was significant for Kooij in portraying the coming together of African and European cultures. He concluded that the combination of a short Baroque opera, African music and dance “is certainly not boring”.⁶¹⁹

Noticeable in both these reviews is the favourable reception of how African and Western musical elements were combined to create a new work. But both reviews also cautioned against taking away too much from an original work, as this damages the production. In the trajectory of a changing opera aesthetic, this production of *Dido and Aeneas* is significant in that it reached that “happy blend” of combining African and European arts.

A more drastic adaptation came in 2007, when an independent theatre company, called Isango/Portobello, created an Africanised version of Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*, with the title translated into isiXhosa as *Impempe Yomlingo*. In this version, traditional African and Western instruments were not combined, but a full orchestra of marimbas, drums and glass bottles were used to play Mozart’s score. For this instrumentation, the score had been minimally adapted, while the German libretto had also been adapted and translated into

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid*: 7.

⁶¹⁹ Kooij, P. 2002. “Barok en Afrika klink goed saam”. *Die Burger*, Monday 14 January 2002, p4.

English and isiXhosa.⁶²⁰ The production toured to London’s West End, where the reception was overwhelming. As reported in *Die Burger*, the London media described the production as “remarkable”, “delightful”, “enchanting”, “vibrant” and “glorious”. Mark Dornford-May, director of Isango/Portobello, explained in an interview with *Die Burger* their choice of repertoire and its adaptation as follows:

[*The Magic Flute*] has universal themes that suit the post-apartheid South Africa we live in; things like forgiveness. And this is one of the world’s most well-known operas that was written for children *and* adults. Opera is difficult. You cannot dumb it down; you have to find other means to approach it and work with what is given. The audience still comes for opera, but they want it to make sense within their linguistic and cultural context. And this is something that Wagner also believed, and the reason why he was an advocate for performing opera in German in Germany.⁶²¹

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In a review in the *Cape Times* of this performance of *The Magic Flute* in the Baxter Theatre, reviewer Karen Rutter wrote that the result of this adaptation “is both exciting and engaging”, adding that although purists might not like it, “it’s certainly a lot of fun”.⁶²³ For purists, Rutter explained, the production team had not strayed far from the original Mozart work and the story remains essentially the same. In conclusion, the opera was seen as a vehicle for “an enormously talented local cast”, but it is the accessibility achieved with this adaptation that finds favourable reception. Rutter wrote that the production achieves what (she assumes) Mozart would have wanted it to achieve by being “accessible, with an enduring message for every person”.

⁶²⁰ Muller, W. 2008a. “Britte gaande oor opera uit Afrika”. *Die Burger*, Friday 8 February 2008, p12.

⁶²¹ *Ibid*: 12.

⁶²² Original Afrikaans text: “Dit het universele temas wat so goed pas by die post-apartheid-Suid-Afrika waarin ons leef; dinge soos vergifnis. En dis een van die wêreld se bekendste operas wat vir kinders én grootmens geskryf is. Opera is moeilik. Jy kan dit nie vervlak nie; jy moet ander maniere vind om die werk te benader en met die gegewe te werk. Die gehoor kom steeds vir die opera, maar hulle wil hê dit moet sin maak binne hul taal- en kulturele konteks. En dis iets wat Wagner ook geglo het, en daarom was hy ’n voorstander dat opera in Duitsland in Duits opgevoer word.”

⁶²³ Rutter, K. 2007. “African themes spices up classic tales”. *Cape Times*, Thursday 25 October 2007, p13.

Muller, in a review in *Die Burger*, wrote that *Impempe Yomlingo* was not only an adaptation of the libretto and score, but that traditional African rituals (he doesn't mention the specific rituals) were included in the staging. Ultimately, he continued, it was the arrangement of the score for African instruments "which situated it firmly in Africa".⁶²⁴ The sound of Mozart's orchestration played on marimbas was found to be surprisingly good and the arrangements done well. The singing, however, was not as good, with Muller writing that many singers struggled with intonation, and soprano Pauline Malefane's voice was not suited to the role of the Queen of the Night. The review ended as follows:

As a theatre production, this *Magic Flute* is excellent: the set and costumes are well designed, the drama is portrayed movingly and the comedy is on point. But musically it has its shortcomings. Whether you are going to like it, depends on which part of opera is more important to you: the drama or the music.^{625 626}

Although performed outside the usual opera scene of Cape Town and not staged by Cape Town Opera, the production was significant in that it was bold in stripping Mozart's work from much of its European musical roots. This aimed to situate the score squarely in an African milieu. Although up until this point in history, operas had been Africanised through translations and arrangements of the score to include, besides Western instruments, also African instruments, this performance of *Impempe Yomlingo* emphasised that there are means of deepening the roots of opera in Africa. This can be done by performing the work in local languages, adding local cultural practices and performing the score on only indigenous instruments.

In 2015, Cape Town Opera staged a reimagined version of Franz Léhar's *Die lustige Witwe*. This operetta had been popular with Cape Town audiences as a festive season stage favourite, much like *Die Fledermaus*. For this production of Lehár's operetta, however, it was titled *The Merry Widow of Malagawi*, set in an imagined place called "Malagawi",

⁶²⁴ Muller, W. 2007. "Towerfluit kry 'n Afrika-geur". *Die Burger*, Monday 15 October 2007, p.8.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid*: 8.

⁶²⁶ Original Afrikaans text: "As teaterproduksie is dié *Towerfluit* puik: die stel en kostuums is goed ontwerp, die drama is meesleurend vertolk en die komedie is in die kol. Maar musikaal het dit sy tekortkominge. Of jy daarvan gaan hou, hang af van watter deel van opera vir jou swaarder weeg: die drama of die musiek."

somewhere in the metropolis of “Africana”. Chisholm wrote in her review in the *Cape Times* that the production, directed by Janice Honeyman (popular for her pantomime productions), featured “high fashion”, “glorious party settings”, an “exuberant cast”, “zesty dancers” and “musicians on the stage and in the pit”.⁶²⁷ The operetta’s libretto was altered to include commentary on topical South African politics, with references to a bankrupt state, rugby transformation in the country, and also former president Jacob Zuma’s controversial Nkandla compound in KwaZulu-Natal. The libretto had been translated into English, but with some commentary in isiXhosa. Chisholm quoted Honeyman’s director’s notes in which the latter explains why she had decided to relocate this operetta from Austria to an imaged African state:

It’s uncanny how many aspects of political manipulation, commercialism, lust, greed and problems of being a woman in a man’s world have been transferred so easily from early twentieth-century Vienna to 2015 Malagawi! My interpretation is suitable for this group and they have given us a wonderful realisation and rendition of this “homegrown” adaptation of the operetta.⁶²⁸

Muller, in his review of the operetta in *Die Burger*, situated the production in the context of recent Africanised productions staged in Cape Town over two decades, saying that this has located European stories and music in an African context. He was of the opinion that this practice remains problematic, and that this production in particular highlighted the problems of Africanisation:

What about the European noblemen and their customs? And unless you re-compose the music, the tunes and rhythms divulge the opera’s origin. On the other hand: the impact of Western European culture stretches so wide that Viennese tunes in central Africa might not be that strange.^{629 630}

⁶²⁷ Chisholm, F. 2015. “Merriest, sassiest, joyful battle of the sexes”. *Cape Times*, Monday 7 September 2015, p7.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid*: 7.

⁶²⁹ Muller, W. 2015b. “Widow se energie verskaf kinderlike genot”. *Die Burger*, Friday 11 September 2015, p8.

⁶³⁰ Original Afrikaans text: “Hoe gemaak met Europese adellikes en hul gebruike? En tensy jy die musiek herkomponeer, verklap die wysies en ritmes tog steeds die opera se herkoms. Aan die ander kant: Die impak van Wes-Europese kultuur strek so wyd dat Weense wysies in midde-Afrika nie juis vreemd is nie.”

He continued to describe the ways in which Honeyman localises and Africanises the operetta. This included the incorporation of African dances, tropical plants and colourful costumes, an orchestration embellished by African instruments like the marimba and penny whistle. The Viennese characters' names had also been changed to parodies of African names: Hanna Glawari became Anna X'lawari, Baron Zeta became Chief L'Zitho, Danilo Danilovitsch became Daniloh Doniloh-loh, and Camille de Rosillon became Khumal Doh-Rassa-Yon. Muller concluded the review by remarking that despite the localisation, it was difficult to ignore the operetta's Viennese nature. This, he said, made one question the value of Africanisation.⁶³¹

After the fall of apartheid, the rapidly changing South African society sought to find its new identity, which was made up of diverse cultures, most of which had previously been ignored and excluded from national attention. In the arts in general, this discourse revolved around the inclusion of indigenous cultural production in existing structures and art forms. Opera – labelled by politicians as Eurocentric and elitist – had indeed created much debate, mostly about its place in society. The strategies, both from the opera industry and political powers, led to the development of a rhetoric of bringing opera closer to the people. Strategies towards contemporary relevance and Africanisation were aimed at doing exactly that.

These changes followed an evolutionary process that took place over many years, eventually making a crucial contribution to establishing a distinctly South African operatic aesthetic. Operas were initially “transported” to a local setting and sung in English or Afrikaans, and in later years, as was the case with *Fidelio*, used to establish connections between opera and contemporary socio-political issues. The process further involved the adaptation of opera scores to include African musical styles and instruments, and in some cases African instruments replaced Western instruments in standard repertoire operas, such as Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*.

What effectively developed in this process of contemporising and Africanising opera was an operatic aesthetic in which Western European repertoire had been transformed through varied adaptations to musical and theatrical performances that not only resonated with a

⁶³¹ Muller, 2015b:8.

contemporary local audience, but also reflected the myriad art forms and cultural diversity of South Africa. It positioned opera as a musical work set in a local milieu and language, with culturally relevant references for a local audience, coupled with references to the original Western European repertoire. It made it possible for an opera, like Lehár's *Merry Widow*, to be set in an imagined African state.

The reception of productions aimed at contemporising and Africanising opera shows an embrace of this staged engagement of European and African musical styles and instruments. This can be read as a strategy towards the preservation of European art forms in South Africa, where the inclusion of indigenous art forms had been deemed necessary due to the socio-political changes in the country. In the reviews of these productions, the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* seemed to have endorsed this developing operatic aesthetic as a compromised means of ensuring the survival of opera. As some of these reviews have alluded to, the relocation and localisation of opera is not without its difficulties. Still engrained in the music, libretto and characters of standard classical opera repertoire is an uneasiness that belies its roots outside of this continent. Liberating opera from this burden required the composition of indigenous South African operas – with music, characters and stories rooted in the soil of this continent.

PART 4

Performing indigenous South African operas

The localisation and Africanisation of standard repertoire operas – through the adaptation of libretti, settings and musical scores – served to make opera relevant to a local audience and indigenise the art form. But the composition of new operas by local composers created the possibility of establishing a musical and theatrical means of expression that could represent an operatic aesthetic with claims to be distinctly South African. Tracing the reception of these indigenous South African operas that were performed in Cape Town reveals changes in approaches to opera performance practices and their subsequent influence on the establishment of a distinctly South African operatic aesthetic. Between 1995 and 2015, seventeen local operas were staged, of which only one was not newly composed.

In less than a year after South Africa's historic first democratic election in 1994, an indigenous opera was staged in the then Nico Malan Opera House: *Enoch, prophet of God* by composer Roelof Temmingh. Over the previous five years, the arts landscape had transformed immensely, and in the case of opera in Cape Town, CAPAB's Choral Training Programme was flourishing and had produced a number of black singers who had gone on to pursue careers as soloists. It had also become pertinent to lift the veil on African stories, not only in opera but in the arts in general. *Enoch, prophet of God* became the first South African opera based on an indigenous story. The libretto relates the events of the Bulhoek massacre in 1921 when a lay priest, Enoch Mgijima, and his church followers, called the Israelites, were killed by police after they had supposedly illegally occupied a farm. *Enoch* was the first in a trilogy of operas by Temmingh that were staged between 1995 and 1999. For the opera's librettist, Michael Williams, *Enoch, prophet of God* was a means of displaying contemporary South African society and relating the untold histories of black people in the country. In an interview with *Die Burger*, Williams explained:

This incident is telling of both our white and our black worlds, the one we live in now, but we have remained oblivious to the black part thereof in the

past. What I try to do is to identify the whole South African culture. This *Enoch* is not meant to divide but to provide a view of this whole.^{632 633}

Asked whether the intention of creating *Enoch, prophet of God* was purely to create an African opera, Williams answered:

I would hope that it has more universal meaning; that I would get understanding for it overseas. But some of the elements are ostensibly and inevitably from here, such as the concepts of the ancestral spirit world that the black population live in. In fact, these spirits play a very important role in the opera. But on the other hand, the prophet Enoch's view of himself as the man that is relentlessly correct because he practices God's word – this is a purely Western tragic element, which the Greeks called hubris.^{634 635}

With its mixture of African and Western music elements and its local story, *Enoch, prophet of God* found favour with critics in a time when South Africans were redefining what culture meant and when opera and its elitist and Eurocentric label was under scrutiny. The *Cape Times* reported that the opera was “powerful enough to become known far and wide”, with the heading adding that the story of the opera was dramatic. In her review, Elspeth Jack wrote that the opera is “pertinent to our times”, implying that it has contemporary relevance for South Africans, but also that the themes have universal appeal. It would appear, according to the reviewer, that the music predominantly had recognisable classical music elements, as Jack wrote, “I had expected more African influence in the music but this was evident only in the inspirational Xhosa hymns which are woven into the score – the responsibility of chorus master Lungile Jacobs”.⁶³⁶

⁶³² Grütter, W. 1995. “Nuwe opera wil poog om hele beeld van Suid-Afrika te wys”. *Die Burger*, Monday 16 January 1995, p4.

⁶³³ Original Afrikaans text: “Hierdie insident is sprekend van beide ons wit en ons swart wêreld, die een waarin ons nou leef, maar waarvan ons van die swart deel in die verlede onbewus gebly het. Wat ek probeer doen, is om die geheel van die Suid-Afrikaanse kultuur te identifiseer. Hierdie *Enoch* is nie bedoel as 'n verdeling nie, maar 'n blik op die geheel.”

⁶³⁴ Grütter, 1995:4.

⁶³⁵ Original Afrikaans text: “Ek sou hoop dat dit van meer universele betekenis is, dat ek ook oorsee sou kon begrip daarvoor vind. Maar van die elemente is klaarblyklik en onafwendbaar van hier, soos die konsepte van die voorvaderlike geesteswêreld waarin die swart bevolking lewe. Hierdie geeste speel trouens 'n baie belangrike rol in die opera. Maar andersyds: Enoch, die profeet, se siening van homself as die man wat onverbiddelik reg is omdat hy Gods woord uitvoer – dit is 'n suiwer Westerse tragiese element, wat die Grieke hubris genoem het.”

⁶³⁶ Jack, E. 1995. “Little light relief in powerful and dramatic story”. *Cape Times*, Thursday 26 January 1995, p9.

Die Burger's reviewer also reported that the music contained only a few "African elements" yet was "strong and very listenable" – a means of conveying that regular operagoers would easily connect with the music. According to Kooij, the music effectively painted the changing moods recognisable in the words, and it swayed between emotive melodies and dramatic and exciting passages. Moreover, the music was "beautiful", containing few "strange" and "dissonant" passages, which Kooij claimed was Temmingh's intention.

The heading to the review stated that *Enoch, prophet of God* had a "successful premiere", and that the bloody tragedy had an enormous impact.⁶³⁷ This impact, Kooij wrote, is that the opera is "an important creative happening", and that this importance is not only because of its musical contribution but also because it has "implications for political decisions".⁶³⁸ Indeed, he called Williams's libretto "loaded with effective theatre", adding a pertinent comment:

It is, however, almost politically too correct to always be credible. The white people are superficial or aggressive, and the followers of Enoch are God-fearing and freedom-loving. It was very interesting to note how the resentful remark "Voertsek K*ff*r!" elicited different reactions from black and white members of the audience.^{639 640}

Interestingly enough, Kooij did not expand on this comment or explain the different reactions. Rather, he continued to comment on Williams's stage direction that was convincing and full of symbolism, which highlighted the differences between the black and white groups in the story, yet overshadowed love as a dimension of the story. The only criticism, which shows the acceptance of black bodies on the opera stage, was the "blackfacing" of white people who played ancestral ghosts. Kooij summarised his views on the opera as follows:

⁶³⁷ Kooij, P. 1995a. "Bloedige tragedie het soms enorme impak". *Die Burger*, Thursday 26 January 1995, p5.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid*: 5.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid*: 5.

⁶⁴⁰ Original Afrikaans text: "Dit is polities egter amper té korrek om altyd geloofwaardig te kan wees. Die witmense is oppervlakkig of aggressief, en die volgeling van Enoch is godvresend en vryheidsliewend. Baie interessant is hoe die verwyte 'Voertsek K*ff*r!' verskillende reaksies by swart en wit lede van die gehoor ontlok het."

Enoch is dynamic theatre, with music that is easy to listen to and often strongly dramatic. Do not miss this stimulating performance. And if the arts should be politicised, then this opera was excellent politics.^{641 642}

From this comment, and others in this review, *Die Burger* painted an image of the opera as a work that has more political motivation than artistic relevance. Although the opera as a musical and theatrical work found favour with the reviewer, the political impetus for its creation and its portrayal of history was not less commendable. The *Cape Times* had steered away from any mention of a political theme in the opera. It is evident, however, that both newspapers viewed the work as important in being the first work to explore indigenous stories in operatic form. Judging from both reviews, it would seem that the “African elements” of the work were mostly found in the story and the staging of the production – the “listenable” music had been aimed at drawing regular operagoers into the theatre to explore an African story in a familiar (Western) musical idiom.

The second opera in Temmingh’s trilogy, *Sacred Bones*, was staged two years later in 1997 at Artscape. Described as a “South African chamber opera”, *Sacred Bones* seemed, judging from the *Cape Times*’s review, a work of a smaller scale than *Enoch, prophet of God*. However, Irish opined that the libretto lends itself to being a larger work that explores several themes and that contains deeper subplots. The libretto revolves around a palaeontological expedition group that visits a female farmer who had been raped and whose husband had been killed during a farm attack. It explores the “cultural tensions” between “white intruders and the African bush and its endemic inhabitants”.⁶⁴³ The white leaders of the expedition try to maintain “Western standards” and feel threatened by the wilderness, while a black character feels “truly at home in the bush”. Looking back today, it feels rather ironic, as this seems to be a portrayal of the changes happening in the arts at that time, and of which Temmingh’s opera is an example – Western opera finding its place in Africa. Irish concluded:

⁶⁴¹ Kooij, 1995:5.

⁶⁴² Original Afrikaans text: “*Enoch* is dinamiese teater, met musiek wat maklik op die oor val en dikwels sterk dramaties is. Moenie hierdie stimulerende opvoering misloop nie. En as die kunste verpolitiseer sou word, was hierdie opera goeie politiek.”

⁶⁴³ Irish, D. 1997a. “Visually, musically appealing ‘Sacred’ is often confusing”. *Cape Times*, Tuesday 17 June 1997, p14.

The production is, in all, a challenging one and provides considerable interest to all concerned with the on-going development of South African music and theatre. However, one is left with the feeling that it requires fleshing out and that this is but the essence of a larger work, waiting its creators' further attention.⁶⁴⁴

Die Burger's review similarly pointed towards an uncertainty about the place of *Sacred Bones* in the operatic spectrum. Kooij called this opera an "interesting and gripping theatre experience", adding that the music made an impact and is melodious, and that the story was compelling. The music, he wrote, reflects the characters' moods and the settings they find themselves in.⁶⁴⁵ For Kooij, a highlight was how the music created a "bush atmosphere" and enhanced a storm scene. He praised the composer's sensitivity for the emotional depictions in the words. However, Kooij warned that the opera is not for audience members who have never heard "contemporary classical music", except if they are interested in theatre and the music is secondary to their experience.⁶⁴⁶

From the reviews of both *Enoch, prophet of God* and *Sacred Bones*, it can be deduced that there had been some uncertainty as to the direction of a new way of creating South African opera. Both these works conveyed indigenous stories, but its musical idiom was still mostly rooted in Western art music. This seemed to find favour with the reviewers, as such a strategy kept the idea and ideals of opera intact while simultaneously infusing it with local stories and musical elements. What also comes across is that these works indeed had a political motive that aimed to establish a new operatic aesthetic in its mixture of Western European and African artistic elements. The third opera in Temmingh's trilogy, *Buchuland*, was not performed in Cape Town, but only in Pretoria in 1999.

For the libretto of his opera *Amarantha*, the Hungarian-born South African composer Thomas Rajna used an American short story and not a local narrative. *Amarantha* opened at Artscape in November 2000 and reviews in the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* described the work as dramatic, both in its story and Rajna's orchestration. In his programme notes, the

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid*: 14.

⁶⁴⁵ Kooij, P. 1997. "Afrika opera open luisterryk". *Die Burger*, Monday 16 June 1997, p4.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid*: 4.

composer had defined the work as a music drama. Rajna is described as a composer who has been “a significant contributor” to Cape Town’s music scene; apart from being a composer, he had a long career as concert pianist. *Amarantha*’s dramatic story, set in the American South during the depression years, had made an impression on Irish, and he advised operagoers rather to experience the drama than read the synopsis beforehand.⁶⁴⁷

More than the dramatic story, Rajna’s orchestration had enthralled Irish, who described the score as “lushly conceived”, with the writing for the winds “striking in its prominence and effectiveness”. The musical interludes is likened to that of Britten and contains much symphonic writing. However, as much as the orchestration had been rich, it was too loud in passages that accompanied the singers. This is the only criticism Irish offered, saying that the remedy lies with the composer and not the conductor’s control of dynamic levels. Nonetheless, Irish considered the opera “more than a welcome addition to the growing body of South African stage works”.⁶⁴⁸

In *Die Burger*, Kooij wrote that the audience’s reception seemed to have been divided between an enthusiastic group, who welcomed the work with “bravos”, while the rest of the audience did not even attempt at giving “polite applause”. He too described *Amarantha* as a dramatic work in one act that is divided in seven scenes, but with a libretto that was often “commonplace and unpoetic”.⁶⁴⁹ The text did not support the intense atmosphere created by the music. Most of Kooij’s review contained descriptions and criticism of Rajna’s orchestration:

The sound of the orchestra was far too prominent for the singers and at times the singers could barely be heard – or even be understood. The orchestration is colourful, dramatic and rich, but overshadowed the vocal lines. Added to that, the young voices of most of the singers did not possess enough volume power. The conductor Christopher Dowdeswell interpreted the complex orchestral score very well, but failed with regards to the balance between the orchestra and the singers. The music is

⁶⁴⁷ Irish, D. 2000. “Gripping opera has its premiere”. *Cape Times*, Wednesday 29 November 2000, p10.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid*: 10.

⁶⁴⁹ Kooij, P. 2000. “Mooi musiek, maar opera kry gemengde ontvangs”. *Die Burger*, Monday 27 November 2000, p11.

dramatic and sometimes beautifully expressive. The melodies are contemporary-lyrical and the rhythms interesting and strongly varied.⁶⁵⁰

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Certainly, for a local audience in 2000 expecting to see a South African opera and experiencing *Amarantha*, the work could easily have felt just as foreign as a little-known opera by Bellini, for instance. Judging from the reviews, *Amarantha's* American story and music had no reference to the South African context that had been sought at the time in order to make opera relevant in the country's arts landscape.

Two novels by the South African writer Zakes Mda had been the source for the libretti of two indigenous operas – the first being Denzil Weale's *Love and green onions* of 2001 that is based on Mda's *Ways of dying*. (The second would be performed in 2015, Neo Muyanga's *Heart of redness*, based on Mda's *The heart of redness*.) The *Cape Times's* heading already revealed a positive reception of Weale's *Love and green onions*, stating "Diverse rendering of Mda novel surprisingly satisfying".⁶⁵² Reviewer Andrew Gilder described Mda's novel as dealing with a "particularly difficult and contorted time in the history of this country".

This work by Weale, known as a jazz pianist, is classified as a jazz opera that blends different musical styles: "The blend of forms is surprisingly satisfying, with moments of bluesy jazz underpinning soaring solo vocals, or the plaintive notes of a tenor saxophone merging with the thrumming power of an African chorus." Gilder added that although the work is defined as an opera, the description of "musical theatre" fits better. In his final analysis, Gilder also stated that the jazz opera made for a good theatrical experience.⁶⁵³

Similarly, *Die Burger's* heading had been positive: "Jazz opera touches the heart".⁶⁵⁴ It seems the work certainly touched the audience, as Kooij described the audience's reaction

⁶⁵⁰ Kooij, 2000:11.

⁶⁵¹ Original Afrikaans text: "Die orkesklank was veels te prominent vir die sangers en soms kon hulle beswaarlik gehoor word – wat nog te sê van verstaan word. Die orkestrasie is kleurvol, dramaties en ryk, maar het die vokale lyne oorweldig. Daarby het die jong stemme van die meeste sangers nie genoeg volume krag gehad nie. Die dirigent Christopher Dowdeswell het die komplekse orkespartituur baie goed vertolk, maar gefaal met die balans tussen die orkes en die sangers. Die musiek is dramaties en soms pragtig uitdrukkingsvol. Die melodieë is eietyds-liries en die ritmes interessant en sterk wisselend."

⁶⁵² Gilder, A. 2001. "Diverse rendering of Mda novel surprisingly satisfying". *Cape Times*, Thursday 26 July 2001, p7.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid*: 7.

⁶⁵⁴ Kooij, P. 2001a. "Jazz-opera raak aan die hart". *Die Burger*, Saturday 21 July 2001, p4.

to the Kombi song, which was so successful that the audience shouted and yelled during the song and even overshadowed the singing on stage. The story, Kooij added, becomes a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but he is of the opinion that the political aspects of the story are not the most striking part thereof, but rather the individual characters' melancholy and the disarming love story that develops.⁶⁵⁵ Kooij's description of the music divulges the style employed:

The traditional Xhosa choral works has its own enchantment, but the other choral works give the impression that it had been composed too easily. Polyphony and mimicking effects are included, but the repetitions (which is a typical aspect of African music) and chant-like melodies with limited use of intervals became boring. For me, the mixing of musical styles did not always work. Township jazz, gospel, traditional Xhosa hymns, parts that sound like a musical, as well as traditional opera is mixed freely. Sometimes rather refreshing and enthralling, but it is not successful throughout.^{656 657}

The fusion of musical and theatrical styles from Africa and Europe was also employed in Péter Louis van Dijk's new work, *Earthdiving*, performed at the Spier Amphitheatre in Stellenbosch. The work was a great success, evident from the *Cape Times's* heading, which read, "New African work of art hits high note", as well as a subheading that read, "Opera blends continent's myths with universal theme".⁶⁵⁸ The review reported that the libretto is based on a fusion of Greek and African mythology, and one is left to surmise that the "universal theme" referred to in the subheading relates to the former. Wilhelm Snyman's description viewed the "heritage of ancient Greece" as the obvious point of departure, while the "African" part only provides a different context and setting. Nonetheless, Snyman wrote, this is nothing new, and he references the 1969 Italian film *Appunti per un'Orestiada*

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid*: 4.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid*: 4.

⁶⁵⁷ Original Afrikaans text: "Die tradisionele Xhosa-koorwerke het 'n eie bekoring, maar die ander koorwerke laat soms die indruk dat dit te maklik gekomponeer is. Meerstemmigheid en nabootseffekte kom wel voor, maar die herhalings (wat 'n tipiese aspek van Afrika-musiek is) en spreekangagtige melodieë met beperkte interval-benutting het vervelig geraak. Vir my het die vermenging van musikale style nie altyd gewerk nie. Township-jazz, gospel, tradisionele Xhosa-liedere, dele wat soos 'n gewone musiekblyspel klink, asook tradisionele opera, word vrylik gemeng. Soms heel verfrissend en boeiend, maar nie deurentyd geslaag nie."

⁶⁵⁸ Snyman, W. 2003. "New African work of art hits high note". *Cape Times*, Tuesday 11 March 2003, p7.

Africana as an example. In *Earthdiving*, the myths of Demeter and Persephone come to Africa.

Van Dijk's opera made a great impact, probably because of its fusion of the accepted great Greek myths and the need to find universality in stories from Africa. Bringing together opera and theatre's European roots and replanting them in Africa found resonance with local audiences who seemingly knew the old myths well, but were curious about indigenous storytelling. *Earthdiving's* impact seems to be an important catalyst in attaining a new South African operatic aesthetic, as Snyman explained:

Earthdiving is monumental, and for what it lacks in substance, it compensates for with spectacle. The libretto, reflecting the often complex and necessarily illogical realm of myth is at times confusing, with significance imparted in a somewhat arbitrary fashion. Duiguid and Hamilton were perhaps trying to say too much and the libretto would perhaps be more effective if honed down to the more essential elements. That said, vast talents went into making this an extraordinary work and an engaging operatic experience. It is inspiring to see people harnessing so much creativity into bringing a new work of art to life.⁶⁵⁹

Similarly, *Die Burger* called the opera a "pretentious but colourful, melodious and interesting theatrical experience". The pretentiousness, wrote Kooij, is found in the English libretto, which seems to be too affected without being poetic. Van Dijk, who composed "most of the music", shows an excellent awareness for the theatrical and the dramatic. Kooij found the music to be easily to listen to, without it being superficial. Van Dijk's music combined to good effect the "rhythmic traditional African-inspired music" by Martin Phipps, who wrote this music to depict the underworld.⁶⁶⁰ The story developed swiftly, while still alternating between dramatic and lyrical scenes effectively.

Like the *Cape Times*, *Die Burger's* review also depicts *Earthdiving* as a work that should be regarded as an example of a new aesthetics in opera in which established European art

⁶⁵⁹ Snyman, 2003:7.

⁶⁶⁰ Kooij P. 2003. "Nuwe opera vol emosie". *Die Burger*, Monday 10 March 2003, p4.

forms and traditional African stories are intertwined to form a new opera that in essence reflects South African society; not entirely African, because it has been influenced greatly by European culture through the process of colonisation. At this point in the performance history of opera, that fusion of African and European in creating new operas seemed to be the guiding principles.

But in 2004, two short operas by Eric Chisholm (1904–1965) were performed, *Dark Sonnet* (composed in 1952) and *The Pardoner's Tale* (1961), both staged in a single performance.⁶⁶¹ On the surface, this appears to be a digression and does not seem to further the ideals of creating opera that is distinctly South African. *Die Burger's* heading called Chisholm a “Scottish master”.⁶⁶² In his review, Maas quoted the English composer Arnold Bax as having described Chisholm as “the most progressive composer that Scotland had produced”. Chisholm was born in Glasgow in 1904, later coming to South Africa to head up the South African College of Music between 1946 and 1965. “His role in the local musical life was big,” wrote Maas. The opera was performed because it had been the centenary of Chisholm’s birth in 2004, and at the performance his three children gave tributes to their father. Besides it being a tribute to Chisholm, the performance did not seem to carry any other significant value in the pursuit of Cape Town Opera to stage South African operas. The review does not mention much of the performance itself, but Maas wrote the following:

It is fairly “difficult” music with few tunes to whistle. In combination with the stage action it is, however, effective – and tame compared to Stockhausen, for example. This special performance, with simple yet striking décor and discerning lighting, should be well supported.^{663 664}

It would be five years after Rajna’s *Amarantha* that another opera by this composer was staged in Cape Town. This time the libretto was a local story, an adaptation of the South African playwright Athol Fugard’s *Valley song*. In the *Cape Times*, Rajna’s new opera again

⁶⁶¹ A report on this performance could not be found in the *Cape Times*.

⁶⁶² Maas, G. 2004. “Operas van Skotse meester besonders vertolk”. *Die Burger*, Saturday 7 February 2004, p14.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid*: 14.

⁶⁶⁴ Original Afrikaans text: “Dit is betreklik “moeilike” musiek met min fluitbare wysies. Gepaard met die verhoogaksie is dit egter effektief – en mak teenoor byvoorbeeld Stockhausen. Dié besondere opvoering, met eenvoudig dog treffende dekor en oordeelkundige beligting, behoort sterk gesteun te word.”

had a rather lukewarm reception, with the main heading reading, “Intriguing show fails to reach potential” and a subheading lamenting “Struggling between play and opera”. Irish’s main point of criticism is that operagoers know the play – which is about a young women’s singing talent – and while in the play you are uncertain whether the character really can sing, it is obvious in the opera that she can. But, admitted Irish, the composer had to use the material he had been given.⁶⁶⁵ Of the musical score, Irish wrote as follows:

Rajna’s score is inventive and generally fluent, demonstrating influences which may be traced back to Prokofiev, Gershwin, Copland, Bernstein and Britten. This is not to be understood in an unduly critical way; rather that orchestrational or stylistic elements in the score call to mind similar employment in the writings of these composers. But [Rajna’s] writing for voice (which is, after all, central to the operatic endeavour) is not of uniform quality...”⁶⁶⁶

However, Irish concluded that the work was intriguing and that there were many possibilities still to be explore should it be further edited and refined – “still to make it across the divide between play and opera”.⁶⁶⁷

Die Burger, on the other hand, was clear in its heading of the review of *Valley song* that it is an opera that is unmissable. Maas called Fugard’s then ten-year-old play his “most lyrical” piece – a work written shortly after the 1994 elections. The whole production, not only the libretto and music but also the design and lighting, was hailed as an “opera jewel”.

Reference was made to the almost full auditorium and the audience’s standing ovation. Furthermore, Maas described the music as “a combination of Rajna’s accessible ‘communicative modern lyricism’, Karoo rhythms and old church hymns”. He foresaw an ambitious future for the opera, stating that it deserves full auditoriums and a place of stature in the repertoire of all South African theatres, adding that it may also find favour outside the country’s borders.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁵ Irish, D. 2005a. “Intriguing show fail to reach potential”. *Cape Times*, Thursday 10 March 2005, p11.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid*: 11.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid*: 11.

⁶⁶⁸ Maas, G. 2005a. “Opera Valley Song móét gesien word”. *Die Burger*, Monday 7 March 2005, p10.

Apart from Maas's review, the generally tepid response to Rajna's two operas may be ascribed to the disconnect of these operas with the changing and newly developing operatic aesthetic in South Africa during the first half the 2000s. After Temmingh's two operas that seemed to combine contemporary classical and African musical elements – and concurrently a trend in localising and Africanising standard repertoire operas and other indigenous works having been performed at the time – a work like *Valley Song*, with musical references to the likes of Prokofiev and Copland, seems out of place.

Although Rajna's *Valley song*, and his last opera to date to be performed in Cape Town, had a local and credible story – its source being a play by one of the most acclaimed contemporary playwrights in the world – it did not seem fully to convince either. Irish's reference to the music of Prokofiev, Gershwin and the other composers illustrated that the music, for an opera audience in 2005, felt foreign and created that disconnect between story and music. However, Maas in *Die Burger* had found the music to contain local references in, as he mentioned, the Karoo rhythms and old church hymns that had been included in the score. For Maas, this was enough material proof to consider the work as having a local connection for audience members.

In the same year, 2005, opera went “beyond the adaptation of Western music”, as the *Cape Times's* subheading to a review of Hans Huysen's new opera, *Masque*, read. In its main heading, “Music art of, for and by the people”, one reads a political statement, because the phrase “for and by the people” had been a slogan for the philosophy behind the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) started by the new ANC government in an effort to rectify the socio-economic imbalances created by apartheid.⁶⁶⁹ It is evident that the *Cape Times* saw this new opera as one that could play a similar role as the RDP in the cultural landscape.

In the *Cape Times's* review, Huysen was credited for his “notable first” with the Africanisation of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (discussed in Part 3 of this chapter). According to Irish, the greatest achievement of that Africanisation was that it demonstrated that such adaptations could be attempted without being “either patronising to indigenous folk culture

⁶⁶⁹ Irish, D. 2005c. “Music art of, for and by the people”. *Cape Times*, Thursday 3 November 2005, p11.

or doing violence to musical and historical literacy". This is a strong indication that a merging of these two art and cultural traditions had been an aesthetics favoured within the contemporary South African context. But, wrote Irish, *Masque* had taken the process further "by a more unremitting move towards an unquestionably African art music form" – indeed the goal of finding a distinctly South African operatic aesthetic. He continued:

All cultures have folk music and what we are generally exposed to as being "indigenous music" in the South African context is essentially folk in character. Folk, in the same sense as the morris dances of England, the flamencos of Spain and the flings of the Highlands, the chansons of France, the yodels of the Alps or our own Cape moppies [songs of the Cape minstrels]. Music and dancing of, for and by the people.⁶⁷⁰

In *Masque*, wrote Irish, Huyssen employed traditional African musical instruments with through-composed music that mirrors baroque and chamber music, for example a sextet of tuned kudu horns. For singers and instrumentalists, the score had held great demands because of its "contemporary harmonic and rhythmic idiom" that is coupled with African musical elements. But in its staging, the work also followed these principles of merging European and African references, as Irish described:

The work also embraces African plastic arts in the central theme of the work; the role of cultural tradition, represented by five superbly conceived Maliesque masks, representing blindness, death, sleep, sorrow and eternal change. The masks are housed in a museum, objects of antique reverence, without currency or influence. The libretto relates their liberation from the museum by a story teller and their return, despite the interventions of the curator, to Africa and to their people.⁶⁷¹

Irish raised one point of critique regarding the characterisation, saying that the libretto depicts the Western characters as "cardboard cut-outs" and one-dimensional. However, the African characters seemed to him to be more well-rounded and realistic. In conclusion, Irish

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid*: 11.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid*: 11.

remarked that the performance had been of “great artistic significance, not merely for opera in South Africa, but for a larger and wider musical world”.⁶⁷²

Die Burger called this new work an opera that offers much yet demands equally much from the audience. As the second world-premiere opera production for Cape Town Opera in the same year, *Masque* indeed had significance, according to reviewer Maas. He regarded Huyssen’s interest in contemporary classical music and African sounds and the combination thereof as the motivation for the creation of this new opera.⁶⁷³ Maas, admitting that he favours the Western masters, described the combination of musical styles in *Masque* as “interesting rather than enjoyable”, adding that there are no memorable tunes or easy harmonies. He therefore commended the singers for memorising the text along with the “difficult music” while also acting.

In his final analysis of *Masque*, Maas seemed rather unconvinced that the opera will show a way forward for opera in South Africa. He wrote that he did not find everything engaging or convincing, and that the work felt long. However, he urged lovers of music theatre who do not only want to “sit back and relax” to see the production as he doubts whether *Masque* would be regularly performed.⁶⁷⁴ *Die Burger’s* review portrayed *Masque* as a work aimed at a high-brow audience and an opera that does not have wider appeal. By implication this view of the opera conveys that this aesthetic of opera is something that possibly will not be reproduced or find favour with an audience whose ideas and ideals of opera are located in the Western art music traditions, where Maas admitted his own interests lie.

In 2006, the first opera by a black South African composer of classical music was performed: Mzilikazi Khumalo’s *Princess Magogo*, performed at the Spier Amphitheatre in Stellenbosch.⁶⁷⁵ (Denzil Weale, whose *Love and green onions* was staged in 2001, is considered a jazz composer.) Again the heading of the review in *Die Burger* referred to the fusion of opera (being European) and Africa: “Opera and Africa here mixed with great success”.⁶⁷⁶ Reviewer Willem Bester wrote that he had been trepidatious in seeing *Princess*

⁶⁷² *Ibid*: 11.

⁶⁷³ Maas, G. 2005b. “Nuwe opera bied heelwat, stel eise aan gehoor”. *Die Burger*, Tuesday 1 November 2005, p14.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid*: 14.

⁶⁷⁵ A report on this performance could not be found in the *Cape Times*.

⁶⁷⁶ Bester, W. 2006. “Opera en Afrika hier met groot sukses vermeng”. *Die Burger*, Wednesday 1 March 2006, p10.

Magogo after seeing two other productions in which Western and African music were combined. The first was a musical that he found boring, while the other juxtaposed Western and African musical idioms in a way that he deemed too eclectic. It was, therefore, not only in opera that this merger of Western and African music had been pursued, with Bester asking, “Does one dare hope on something that is more than just a matter of conscience to support South African cultural things?” But *Princess Magogo* had risen above these feeble attempts at creating a new kind of South African music genre, as Bester wrote:

From the first notes sounded until the last spotlight died out, you were captured by the artists’ lips and feet. *Princess Magogo* is both unapologetically opera and unapologetically African. No postmodern roundabout of relevance that leaves you sweating in your seat or making you nervous. There is only the music, the story and the feeling that here at last is something that passes the test with flying colours. You will want to see it again and you will want to buy a recording.^{677 678}

The thematic material in the story had transcended cultural boundaries and is simply about a remarkable woman in difficult circumstances, which Bester deemed ideal for an opera. That the context in which it is set would probably feel strange to regular operagoers, was not really relevant because, wrote Bester, the themes of love, duty and sacrifice are universal. The music had struck a balance between the Western ideal of opera and traditional African singing. Besides this, African dance had been incorporated, which Bester found natural and not inserted solely to make it “more African”. In structure, the music moved easily between these African elements to a typical operatic structure of, for instance, a duet. In the same way, several Zulu songs were sung over each other as if to form an ensemble. Besides Western orchestral instruments, traditional African instruments had

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid*: 10.

⁶⁷⁸ Original Afrikaans text: “Van die eerste note gespeel is tot die laaste kollig verdof het, hang ’n mens grootoog aan die kunstenaars se lippe en voete. *Princess Magogo* is tegelyk onapologeties opera en onapologeties Afrika. Geen postmoderne mallemeule van relevansie wat jou sitplek sweterig en jou senuwees aan flarde laat nie. Daar is net die musiek, die storie en die gevoel dat hier uiteindelik iets is wat die toets met vlieënde vaandels slaag: Jy sal dit weer wil sien en jy sal ’n opname koop.”

been incorporated, and Bester refers to mezzo-soprano Sibongile Khumalo who, in the title role, accompanied herself on a traditional African instrument called the *ugubhu*.⁶⁷⁹

Because the story had some anti-British sentiments, Bester found it ironic that the orchestral music indeed had a strong “British sensibility, which I can only describe as the ‘damp’ sound of Vaugh Williams and some British film composers...” He continued to say that while the music is filmic, the libretto is colourful, direct, sometimes humorously exaggerated but with a poetic slant.⁶⁸⁰ Bester’s review depicted *Princess Magogo* as the ideal South African opera. While it still merges Western and African musical idioms, the composer had created an opera that is uniquely South African both musically and in its storytelling – a work that found resonance with theatregoers from different walks of life. Still, *Princess Magogo*’s success, as the heading stated, lay in that it was the amalgamation of a Western art form such as opera and Africanist pride, which had been propagated since the dawn of South Africa’s democracy. In some way, and in Bester’s judgement of the opera, *Princess Magogo* seemed to represent a soundscape of an ideal South African society, and a theatrical work of art that pointed towards the establishment of a new cultural landscape.

Although composed in 1993, *The orphans of Qumbu* by Alan Stephenson only reached the professional stage in July 2007 when Cape Town Opera presented it in the Artscape Theatre and in the Joseph Stone Auditorium in Athlone.⁶⁸¹ In 1993, the opera had originally been performed as part of CAPAB Opera’s outreach programme in schools in local townships, with pupils and UCT singing students performing. In an interview with the opera’s director, Gerrida Dickason, in the *Cape Times* in 2007, Chisholm described the work as a “joyful South African opera for young people by young people”.⁶⁸² At its Artscape run, forty pupils had performed in the opera, along with young professional singers. Dickason was quoted as saying that this work has primarily an educational purpose.

The orphans of Qumbu was indeed created in 1993 at a time when the Choral Training Programme was established and CAPAB Opera had made concerted efforts in arguing that

⁶⁷⁹ Bester, 2006:10.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid*: 10.

⁶⁸¹ A report of this performance could not be found in *Die Burger*.

⁶⁸² Chisholm, F. 2007b. “Township pupils are melodic opera Orphans”. *Cape Times*, Wednesday 11 July 2007, p10.

opera has a place in South Africa. Although this article did not expand on how Stephenson's music sounded like, it related the libretto, which tells the story of a healer, storyteller and an orphan who visit the Qumbu valley in the Eastern Cape to search for answers to their problems. The local setting would have made this opera a suitable choice in 2007 when regular performances of South African operas had become well established in Cape Town.

An ideal of creating a distinctly South African operatic aesthetic where the West meets Africa, had been the driving force behind the creation of *Poet and prophetess*, staged at Artscape in 2008. Although composed by a Swedish composer, Mats Larsson Gothe, with a libretto by the South African Michael Williams, it is evident that *Poet and prophetess* had been composed with the concept of an ideal African opera in mind. Not only that, but its reception in Cape Town had been informed by it being an opera from Africa and therefore judged according to the views and perceptions of an ideal contemporary South African opera.

The libretto revolves around a fictional, and improbable, meeting between the Swedish poet Bengt Lindner and the Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse. While the former lived in the eighteenth century, Nongqawuse lived in the nineteenth century. The *Cape Times's* review, under the heading "Mixing opera and African folk traditions", questioned this fusion of historical facts, fictional actions and contemporary issues. Irish wrote that the story is set in a "fictional historical matrix" and that "the intrusion of contemporary values becomes an irritating aberration", using the example of the theme of "crimes against the human race", a concept which had not existed in either of the main characters' eras.⁶⁸³ Yet, Irish opined, the libretto "succeeds in telling an engrossing tale using vivid imagery". He continued to describe Larsson Gothe's music as follows:

The score of Mats Larsson Gothe is distinguished in several respects, not least that he speaks with his own voice, in an accent not overtly derivative. Of course, there are musical lineages to be detected, and occasionally a passage that kindles the memory of a work penned by another: Britten is sometimes recalled in the spiky vocal lines and rhythmically angular

⁶⁸³ Irish, D. 2008. "Mixing opera and African folk traditions". *Cape Times*, Wednesday 5 November 2008, p9.

accompaniment; Poulenc is fleetingly glimpsed in an advanced, acerbic impressionism; and even the celeste of Strauss's *Rosenkavalier* was a momentary – and surely deliberate – reference.⁶⁸⁴

Apart from all these references to the masters of the Western art music canon, Larsson Gothe had also included both Swedish court dances and Xhosa tribal music in his score, with Irish adding, “There is a signal lesson in this writing to other composers who seek to bridge the gap between the symphonic orchestral tradition and African folk music”. Irish therefore implied that Larsson Gothe comes close to a new operatic ideal of combining Western and African musical traditions, and that indeed that is what the ideal should sound like. With regards to the vocal writing, Irish found it to be “not always as assured” as the orchestral part. The singing parts of the prophetess, he wrote, “is unforgiving, with frequently high tessituras, sharply delineated intervals and awkwardly ascending phrase ends”.⁶⁸⁵

In its review, *Die Burger* praised the creators of the *Poet and prophetess* for music and a story that draws the audience in and keeps them engaged. The music, wrote Muller, was lyrical yet dramatic and rhythmically odd. He adds that Larsson Gothe only builds on the ideas that people generally have of Western art music, but that the composer created new sounds and structures around the traditional phrases.⁶⁸⁶ However, it is the libretto that mars the opera – character development suffered, especially that of the main character, Ingrid, who seemed to be just another side character but suddenly became the catalyst for the drama. Muller opined that it is only by the second act that the characters are fully established.

Again, it is the inclusion of “African rhythms” that was a high point in the opera for the reviewer. This is an indication that musical elements recognisable as local and African found favour with the reviewer, and furthermore suggests that this is an aesthetics that should be maintained. In describing the production, Muller used the words “chic” and “minimalist”, and called the décor and lighting “stylish”, which all contributed to a “visually excellent

⁶⁸⁴ Irish, 2008:9.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid*: 9.

⁶⁸⁶ Muller, W. 2008d. “Opera tuis op Terra Nova”. *Die Burger*, Saturday 1 November 2008, p12.

production". Yet, wrote Muller, it is Larsson Gothe's "amazing music" that impressed most.⁶⁸⁷

Judging from the reception of local operas up until this time, one can surmise that a certain aesthetics of local opera had been established and that critics had begun to measure the artistic value of newly created operas by these aesthetic standards. New and truly South African operas seemed to be works in which a variety of musical elements were combined, mainly traditional African in nature and juxtaposed with vocal and musical elements that would be clearly recognisable to a local audience as Western European opera. In its libretto, local opera should have characters that have clear connections with South Africa, often historical characters. The operas should be set in South Africa (or Africa) and the country's traditions, history, customs and culture should become part of the fabric and indeed the catalyst for the drama. It is an aesthetic that juxtaposes South Africa's diverse cultures, while through this combination of varied musical and theatrical elements personifies the type of nationhood propagated through the ideals of a rainbow nation.

It is probably an effort to perpetuate this new aesthetic that led to the creation of *African songbook*, a work that theoretically aimed to combine all these elements of what a distinctly South African opera should be. *African songbook*, staged at Artscape in 2010, consisted of three parts, each in a different musical style and set by a different composer. The story portrayed the life of former South African president Nelson Mandela, a man who represented the ideals of the rainbow nation and a person who had been rooted in Africa and to whom not only South Africans but also the world could relate. Moreover, *African songbook* was the first opera about Mandela's life. Despite all this, the reception of this opera was disastrous.

In the heading of its review, the *Cape Times* called the work "Entertainment not opera" and "A poor libretto with no musical score".⁶⁸⁸ Irish wrote that one would assume that the opera – in fact, he does not feel that it is an opera but merely "musical entertainment" – would, like Mandela, have a certain stature, but the work lacked any stature, he thought.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid*: 12.

⁶⁸⁸ Irish, D. 2010b. "A poor libretto with no musical score". *Cape Times*, Wednesday 23 June 2010, p8.

The combination, or problem, of three composers and one librettist working on a single opera became the central point of critique, with Irish writing that “an opera written by several composers is not novel and includes as precedent even the great Mozart himself” (referencing Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*, which had other contributors).⁶⁸⁹ This, he added, “demonstrates that an opera can survive with a poor libretto, but hardly with a poor score”. And Irish considered the libretto as being of a poor quality. He continued:

There is effectively no musical score at all, since the collaborating composers have not sought to unify their efforts, but have been required to produce three wholly dissimilar and, indeed, disparate scores for three disjointed acts. That the result does not really qualify as an opera at all is unsurprising.⁶⁹⁰

Irish wrote that composer Allan Stephenson composed “an attractive filmic accompaniment with some particularly effective Xhosa choral settings” for the first act, which was set during Mandela’s youth in the rural Eastern Cape; Mike Campbell wrote “unashamedly a jazz musical” for the second act, which is set in the former Johannesburg neighbourhood of Sophiatown; Roelof Temmingh’s contribution was “a Shostakovich-like threnody” for the third act. Combined it was “a truly bewildering mix that serves none of them well”.⁶⁹¹

Die Burger’s review described the experience of watching *African songbook* as feeling like “a chameleon on a heap of colourful Jelly Tots [sweets]” because the work sounds like three different operas. Muller wrote that Stephenson’s part is an oratorio, Campbell’s is a jazz musical, and Temmingh’s is an opera, “although the programme notes described the whole work as being an opera”. Of Stephenson’s contribution, Muller wrote:

Like an oratorio, the music relies on sturdy choral parts and supports the traditional rituals in the drama. Although Stephenson borrows a number of elements from traditional African music, one would also expect to hear a

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid*: 8.

⁶⁹⁰ Irish, 2010:8.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid*: 8.

traditional instrument, especially because this act is situated so strongly within the Xhosa culture.^{692 693}

Muller continued that *African songbook* seemed fragmented, although some of these loose strings are tied together in Temmingh's part, and that the work could have been better had it been "either a complete opera or an energetic musical".⁶⁹⁴ It is evident from these reviews that *African Songbook*, although it had all the elements of what could have been a truly South African opera, failed to be perceived as such. Its combination of musical styles, in particular, was perceived to detract from the work.

For its next effort at creating South African opera, Cape Town Opera borrowed a concept from the Scottish Opera Company, focusing on the composition of short operas. This production was presented at the Baxter Theatre as *Five:20 Operas made in SA* in 2010. The production consisted of five operas, each twenty minutes long, and each of these was written by a different South African composer while the libretti were based on local stories. The short operas were *Hani* by Bongani Ndodana-Breen, *Saartjie* by Hendrik Hofmeyr, *Words from a broken string* by Peter Klatzow, *Tronkvoël* by Martin Watt, and *Out of time* by Péter Louis van Dijk.

In the *Cape Times*, Irish wrote that the performance as a whole was "intriguing in its examination of five composers' differing voices, techniques and inspirations". He described Ndodana-Breen's music as "a significantly personal musical vernacular and rhythmically complex" because the score is "infused with both indigenous folk music and Miles Davis-inspired elements". However, it was the choral writing in *Hani* that impressed most, "with the invigorating polyrhythmic and ostinato elements demanding quicksilver precision".⁶⁹⁵ Hofmeyr's score referenced both European and Nguni sources, with an "almost Straussian musical largesse".⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹² Muller, W. 2010a. No title. *Die Burger*, Saturday 19 June 2010, p10.

⁶⁹³ Original Afrikaans text: "Die musiek steun, soos 'n oratorium doen, op 'n sterk koordeel en ondersteun die tradisionele rituele in die dramatiese gegewe. Hoewel Stephenson heelwat elemente uit tradisionele Afrika-musiek leen, sou 'n mens ook tradisionele instrumente wou hoor en sien, veral omdat hierdie bedryf sterk binne die omgewing van die Xhosa-kultuur gesetel is."

⁶⁹⁴ Muller, 2010a:10.

⁶⁹⁵ Irish, D. 2010c. "Flashes of beauty sparkle in feast of short works". *Cape Times*, Thursday 25 November 2010, p16.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid*: 16.

In Watt's music, Irish found the "elegiac episodes" most effective. The composer included a traditional song with references to the apartheid struggle, "Senzeni na?" (What have we done?), sung by a chorus of prisoners, and for Irish this chorus had strong references to that of the prisoners' chorus in Beethoven's *Fidelio*. Irish called Klatzow's opera "a memorable miniature" while the music had been "a jewel of orchestration that fascinates as it sparkles with subtle allure".⁶⁹⁷ *Out of time*, Irish opined, is an opera that, in its focus on the theme of xenophobia and the anti-foreign riots in South Africa at that time, is too big to be only twenty minutes long. The orchestration was colourful and the choruses well-crafted. In summarising his view of *Five:20 Operas made in SA*, Irish wrote:

A final word concerning all the works: there was not much truly gratifying in the collective writing for solo voices and I wish modern composers would re-discover something of the joy of a bel canto line, or a legato melodic phrase.⁶⁹⁸

The heading of *Die Burger's* review described these operas as a "special contribution", and "Opera turned on its head – in 20 minutes".⁶⁹⁹ Along with the five new operas, one of Scottish Opera's works was also presented, but Muller wrote that it was the five local operas that were "a unique opera experience – stories that speak to us in a musical language that we understand". The phrase affirms the importance of the development of a South African operatic aesthetic that connects with local audiences and relates local stories. Muller added that these five operas – specifically the stories and people referred to in their titles – do indeed speak to South Africans.

Of Ndodana-Breen's *Hani*, he wrote that "music with African roots on Western instruments could not relate a political story such as that of [anti-apartheid activist of the South African Communist Party] Chris Hani any better". He called the sound "modern *and* traditional". Hofmeyr's depiction of the longing that the "Hottentot Venus" Saartjie Baartman (held captive in Paris in the nineteenth century) experienced is described as being "masterly done", because it includes African traditional songs, such as "Al lê die berge nog so blou"

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid*: 16.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid*: 16.

⁶⁹⁹ Muller, W. 2010d. "Opera op sy kop gekeer – in 20 min." *Die Burger*, Tuesday 23 November 2010, p8.

and “Thula, thula”. Watt’s music in his opera about the Afrikaans poet Breyten Breytenbach’s incarceration during the apartheid years “speaks a crude language, sardonically and degrading – a musical picture of the prison” yet contains “pensive melodies”.⁷⁰⁰

Klatzow’s music in *Words from a broken string*, which relates the story of Lucy Lloyd, who penned the stories and culture of the San people, is “a worthy memory” and his music is described as having “many dream moments” and depicting the main character in a heartfelt manner. Van Dijk’s opera is a “plain story of our contemporary society” with “overwhelming energy”. It was an energetic musical experience.⁷⁰¹ Muller explained the contribution of *Five:20 Operas made in SA* as follows:

Five:20 is indeed one of Cape Town Opera’s strongest presentations of the past few years. The operas are a special contribution to our musical outputs. It is theatre with a kick and music with spirit – everything that opera should be, in just 20 minutes.^{702 703}

Both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* viewed *Five:20 Operas made in SA* as a significant collection of operas that are examples of truly South African operas. Again it is noticeable that the reviewers praised the combination of musical elements from different styles, the inclusion of recognisable traditional songs, and the relevance of the libretto in that it resonated with opera audiences from different communities and cultures.

South African composer Neo Muyanga’s debut operetta called *The flower of Shembe* was performed in 2012⁷⁰⁴ – a work that Muller, in *Die Burger*, doubted should be called an operetta.⁷⁰⁵ The cast consisted of actors and not professional (opera) singers. Muller described the libretto as a fairytale in which a Messian women, Addis Shembe, is born. Her mother, Anharit, is the wife of a mad king called Ledimo. The rest of the cast consists of

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid*: 8.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid*: 8.

⁷⁰² *Ibid*: 8.

⁷⁰³ Original Afrikaans text: “Five:20 is inderdaad een van Kaapstad opera se sterkste aanbiedings die laaste paar jaar. Die operas is ’n besondere bydrae tot ons musikale uitsette. Dis teater met skop en musiek met gees – alles wat opera behoort te wees, in net 20 minute.”

⁷⁰⁴ A report on this performance could not be found in the *Cape Times*.

⁷⁰⁵ Muller, W. 2012b. “Eklektiese operette vol verrassings”. *Die Burger*, Friday 4 May 2012, p4.

“dancing angels”. Muller’s comments as to whether this work should be considered an operetta – although that is how the composer classified it – suggested that although new South African works had been created they still had to be classified according to Western art music standards and genre classifications. In his review, Muller opined:

The composer Neo Muyanga calls his latest creation, *The flower of Shembe*, his debut operetta. Whether it is an operetta is debatable, because a light opera in the tradition of Offenbach or Léhar it is not, but it is certainly a story that is told through music.^{706 707}

In describing Muyanga’s composition, Muller wrote:

Muyanga’s music has a wide range of influences – you hear parts that could have come from Schubert’s chamber music, then something epic and filmic, then applause-pullers like those from Broadway musicals, then rich choral sounds relating “The seven trials of Addis”, and the township sounds pumping until the work ends. Often a surprise pops up.^{708 709}

Muller judged *The flower of Shembe* within a context in which an eclectic mix of musical styles in opera had been favoured, but which still needed to have a connection with the Western art music tradition. This is especially shown in Muller’s doubting of the composer’s own classification of his work. This review expressed what had not been favoured in the context of the developing operatic aesthetic. It would seem that a work with much dancing and actors, rather than singers portraying the roles, had not been within the boundaries of what had been considered opera or operetta at the time. The descriptions of *The flower of Shembe* in the review reveal that the composer had been experimental in testing the genre boundaries of what could be considered opera or operetta within this context.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid*: 4.

⁷⁰⁷ Original Afrikaans text: “Die komponis noem sy jongste skepping, *The flower of Shembe*, sy debuut-operette. Of dit ’n operette is, is debatteerbaar, want ligte opera in die tradisie van Offenbach of Léhar is dit nie, maar dit is wel ’n verhaal wat op die maat van musiek vertel word.”

⁷⁰⁸ Muller, 2012b:4.

⁷⁰⁹ Original Afrikaans text: “Muyanga se musiek het invloed wat wyd strek – jy hoor grepe wat uit Schubert se kamermusiek kon kom, dan iets epies en filmies, dan apploustrekkers soos dié uit Broadway-musiekspele, dan vertel ryk koorklanke van “The seven trials of Addis”, en dan pols township-klanke die stuk tot ’n einde. ’n Verrassing klink telkens op.”

The concept of presenting short operas rather than a big work, which both Irish and Muller commended in 2010, was again employed in the creation of *Two:30*, which was presented in an industrial building near Cape Town International Airport in June 2013. Two operas of thirty minutes long were presented: the first was the Swedish composer Carl Unander-Scharin's *Sing the body electric!* and the second was the South African composer Philip Miller's *Between a rock and a hard place*.⁷¹⁰ In *Die Burger*, Muller described the evening as starting at the Artscape Theatre, from where the audience was driven by bus to the industrial building for the performance. In writing about Unander-Scharin's opera, which was performed first, Muller stated:

One's experience of art is situated in the context in which you live. And maybe the Swedish context is too far removed from ours for this work to truly speak to a Cape Town audience. Although *Electric* comes across as interesting at times, it feels icy and does not really touch you.^{711 712}

The reception of Miller's opera was quite the opposite. The story relates a tragedy at a mine and, wrote Muller, one gets insight into the lives of mine workers. In 2012, there had been a historic massacre at a mine in Marikana in the North West province of South Africa when protesting miners and the police clashed and 34 miners were killed at the scene. At the time, the Marikana tragedy was compared to the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. By June 2013, the Marikana massacre was still fresh in South Africans' memory and still a topical issue. It was evident that this tragedy was the inspiration for *Between a rock and a hard place*. Of the music, Muller wrote:

The music has an earthiness that draws you in, and the rhythms – like that of the toyi-toyi used during protests – conveys the urgency of this story. The basis of the music, Miller told the audience beforehand, lay in the self-created language the miners use, namely Fanagalo. Eight singers are used as in a chorus, and they play different characters. Picks make music with a

⁷¹⁰ A report on this performance could not be found in the *Cape Times*.

⁷¹¹ Muller, W. 2013a. "Opera oor mynramp boei". *Die Burger*, Saturday 15 June 2013, p14.

⁷¹² Original Afrikaans text: "'n Mens se belewenis van kuns is wel gesetel in die konteks waarbinne jyself leef. En dalk is die Sweedse konteks te ver van ons verwyder vir hierdie werk om eerlikwaar tot 'n Kaapse operagehoor te spreek. Al kom *Electric* soms interessant voor, is dit kil en raak dit 'n mens nie juis nie."

group of instrumentalists (violin, cello, double bass, saxophone and percussion)...^{713 714}

Muller concluded that even if you do not understand Fanagalo – as much as most operagoers do not understand Italian or German – the themes were communicated well and the audience had been gripped in the drama for the full thirty minutes – “unlike *Sing the body electric!*”.⁷¹⁵

This reviewer expressed a preference for operatic works that had strong local roots, and that European operas such as *Sing the body electric!* had little local relevance and failed to find favour. That Miller’s opera addressed a topical issue added to its contemporary relevance and its favourable reception. One can surmise that local opera had by now been an established practice and had, much like local theatre, become an artistic means of addressing contemporary South African societal issues.

Novelist Zakes Mda’s novel *The heart of redness* was reworked into a libretto for the opera *Heart of redness* by Neo Muyanga. The novel, published in 2000, had been described by reviewer Tracy Saunders in the *Cape Times* as the “first great novel of the new South Africa”. It also finds its historical reference in the story of the Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse, also a central character in the 2008 opera *Poet and prophetess*. Saunders described Muyanga’s music as follows:

The musical score does more than tell the story; it is a way of interpreting the themes of contradicting and conflicting aspirations, both in the historical and current contexts. Muyanga speaks of the score as occurring “almost naturally based on the choral modes and harmonies of the Old Apostolic Church playing in call-and-response against songs of ‘redness’ – the music of Nguni tradition”.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹³ Muller, 2013a:14.

⁷¹⁴ Original Afrikaans text: “Die musiek het ’n aardsheid wat jou intrek, en die ritmes – soos dié van die toyi-toyi tydens ’n stakingstoneel – dra die dringendheid van die verhaal oor. Die basis vir die musiek, het Miller vooraf aan die gehoor vertel, lê in die selfgeskepte taal wat die myners besig, naamlik Fanakalo. Agt sangers word soos ’n koor ingespan, en hulle speel verskillende karakters. Pikke maak musiek saam met ’n groep instrumentaliste (viool, tjello, kontrabas, saxofoon en perkussie) ...”

⁷¹⁵ Muller, 2013a:14.

⁷¹⁶ Saunders, T. 2015. “Ambitious project harnesses many talents”. *Cape Times*, Friday 21 August 2015, p8.

According to Saunders the work provided “a sense of watching history repeat itself”, and this was found to be “visually arresting”. She reported that it was a “brave and ambitious” project in which several theatre role players had participated.

Similarly, Muller in his review in *Die Burger* wrote that the “poignant story” of the prophetess Nongqawuse is deeply rooted in the Xhosa culture and South African history. This gives an indication that the source material of the opera was deemed highly appropriate, with Muller referencing *Poet and prophetess*. He added that in *Heart of redness* tradition is juxtaposed with progress. The work was seen as partly opera, in which several musical styles were employed, and partly physical theatre. In its directing, Muller said, the piece used an eclectic merger of performance styles, which made the work genre-defying.⁷¹⁷

Muller quoted the composer from his programme notes where he wrote that *Heart of redness* is “a chamber opera that is interrupted ... by actors that speak”. However, the reviewer opined that in his view it is rather the actors that are interrupted by the music, making the opera a “theatre work interrupted by music”. This had been a shame because it made the music incidental, according to Muller, and moved the music into the background as merely a means of colouring the story. Muller continued:

Unlike “traditional” opera, the music cannot stand separately from the staging. But maybe this was Muyanga and [Mark] Fleishman’s [the director] intention. Yet, one wonders if the opera part should not be abandoned and only the wonderful choral pieces, traditional songs and hymns become the soundtrack of this work. In any case, the opera singers only repeat the actors’ dialogue when they sing.^{718 719}

Die Burger’s review points towards a call for a definition of what opera currently constitutes. In fact, the reviewer would rather had preferred the work without any traditional operatic

⁷¹⁷ Muller, W. 2015a. “Stuk fokus op tradisie teenoor vooruitgang”. *Die Burger*, Friday 21 August 2015, p11.

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid*: 11.

⁷¹⁹ Original Afrikaans text: “Anders as ‘tradisionele’ opera, kan die musiek nie juis los staan van ’n verhooginkleding nie. Maar dalk was dit Muyanga en Fleishman se bedoeling. Tog wonder ’n mens of die opera-deel nie laat vaar kon word en net die wonderlike koorstukke, tradisionele liedjies en gesange bloot die klankbaan kon wees nie. Die operasangers sing immers net ’n herhaling van die akteurs se dialoog.”

elements. But in these descriptions of *Heart of redness* is further evidence of a future shift in the operatic aesthetic. While the opera had all the contemporary elements (in a broad sense) of a mixture of musical styles and the use of an indigenous story as its libretto, the production seemed to shift the boundaries of opera more towards the theatrical in that it changed the balances of music and the theatrical in opera. As can be surmised from both reviews, *Heart of redness* questioned the idea that any new operatic aesthetics could contain experimentation and seems to relook at what opera in a South African context could mean. What is interesting to note is that both reviewers considered the choral writing and inclusion of traditional songs essential elements of the narrative.

For a third time, Cape Town Opera ventured into creating short operas, a concept that was received well when presented in 2010 and 2013. For the 2015 season, the opera company presented *Four:30 – Operas made in SA*, and as the name indicates, four operas of thirty minutes long were staged.⁷²⁰ *Die Burger* reported on it under the heading, “Registers, musical idioms grip”.⁷²¹ As this heading suggests, Muller’s review again praised the use of an eclectic mix of musical registers and idioms. He started this review by saying that, “South African stories are often so bizar that it could only happen here. That we in Cape Town can relate those stories through opera – being a European art form – is equally fascinating.”

With reference to the earlier two productions of short operas, the review stated that progress had been made since this concept was first explored. From addressing history and current issues such as the Marikana massacre, the operas in *Four:30* told stories about colonialism, infidelity, bureaucratic redtape and violence. Muller viewed Angelique Mouyis’s opera *Bessie: The blue-eyed Xhosa* as a story as aimed at addressing decolonisation. The piece interrogates South Africa’s colonial history, and Muller described the music as “excitatory”.⁷²² The second opera by Sibusiso Njeza, called *Blood of mine*, seemed to be a composition that employed too many musical styles, according to the reviewer.

The bureaucratic struggles of a woman at a Home Affairs office was the subject of Robert Fokkens’s *The application*. According to Muller, the composer used recurring musical

⁷²⁰ A report on this performance could not be found in the *Cape Times*.

⁷²¹ Muller, W. 2015c. “Registers, musikale idioome boei”. *Die Burger*, Saturday 28 November 2015, p14.

⁷²² *Ibid*: 14.

themes, while the text and scenarios were also repetitive. The work that impressed the reviewer most was Adrian More's *Anti-Laius*, which was called "a compelling and musically rich and thoughtful creation". Its libretto is in Afrikaans, and by employing Greek mythology, conveyed the real-life events of the shooting of the late South African tenor Deon van der Walt by his father. More's music, Muller wrote, is as dramatic as the story, and the musical references to the French anthem and Mozart operas were found to be sensible in underpinning the libretto. Muller concluded that, broadly speaking, the different registers of storytelling, contrasting musical idioms and diverse stories made *Four:30* a gripping operatic experience.⁷²³

Over twenty years, between the staging of Temmingh's *Enoch, prophet of God* in 1995 and *Four:30 – Operas made in SA* in 2015, the ideas and ideals of what constitutes opera in a South African context had changed immensely. While *Enoch, prophet of God* had primarily been a combination of an indigenous story set to music that remained situated in a Western art music idiom, *Four:30 – Operas made in SA's* material sounded the music of South Africa in reimagining both the inherited art music and the often undocumented traditional African folk music while still relating local stories that found resonance with a local audience. Between those extremes, as shown in this part of the chapter, there had been manifestations of what South African opera could sound like and what stories it could tell.

The reception of these South African operas had been concerned with making sense of how opera in South Africa had evolved after democracy, perhaps even in postulating the conditions and characteristics of a South African operatic aesthetic. In this process of making sense of what audiences had been presented with, opera critics had not only documented the development of these changes and kept track of a changing aesthetic, but had guided society at large in their own conceptions of what South African opera should be. This is true not only of the positive reception of works, but also in reception pointing to weaknesses or infelicitous choices. The reception of Huysse's *Masque*, for example, was viewed as an ideal of what had been considered the start of a new unique South African operatic direction that was not merely a combination and continuation of the traditions of

⁷²³ *Ibid*: 14.

Western art and indigenous African music. On the other hand, *African Songbook*, a type of deconstruction of traditional opera made up of parts that were still rather traditional, had not found favour, although its libretto sketched the life of the iconic Mandela.

Judging from the reception of Cape Town Opera's three productions of short operas, respectively in 2010, 2013 and 2015, opera had steadily developed a more local set of values. These include eclecticism of styles – often a fusion of inherited European and indigenous African styles and structures – and performances on instruments equally eclectic. Furthermore, opera libretti had been described as addressing themes of local relevance that transcend local cultural boundaries and are universal. These descriptions – what Scruton calls the language of aesthetics – point towards a distinctly South African operatic practice that had been developing over the course of thirty years.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to present the research results in a manner that constructs a reception history of operas performed in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015, and particularly to trace the changing aesthetics of opera against the socio-political changes in South Africa.

Journalistic articles on opera in the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* served as the source material to construct this reception history of opera. By analysing these articles and reviews, the researcher has been able to describe the development of a novel South African operatic expression that has been established over the course of thirty years. Each of the four parts of this chapter discussed an historical pattern in this reception history that connects the events (in this case, opera works and performances) that represent these changes in opera.

While these historical patterns appear to be separate and chronological, in reality they happened concurrently. Over the thirty years, there has been a constant portrayal of Western European operas as the unspoken normative to which all operas should be measured against. Simultaneously, transformation in opera had begun and over time certain repertoire, particularly Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, had been significant in enabling this transformation. In an effort to ensure contemporary relevance and Africanising opera, a number of strategies have been employed over thirty years by localising settings and adapting scores and libretti to be relevant to a local contemporary audience. While Western European opera had remained unassailable as the acknowledged peak of operatic expression, transformation of the opera industry had progressed, and strategies towards making opera relevant had been implemented, and new South African operas were composed and performed. These concurrent changes over time have cumulatively contributed to the changing operatic practices in South Africa from what they had been half a century ago.

Dahlhaus theorises that reception may be traced in repertory changes and the views and opinions on aesthetic changes as portrayed in journalistic articles. From the evidence presented in this chapter, as well as in the list of works performed (in Addendum A), particular changes in the repertoire performed in Cape Town over thirty years can be

observed. The most significant of these repertory changes is the composition and performance of South African operas, which contributed considerably to the establishment of an ever more distinctly South African operatic ideal. Over the first ten years investigated by this study, only Western European operas were performed. But the socio-political changes and the development of a new arts dispensation in the country during the early 1990s had become the motivation for creating local operas with music and libretti that aimed to be representative of and reflecting a new South African society.

As much as these changes in the choice of repertoire constitute an indicator of reception and an important part of this reception history, it is the changing values associated with opera over thirty years that have been pertinent to the formation of a more distinct South African operatic expression. Providing a list of the operas performed during this time is a valid, but somewhat simplistic means of showing the repertory changes, and so a methodology of content analysis was implemented to trace other changes as reported on in journalistic articles. As Scruton explains, aesthetics can be noticed in the descriptions of music used by these writers, and the researcher found evidence of a changing aesthetics in local opera in these musical descriptions in the reviews of the opera critics of the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*. The critics' use of affective language was aimed at describing what they considered to have been an accepted operatic aesthetics and what not, thereby persuading and negotiating with their readers (society) shifts in the values that inform views on aesthetics.

According to Scruton affective language is normative and promotes a "standard of taste", and in this way opera critics of the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* used affective language in their writing as a persuasive device in shaping society's ideas and perceptions on opera. Through the analysis of the primary sources, the researcher has concluded that in their reviews of opera performances in Cape Town, these critics had negotiated with their readers the changing aesthetics of opera away from the unquestioned normativity asserted by the European canon. But it also went further to probe what kinds of values and strategies informed this new aesthetics of opera, and how the media reported on and defined it to their readers. The latter represented a society that aimed to make sense of the changing arts dispensation amid the vast socio-political shifts happening in the country since the demise of apartheid and the creation of a new inclusive, constitutional society.

The research reveals that while Western European opera had retained its canonical position, there had been a move towards novelty that combined contemporary art music and African music. Opera critics had portrayed Western European opera as grand and lavish, and having a long tradition that had resulted in an ideal performance practice both in its musical interpretation and staging. In the first part of this chapter evidence was given of how operatic masterpieces had been portrayed as spectacular, enchanting and alluring. These works had defined the art form in the local context, and continued to serve as the point of departure from where a new aesthetic of opera in South Africa had to be imagined.

As discussed in the second part of this chapter, the need for transformation in the arts sector had ensured the emergence of black opera singers, which in turn brought about the inclusion of new repertoire and novel reinterpretations of the standard repertoire. This had been spurred on by the socio-political changes in the country and was aimed at ensuring the survival of opera and guaranteeing its relevance in South Africa. As discussed in the third part of this chapter, there had been a move towards Africanising opera by including local musical elements and setting operas within an African milieu by adapting the score and libretto in order to create a distinctly South African operatic ideal. Similarly, the composition of local opera by South African composers, as discussed in the fourth part of this chapter, had been the culmination of the development of a renewed South African operatic expression.

The reception of operas performed in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015 shows the creation of this distinctly South African operatic expression that, musically and theatrically, was aimed at combining the Western European operatic tradition with music and stories rooted in African cultures. Musically, the local ideal of operatic expression seemed to be this fusion of European and African musical styles, although opera critics shied away from explicitly describing what “African musical elements” sounded like. However, this fusion of musical styles was best illustrated in a review in *Die Burger* of Khumalo’s *Princess Magogo*, in which the opera was defined as being “unapologetically opera and unapologetically African”. The reception also reveals a favouring for a combination of classical and African instruments and a variety of musical elements. One can surmise that it points towards an aesthetic that continues to respect the importance of European musical lineages by building on the traditional and conventional ideas of what constitutes opera within a South African

context. The review of *African Songbook*, however, indicated that the combination of musical styles in that manner (three acts in separate musical styles) had not been favoured. Opera critics seemed sensitive to the idea that, although the fusion of European and African musical elements was generally viewed as positive, this fusion could not happen merely by invoking a political metanarrative.

A score with memorable tunes and easy harmonies and melodies, which are both interesting and enjoyable, was generally favoured by opera critics. Critics' preferences were that the music should be cast in a recognisable structure; therefore, despite the mixture of musical styles, the structure should reflect the forms of arias, duets, and the like, found in a certain kind of Western number opera. The chorus in operas – from Verdi to local operas – played an important role in critical reception and was often included in local compositions. With the strong choral tradition in South Africa, it seems self-evident that this should be a musical form that would be part of an aesthetic re-alignment in South African opera. The importance of the opera chorus is also evident in the establishment of the Choral Training Programme, which was pivotal in the transformation of the opera industry.

In its storytelling – the libretto and the staging – thematic material that transcended cultural boundaries in the country was described in reviews as ideal. Although universal themes remained favoured, it was increasingly viewed as pertinent that such narratives should have strong local connections and address topical issues relevant to local audiences, as was the case with the series of short operas presented by Cape Town Opera. Libretti perceived to be relevant in this way, were reported on as resonating with local audiences, were described as being direct, colourful, humorous, having engrossing tales, using vivid imagery, and having strong local roots. These themes were praised when they seemed to be able to find resonance with a spectrum of cultures in South African society.

Relating to the theatrical aspects of opera, the staging and directing had initially been found ideal when it represented the grand lavishness of period productions of standard repertoire operas. However, as global trends towards more minimalistic productions became popular by the mid-1990s, directors of local opera productions followed suit. Initially, this tendency was met with disapproval from opera critics who sought to preserve and uphold the production styles associated with Grand Opera. Over time there has been – along with the

introduction of increasingly Africanised staging – a move towards minimalist productions that have been positively described by opera critics as being chic, stylish, and modern yet traditional.

These descriptions of operas and their musical and theatrical interpretations trace the development of South African operatic expression through its reception in Cape Town. The research presented in this chapter explains how, over a period of thirty years, the ideal of operatic expression and aesthetics changed in the descriptions opera critics have communicated with their readers and society at large. In favouring a certain aesthetic, opera critics have persuaded their readers of a new “way of doing” opera and negotiated an acceptance of this new operatic aesthetic that combines European and African elements in its music and staging to form distinctly South African theatrical productions.

Contrary to what one might expect, because of how the readership of the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* differ and that these newspapers have divergent histories and ideologies within the South African media landscape, their reportage on opera in Cape Town both favoured a similar ideal operatic expression and aesthetic. In some cases the opera critics of these respective newspapers might have differed in their opinions of a specific production, but in their views and opinions of these performances they favoured the aesthetic changes and supported the creation of a distinctly South African operatic expression. What has also been evident in the analysis of the source material, is that both newspapers had been oblivious to the socio-political significance of opera in the country during the first decade that this study covers (especially noticeable in the reviews of the 1990 and 1994 productions of *Fidelio*). However, since the formation of a new arts dispensation during the late-1990s, there has been a growing awareness of opera as a social construct, its political power, and its place in South African arts generally.

CONCLUSION

Historical writing against the background of South Africa's socio-political history, encompassing a multitude of "master narratives" that have shaped society's thinking about the arts over time, is a complex and contentious matter. As discussed in Chapter 1, contemporary South African historiography is aimed at rewriting the country's history because previous historical writing has been dominated by the perspectives of earlier historians, on their part influenced by the political systems in which they had been embedded.⁷²⁴ This burden has not escaped historical writing on opera, and the current research project set out to investigate the performance history of opera through the lens of reception theory, as articulated by Carl Dahlhaus and as discussed in Chapter 1.⁷²⁵ The aim of this study was therefore to construct an historical narrative of the reception of opera performances in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015 as reported on in the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger*.

By constructing this historical narrative of the reception of opera in Cape Town, this project addressed the four pertinent research questions it set out to answer. As stated in Chapter 1,⁷²⁶ these questions were: First, what have scholars up until now documented about the performance history of opera in Cape Town? Second, what has been documented about the performances of opera in Cape Town in the journalistic articles sourced from the two selected newspapers over the period of 1985 to 2015? Third, what was the reception of the operatic works performed during that period in Cape Town as reflected in these journalistic articles? And, in conclusion, what are the problems and possibilities of reception histories in music within the South African context? As a conclusion to this thesis, I will therefore discuss how this study has addressed these research questions.

The literature review in Chapter 1⁷²⁷ addresses the first research question by critically analysing the historiography of opera. The researcher has levelled three points of critique at

⁷²⁴ See page 17.

⁷²⁵ See page 34.

⁷²⁶ See page 69.

⁷²⁷ See page 22.

this historiography and its portrayal of opera as an art form in South Africa. First, the literature covering historical information on opera performances in South Africa, and particularly in Cape Town, is limited and data is sparsely spread and interwoven with other historical facts on music performances. Second, in dealing with opera and its history, scholars and writers have, purposefully or unwittingly, created a disconnect between the art form and its South African socio-political and cultural contexts, creating an impression that these contexts have had little impact on the performance of opera. Linked to this, the third critique is that this historiography of opera is burdened with the history of the writers of South African history, in that it rests on “master narratives” that have ignored minority and alternative histories.

What has been written by scholars and writers on opera in South Africa has proved to be history-as-event and not history-as-account.⁷²⁸ Therefore, the historical writing on opera only represents a chronological series of events without linking these events in order to reveal the different layers in that history. In addressing these critiques and to provide an historical context for this reception study, the researcher revisited the historiography of opera. In so doing, the intention was to take a broad view of all the historical writing and, as Stanford suggests, to identify historical patterns in the events over the course of history. Three historical patterns were identified and discussed in Chapter 2.

The first pattern explores how different political systems over the course of two hundred years have enabled the introduction of opera as an art form in South Africa and its continued performance in Cape Town.⁷²⁹ While colonialism had created a setting in which European travelling opera companies could introduce opera to this country, Afrikaner nationalism laid a claim to the art form to ensure the Afrikaner’s position at the apex of a social and artistic hierarchy of sophistication and maintain their European cultural and ancestral lineage. With the dawn of democracy in South Africa, a new Africanist nationalism safeguarded the survival of opera as an expression of the various cultures within the imagined rainbow nation.

⁷²⁸ See page 17.

⁷²⁹ See page 79.

The professionalization of opera is the second historical pattern.⁷³⁰ Over the course of about two hundred years, opera had developed from an art form brought to the country by foreign amateurs to an industry that is today recognised as professional. The indicators of the professionalization of opera was identified as the building of theatres, the training of singers, the solicitation of state funding, and the establishment of opera societies and companies. The third pattern that the researcher identified was the dominance of nineteenth-century Western European operas in the repertoire of local opera societies and companies.⁷³¹ While this is true of most opera companies worldwide, this repertoire became a specific aesthetic benchmark of opera within the South African context as a way to measure performance standards, aesthetic merit, and to suggest a definition of the grandeur of opera.

In Chapter 2, the researcher argued that these historical patterns also represent reception in that they reflect several interpretations of the history of opera in South Africa. These historical constructions do not necessarily divulge new information from primary sources regarding opera, but provide interpretations of the interpretations of historical facts documented by writers and scholars over time. The researcher's aim was to critically interpret how these writers of opera history have interpreted the facts they had been presented with. These historical "social responses to art", as Dahlhaus defines reception, therefore also represent opinions, views, perceptions and interpretations that are the building blocks of reception histories.

Chapter 2 also signifies a hermeneutic shift in the treatment of the historical documentation of opera history in South Africa, and this is a key contribution of this study to the body of knowledge on this topic. The study views opera history from a fresh vantage point, looking critically at how, what and by whom this history has been written. This contribution adds to the current growing scholarly literature that addresses the decolonisation of music histories in South Africa.

⁷³⁰ See page 106.

⁷³¹ See page 132.

In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the second and third research questions are answered. The former served to define what had been documented about the performances of opera in Cape Town in the journalistic articles sourced from the two selected newspapers over the period 1985 to 2015. In this study, it was found that these reviews and other journalistic articles on opera had rich content that relates historical information about opera performance on two levels. First, these sources provide basic information about which operatic works were performed, when they were staged, where the productions were mounted, as well as who had been the casts, orchestras, conductors, directors, producers, and opera companies. The sources provided the researcher with a means of cross-checking archival information (which was used to compile Addendum A) on the performed operas.

Second, and more crucial to this reception history, these journalistic articles document value judgments and aesthetic descriptions of the opera performances. These elements were essential to the construction of the reception history presented in Chapter 3, and show the changes in opera performance in Cape Town over the period covered by this study. By using the methodology of content analysis, the researcher was able to extract these value judgments and aesthetic descriptions from the primary sources, and could trace the changing aesthetics as reported on in those journalistic articles. According to Scruton, aesthetics can be noticed in the descriptions of music that manifest in music critics' use of affective language, which in turn is normative and promotes a "standard of taste". The use of affective language in the writing of reviewers of the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* served as a persuasive device in shaping their readers' (and society's) ideas and perceptions on opera.

The third research question – what had been the reception of the operas performed during the selected period in Cape Town as reflected in these journalistic articles? – was also addressed in Chapter 3. Looking at what had been written by music critics on opera (the value judgments and aesthetic descriptions), the researcher again followed Stanford's process of identifying patterns in history, and in this case patterns in these descriptions. The researcher found that these journalistic articles had been focussed on portraying the changing aesthetics in opera over the course of thirty years and the writers thereof negotiated with their readers an acceptance of a "new way of doing" opera amidst the socio-political changes in South Africa. These developments in opera resulted in the

establishment of novel, perhaps even distinctive, forms of South African operatic expression.

Four historical patterns have charted these developments. Although on the surface they seem to follow chronologically – each historical pattern following on the other (as presented in the different parts of Chapter 3) – in reality they happened concurrently. The first pattern reveals that there had been a consistent portrayal of Western European operas as the benchmark against which all operas should be measured.⁷³² The second pattern shows how the transformation in opera had commenced through the performance of certain repertoire, primarily Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. This transformation of the opera industry had been enabled by the socio-political changes in the country.⁷³³ The strategies used by opera companies to create contemporary relevance for opera and Africanising opera is the third pattern in this reception history.⁷³⁴ These strategies included localising settings and adapting scores and libretti to be relevant to a local contemporary audience. The fourth pattern in this reception history is the performance of new South African operas as a means of searching for a distinctly South African operatic expression.⁷³⁵ These parallel historical patterns have cumulatively aided and ensured an approach to opera that is markedly different today than fifty years ago.

Viewed through the lens of opera critics in the journalistic articles that were analysed, the research makes concrete assertions about what this developing South African operatic aesthetic entails. A productive tension between Western art music and indigenous African music characterises the development of a local operatic ideal, with new music consistently being viewed as either following the traditions of Western art music or countering those traditions. This reception history charts the move away from the traditions of Western European opera towards creating this distinctly South African operatic expression that both musically and theatrically combine these traditions. Musically, new operas were expected to respect the importance of the European art music lineage, but were also increasingly expected to employ indigenous instruments and musical elements to portray local roots.

⁷³² See page 164.

⁷³³ See page 175.

⁷³⁴ See page 196.

⁷³⁵ See page 224.

Such works dared not stray too far from the ingrained ideas of what constitute opera from the perspective of Western European opera. This could be seen in opera critics' favouring of scores with memorable melodies and easy harmonies that are interesting, enjoyable and have a recognisable structure.

In its libretto and staging, a distinctly South African opera was characterised as using thematic material that transcended cultural boundaries in the country, had universal import and yet boasted strong local connections and spoke to topical issues relevant to local audiences. In this way, the opera would have contemporary relevance for and resonate with local audiences, its characteristics being that it would be direct, colourful, and humorous, relating engrossing tales, using vivid imagery, and having strong local roots. While the staging and directing of standard repertoire operas had initially been grand and lavish period productions, local directors later followed international trends towards realism and minimalism, but had set operas in a recognisable South African milieu. The staging of new South African operas followed a similar performance tradition, portraying what was viewed as realistic South African settings.

The historical patterns identified in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 intersect in noteworthy ways. The impact of political systems, the professionalization of opera, and the dominance of especially nineteenth-century Western European opera in the repertoire can clearly be noticed in the historical patterns in the reception of the performed operas. Political systems, professionalization and repertory choices had ensured that Western European opera remained in the position of a normative theatrical and musical discourse against which all works were measured. These factors were also crucial in the transformation of an industry from which black singers had been excluded. It enabled an aesthetic aimed at Africanising opera in an effort to make it relevant for a contemporary audience, and it created a need for the composition and performance of South African operas. This reception history of the operas performed between 1985 and 2015 in Cape Town charts how these historical patterns intertwine and converge, how the aesthetics of opera changed over that time, and how opera critics negotiated with their readers – representative of society at large – an acceptance of an aesthetic that fused Western art music and indigenous African music.

The fourth, and last, research question relates to the limitations and possibilities of reception histories in music within the South African context. This research project affirmed Dahlhaus's theoretical framework of reception in that journalistic articles on music indeed reflect the views and opinions on works of music within a specific societal context, which constitutes the reception of these works. Reception histories give a textured view of the performances of musical works. Unlike conventional musicological histories, reception histories do not deal with musical texts but with the performance of those texts.

Performance is context-related and situates music within a society and makes society part of music history. Therefore, reception histories interrogate, whether by confirming or rejecting, the value of musical works within a specific society. Reception places artists and their audiences in the foreground in providing a history that is framed by the context of those performances.

Reception histories provide a wide perspective on music performances and allow the researcher to compare different views and perspectives on these performances and evaluate them to construct history. In the absence of proper archives – as the current researcher experienced at the Artscape archive – reception histories are indispensable in documenting the performance history of music. Furthermore, in South Africa there are many unwritten music histories that have been buried by the political history of the country. For these, reception studies sourced from newspapers could provide the only means of documenting these histories.

Reception histories, however, do not provide the researcher with all the archival facts. In this study, the researcher found that some production details had often been left out of reviews. Also, among the current developments in the media landscape is the demise of arts reportage, as discussed in Chapter 1.⁷³⁶ With the dwindling writing on and reviewing of opera and art music by the South African media, it may in future become increasingly difficult to write reception histories.

The current reception history research project is therefore timeous and makes a contribution to the body of knowledge pertaining to the history of opera in South Africa.

⁷³⁶ See page 41.

The reception studies referenced in Chapter 1 of this dissertation have specific works or a group of works by a single composer as their subject, but the current research project investigates opera as an art form and as an industry. Its subject is the performance of a body of work by a number of composers over a specific time and in a specific space, determining a very specifically delimited kind of reception history.

This study is the first reception history of opera in South Africa. Although academic articles on the reception of single works performed in South Africa have been written, there has thus far not been a research project aimed at investigating the reception of any musical work or group of works performed in this country. Furthermore, the current study presents an alternative methodology for the writing of music histories, specifically within the South African context. As such, the research contributes to the academic discourse and historiography of opera in South Africa.

Although the focus of this thesis is on the reception of opera performances in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015, the findings of this study represent the development of a broad yet distinctly South African operatic aesthetic – an inference made because Cape Town has over the studied period been the city where most opera performances in South Africa had taken place. Furthermore, in the volume of journalistic articles reporting on or reviewing opera, the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* has consistently and extensively reported on and reviewed opera productions, more than any other newspaper in the country. One can therefore generalise that this reception history represents a broad developing South African operatic aesthetic.

The scope of this research project was to present the reception of opera in Cape Town and relate how opera production had changed over a period of thirty years. But the research also opens up possibilities outside the scope and size of the current study for future research projects. These include interrogating the views expressed in this reception history from the perspective of gender studies, because those views represented here have been expressed predominantly by white males. Blackness on the opera stage has been explored in previous studies (some of which is cited in this dissertation), but the empowerment and employment of black bodies and voices on the South African opera stage, which happened under unique socio-political conditions, has not been studied.

Among the reception themes and patterns identified by the researcher and which could not be addressed within the scope and size of this project, is the media's consistent survivalist approach to Western art music in general and opera in particular. As noted in the conclusion of Chapter 3, the research showed that both the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* had supported and concurred on the aesthetic changes that have played out over the course of thirty years. While these newspapers' readership and ideology seemed initially to be at two different ends of a societal spectrum, the views expressed by their respective opera critics are broadly similar. Because these critics and their readership are predominantly white, this points to a homogeneity that could be argued to infer whiteness and white cultural consensus in the arts and the vantage points from which the views studied in this research had been expressed. What is absent from this study therefore, are alternative views that interrogate whiteness in art forms with European roots that have been indigenised in South Africa. Documenting and interrogating such views, and considering how whiteness has been perpetuated in post-apartheid South African cultural production are aspects in need of further investigation.

Also, the importance of the opera chorus in creating access and providing training to local singers may be further investigated from the perspective of music education. Another theme identified and not addressed in this study, is the use of opera as an artistic export commodity as a means for South Africa to re-enter the international opera arena after apartheid and in relation to the cultural boycotts during the apartheid era. Closely related to this, is an investigation of the media's portrayal of and pride in local opera singers, juxtaposed with their view of international singers who had been imported to portray roles that, according to these opera critics, could have been sung equally well by local singers.

Much is often made of the vibrancy and substantial successes of opera in democratic South Africa; assertions connected to new productions and the emergence of new star performers as much as by the comparative difficulties of other kinds of music supported by the erstwhile white minority regime. As this study has shown, and these future avenues for research intimate, opera also remains a vibrant research field in South Africa. Its successes and experiments on stage, and the interest it continues to excite, are suggestive of many different and enriching research approaches and disciplinary interests. In many respects, this study, like others on the subject, remain at the threshold of what remains to be done.

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ADDENDUM A

List of operas performed in Cape Town between 1985 and 2015

YEAR	STAGE RUN	OPERA COMPANY	COMPOSER	OPERA WORK
1985	7–18 February	CAPAB	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Don Giovanni
1985	16 March – 10 April	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	Aida
1985	6 April – 1 May	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	La Traviata
1985	24 August – 9 September	CAPAB	Gaetano Donizetti	Lucia di Lammermoor
1985	28 September – 14 October	CAPAB	Charles Gounod	Faust
1986	15–28 February	CAPAB	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Le nozze di Figaro
1986	29 March – 12 April	CAPAB	Richard Wagner	Der fliegende Holländer
1986	9–27 May	CAPAB	Pietro Mascagni & Giacomo Puccini	Cavalleria rusticana & Gianni Schicchi
1986	23 August – 1 September	CAPAB	Richard Strauss	Der Rosenkavalier
1986	12 December – 17 January 1987	CAPAB	Johann Strauss II	Die Fledermaus
1987	24 January – 14 February	CAPAB	Gioachino Rossini	Il barbiere di Siviglia
1987	21 March – 4 April	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	Falstaff
1987	2–18 May	CAPAB	Giacomo Puccini	Madama Butterfly
1987	22 August – 12 September	CAPAB	Richard Wagner	Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg
1987	14–29 October	CAPAB	Giacomo Puccini	Turandot
1988	30 March – 18 April	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	Rigoletto
1988	14 May – 11 June	CAPAB	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Die Zauberflöte
1988	13–31 August	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	Aida

1988	3–22 September	CAPAB	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Le nozze di Figaro
1988	15 October – 7 November	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	Otello
1989	3–15 February	CAPAB	Georges Bizet	Carmen
1989	12–30 May	CAPAB	Richard Wagner	Lohengrin
1989	4–29 September	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	La traviata
1989	24 November – 6 January	CAPAB	Franz Léhar	Die lustige Witwe
1990	31 January – 17 February	CAPAB	Ludwig von Beethoven	Fidelio
1990	12 May – 2 June	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	Don Carlo
1990	28 July – 5 August	CAPAB	Benjamin Britten	The rape of Lucretia
1990	1–15 September	CAPAB	Carl Maria von Weber	Der Freischütz
1990	10–24 October	CAPAB	Gaetano Donizetti	L'elisir d'amore
1990	10–24 November	CAPAB	Giacomo Puccini	La bohème
1990	12–29 December	CAPAB	Engelbert Humperdinck	Hänsel und Gretel
1991	2–10 February	CAPAB	Gian Carlo Menotti	The consul
1991	25 March – 8 April	CAPAB	Richard Strauss	Der Rosenkavalier
1991	24 April – 13 May	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	Aida
1991	30 May – 14 June	CAPAB	Giacomo Puccini	Tosca
1991	4–14 July	CAPAB	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Così fan tutte
1991	24 August – 8 September	CAPAB	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Don Giovanni
1991	30 September – 18 October	CAPAB	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Die Zauberflöte
1991	6–16 November	CAPAB	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Le nozze di Figaro
1991	6–28 December	CAPAB	Jacques Offenbach	La belle Hélène
1992	5–19 February	CAPAB	Richard Wagner	Tristan und Isolde
1992	29 February – 2 March	CAPAB	Gioachino Rossini	William Tell

1992	29 April – 10 May	CAPAB	Gioachino Rossini	Il barbiere di Siviglia
1992	9–26 June	CAPAB	Giacomo Puccini	La bohème
1992	15–23 Augustus	CAPAB	Gioachino Rossini	Il turco in Italia
1992	23 October – 9 November	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	Il trovatore
1992	12 December – 7 January	CAPAB	Franz Lehár	Die lustige Witwe
1992	15 December – 6 January	CAPAB	Gian Carlo Menotti	Amahl and the night visitors
1993	27 March – 10 April	CAPAB	Benjamin Britten	Peter Grimes
1993	1–9 May	CAPAB	Richard Wagner	Der fliegende Holländer
1993	15 May – 4 June	CAPAB	Giacomo Puccini	Madama Butterfly
1993	23 August – 3 September	CAPAB	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Don Giovanni
1993	27 September – 17 October	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	Aida
1993	1 December – 8 January	CAPAB	Johann Strauss II	Die Fledermaus
1993	14 December – 6 January	CAPAB	Gian Carlo Menotti	Amahl and the night visitors
1994	19 March	Oude Libertas	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Die Zauberflöte
1994	14–25 April	CAPAB	Ludwig von Beethoven	Fidelio
1994	19 May – 3 June	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	La traviata
1994	15–25 June	CAPAB	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Così fan tutte
1994	17 September – 7 October	CAPAB	Giacomo Puccini	Turandot
1995	18 January – 6 February	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	Nabucco
1995	24 January – 4 February	CAPAB	Roelof Temmingh	Enoch, prophet of God
1995	26 January – 5 February	CAPAB	Georges Bizet / Peter Brooke	La tragedie de Carmen

1995	27 January – 5 February	CAPAB	Gioachino Rossini	La Cenerentola
1995	16–31 May	CAPAB	Giacomo Puccini	Tosca
1995	12–30 August	CAPAB	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Die Zauberflöte
1995	21 September – 7 October	CAPAB	Giacomo Puccini	La bohème
1996	30 March – 12 April	CAPAB	George & Ira Gershwin	Porgy and Bess
1996	27 April – 12 May	CAPAB	Giacomo Puccini	Madama Butterfly
1996	15–22 June	CAPAB	Georges Bizet / Peter Brooke	La tragedie de Carmen
1996	6–12 November	CAPAB	Giacomo Puccini	Turandot
1997	17 May – 1 June	CAPAB	Gaetano Donizetti	Lucia di Lammermoor
1997	14–28 June	CAPAB	Roelof Temmingh	Sacred bones
1997	16–27 August	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	La traviata
1997	20–30 December	CAPAB	Giacomo Puccini / Péter Louis van Dijk	La bohème noir
1998	14 February – 6 March	Spier	Giacomo Puccini	Tosca
1998	21 – 7 March	Spier	Ruggero Leoncavallo	I Pagliacci
1998	20–28 March	CAPAB/Oude Libertas	Gaetano Donizetti	Don Pasquale
1998	25 April – 10 May	CAPAB	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Così fan tutte
1998	28 May – 12 June	CAPAB	Vincenzo Bellini	Norma
1998	5–20 September	CAPAB	Jacques Offenbach	Les contes d'Hoffmann
1998	5–11 October	CAPAB	Francis Poulenc	Dialogues des carmélites
1998	10–24 October	CAPAB	Giuseppe Verdi	Rigoletto
1999	18 March	Oude Libertas	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Die Entführung aus dem Serail
1999	9–18 April	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Le nozze di Figaro
1999	1–15 May	Cape Town Opera	Giacomo Puccini	Madama Butterfly
1999	12–17 July	Cape Town Opera	Gaetano Donizetti	L'Elisir d'Amore

1999	9–21 September	Cape Town Opera	Georges Bizet	Carmen
1999	2–17 October	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	Aida
1999	1–7 November	Cape Town Opera	Engelbert Humperdinck	Hänsel und Gretel
1999	27 November	Cape Town Opera	Richard Strauss	Elektra
2000	18 March – 2 April	Cape Town Opera	Franz Lehár	Die lustige Witwe
2000	13–24 April	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	La traviata
2000	21–26 August	Cape Town Opera	Giacomo Puccini	Suor Angelica & Gianni Schicchi
2000	23 September – 7 October	Cape Town Opera	Richard Wagner	Tannhäuser
2000	30 September – 8 October	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Don Giovanni
2000	21–27 November	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Die Zauberflöte
2000	25–30 November	Cape Town Opera	Thomas Rajna	Amarantha
2001	23–30 May	Cape Town Opera	George & Ira Gershwin	Porgy and Bess
2001	19–28 July	Cape Town Opera	Denzil Weale	Love and Green Onions
2001	14–23 September	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi/ Péter Louis van Dijk	Macbeth
2001	15–24 September	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	Un ballo in Maschera
2001	22 September – 6 October	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	Rigoletto
2001	30 November – 4 December	Cape Town Opera	Giacomo Puccini	La Bohème
2002	5–15 January	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Die Zauberflöte
2002	12–27 January	Cape Town Opera	Henry Purcell	Dido and Aeneas
2002	26 January – 2 February	Cape Town Opera	Giacomo Puccini	Madama Butterfly
2002	20–23 March	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Idomeneo
2002	29 May – 8 June	Cape Town Opera	Gaetano Donizetti	Lucia di Lammermoor
2002	1–17 August	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	Aida

2002	12 – 20 September	Cape Town Opera	Gioachino Rossini	Il barbiere di Siviglia
2002	3–12 October	Cape Town Opera	Ruggero Leoncavallo / Pietro Mascagni	Cavalleria Rusticana & I pagliacci
2002	23–30 November	Cape Town Opera	Georges Bizet	Les pêcheurs de perles
2003	19–28 February	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	La traviata
2003	26 February – 9 March	Cape Town Opera	Engelbert Humperdinck	Hänsel und Gretel
2003	7–15 March	Cape Town Opera	Péter Louis van Dijk, et al	earthdiving
2003	5–16 June	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	Nabucco
2003	17–23 August	Cape Town Opera	Bedřich Smetana	The bartered bride
2003	3–13 September	Cape Town Opera	Charles Gounod	Faust
2003	9 & 12 September	Cape Town Opera	Hector Berlioz	La damnation de Faust
2003	30 October – 7 November	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Così fan tutte
2004	5–7 February	Cape Town Opera	Eric Chisholm	Dark sonnet & The pardoner's tale
2004	27 March	Cape Town Opera	Ludwig von Beethoven	Fidelio
2004	22–30 April	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	La traviata
2004	22–29 May	Cape Town Opera	George Frideric Handel	Alcina
2004	7–14 August	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Die Zauberflöte
2004	11–18 September	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	La traviata
2004	21–30 October	Cape Town Opera	Umberto Giordano	Andrea Chénier
2004	4 December – 8 January	Cape Town Opera	Johann Strauss II	Die Fledermaus
2005	24 February – 11 March	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	Il trovatore
2005	5–12 March	Cape Town Opera	Thomas Rajna	Valley song
2005	16–26 April	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	Nabucco
2005	14–20 August	Cape Town Opera	Benjamin Britten	A midsummer night's dream

2005	24 September – 8 October	Cape Town Opera	Georges Bizet	Carmen
2005	28 October – 5 November	Cape Town Opera	Hans Huyssen	Masque
2005	18–27 November	Cape Town Opera	Pietro Mascagni	Cavalleria Rusticana & Gianni Schicchi
2006	24–26 February	Spier	Mzilikazi Khumalo	Princess Magogo
2006	25 February – 4 March	Cape Town Opera	Antonín Dvořák	Rusalka
2006	31 March & 1 April	Cape Town Opera	Scott Joplin	Treemonisha
2006	6–18 May	Cape Town Opera	Giacomo Puccini	La bohème
2006	20–26 August	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Le nozze di Figaro
2006	21–30 September	Cape Town Opera	George & Ira Gershwin	Porgy and Bess
2006	11–18 November	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Così fan Tutte
2007	15–23 March	Spier	Giuseppe Verdi / Péter Louis van Dijk	macbEth: The Opera
2007	10–23 May	Cape Town Opera	Giacomo Puccini	Tosca
2007	10-14 July	Cape Town Opera	Alan Stephenson	The orphans of Qumbu
2007	18–25 August	Cape Town Opera	Giacomo Puccini	La rondine
2007	8–18 September	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Die Zauberflöte
2007	1–10 November	Cape Town Opera	Jules Massenet	Manon
2008	2 February	Suidoosterfees	Giovanni Pergolesi	La serva padrona
2008	22 February – 1 March	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	Rigoletto
2008	7 – 14 June	Cape Town Opera	Jules Massenet	Werther
2008	31 August – 6 September	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Don Giovanni
2008	2–10 October	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	Aida
2008	30 October – 8 November	Cape Town Opera	Mats Larsson Gothe	Poet and Prophetess
2008	20–29 November	Cape Town Opera	Claudio Monteverdi	L'incoronazione di Poppea

2009	2 February	Suidoosterfees	Giachinno Rossini	La scala di seta
2009	23 May – 5 June	Cape Town Opera	Giacomo Puccini	Madama Butterfly
2009	23 – 29 August	Cape Town Opera	Gaetano Donizetti	L'elisir d'amore
2009	16 – 30 October	Cape Town Opera	Jake Heggie	Dead man walking
2009	20–28 November	Cape Town Opera	Leoš Janáček	The cunning little vixen
2010	9–15 May	Cape Town Opera	Gioachino Rossini	Il viaggio a Reims
2010	29 May – 9 June	Cape Town Opera	Richard Strauss	Der Rosenkavalier
2010	17–19 June	Cape Town Opera	Stephenson/Campbell/Temming	African Songbook: A musical tribute to the life of Nelson Mandela
2010	16–27 October	Cape Town Opera	Gaetano Donizetti	Lucia di Lammermoor
2010	21–27 November	Cape Town Opera	Péter Louis van Dijk, Peter Klatzow, Hendrik Hofmeyr, Bongani Ndodana-Breen, Martin Watt	Five:20 Operas made in SA (Out of time, Words from a broken string, Saartjie, Hani, Tronkvoël)
2011	25–30 January	Suidoosterfees	Richard Wagner	Der fliegende Holländer
2011	9–19 March	Cape Town Opera	Georges Bizet	Carmen
2011	16–21 April	Cape Town Opera	Giacomo Puccini	Gianni Schicchi & Sour Angelica
2011	18 – 21 July	Cape Town Opera	Hans Krasa	Brundibar
2011	30 August – 3 September	Cape Town Opera	Igor Stravinsky	The rake's progress
2011	11–22 October	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	La traviata
2011	6–12 November	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Die Entführung aus dem Serail
2012	16–19 February	Suidoosterfees	Gaetano Donizetti	Viva la Mamma
2012	7–10 March	Cape Town Opera	Ludwig von Beethoven	Fidelio
2012	2-5 May	Cape Town Opera	Neo Muyanga	The flower of Shembe
2012	5–16 May	Cape Town Opera	Giacomo Puccini	La bohème
2012	29 September – 6 October	Cape Town Opera	George & Ira Gershwin	Porgy and Bess
2012	24–29 November	Cape Town Opera	Jacques Offenbach	Les contes d'Hoffmann

2013	6 - 13 April	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	Otello
2013	13–15 June	Cape Town Opera	Carl Unander-Scharin, Phillip Miller	Two:30 (Sing the body electric!, Between a rock and a hard place)
2013	20–24 August	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Don Giovanni
2013	19–27 September	Cape Town Opera	Giacomo Puccini	Madama Butterfly
2013	20–24 November	Cape Town Opera	Gioachino Rossini	Il barbiere di Siviglia
2014	26–30 August	Cape Town Opera	Gioachino Rossini	Il viaggio a Reims
2014	18–26 October	Cape Town Opera	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Le nozze di Figaro
2014	19–23 November	Cape Town Opera	Dominick Argento	Postcards from Morocco
2015	29 April – 2 May	Suidoosterfees	Gian Carlo Menotti	The medium
2015	30 April – 9 May	Cape Town Opera	Giuseppe Verdi	La traviata
2015	19–22 August	Cape Town Opera	Neo Muyanga	Heart of redness
2015	5–12 September	Cape Town Opera	Franz Léhar	The merry widow of Malagawi
2015	7 & 8 November	Cape Town Opera	Gaetano Donizetti	Maria Stuarda
2015	21–29 November	Cape Town Opera	Robert Fokkens, Sibusiso Njeza, Angelique Mouyis, Adrian More,	Four:30 – Operas made in South Africa (<i>The Application, Blood of Mine, Bessie: The Blue-Eyed Xhosa, Anti-Louis</i>)