

Composing a Poetic Opera

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Portfolio Contents

i. Drought

Drought 40'03''

An opera in one act for high soprano, mezzo-soprano, chamber orchestra (0.2+CA.0.2+Cbsn/0.0.0.0/2perc/pno/3.3.3.3.3) and electronic track.

Recorded on the 26th October 2022 by the BBC Philharmonic at MediaCity UK. Conducted by Jack Sheen, with Sally Pitts (soprano) and Lila Chrisp (mezzo-soprano).

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/qs9h3sreq811yu0g04bsd/h?dl=0&rlkey=jlb1fle pwcymontv8nuulvgy5>

ii. Norrisette

Norrisette 51'42''

All recordings made at home by Anna Appleby in September 2020 - March 23.

A. Before PRiSM SampleRNN Collaboration

- | | |
|--------------------|---------|
| 1. Angel | 03'15'' |
| 2. Secret Code | 02'41'' |
| 3. Leaves | 03'15'' |
| 4. Unread | 01'56'' |
| 5. Sheets of Paper | 02'17'' |
| 6. Old Name | 01'58'' |
| 7. Bone Forest | 03'11'' |
| 8. Prometheus | 03'17'' |
| 9. The Half Of It | 02'55'' |

B: PRiSM SampleRNN Collaboration

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 10. Not-Norrisette: Outputs from PRiSM SampleRNN | |
| Not-Norrisette 1 (training cycle 1) | 00'29'' |
| Not-Norrisette 2 (training cycle 2) | 00'29'' |

Not-Norrisette 3 (training cycle 3)	00'29''
11. Reservoir	02'48''
12. Whale House	03'33''

C: After PRiSM SampleRNN Collaboration

13. Wild Being	04'15''
14. Metal Hotel	03'16''
15. Little Lights	03'52''
16. Ribcage	02'49''
17. A Quiet Death	03'14''
18. Fluffwerk	03'10''

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/rcjh7y1q15gzcqzargb5i/h?dl=0&rlkey=8bf2aj16zgl9fqo0c5415azu>

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Thank you to Sally Pitts and Lila Chrisp and cover cast Elspeth Piggott and Morgana Warren-Jones for their artistry, for singing and embodying the roles of Charlie and Coll so powerfully, and for collaborating with me throughout. Thank you to Lynne Dawson for recruiting them. Thank you to James Gillett for being an invaluable and enthusiastic repetiteur, and for motivating us all through many rehearsals.

Thank you to Simon Stephens and Jude Christian for their dramaturgical advice, and to Charlie Sinclair for directing the premiere.

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Abstract

This portfolio comprises an opera, *Drought*, with a libretto by Niall Campbell, and a collection of my electronic music under the moniker ‘Norrissette’. Originally this PhD would have involved the creation of a 2-hour opera for six vocalists and symphony orchestra, however the restrictions necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic led this to evolve into a shorter, one-act opera for two vocalists, chamber orchestra and electronic track.

I have also composed numerous works since 2019, including a 45-minute ballet, part of an opera for Glyndebourne, and multiple orchestral and chamber works, however I have not included these in the portfolio as the development of the soundworld and structure of *Drought* is most clearly represented by itself and by my recorded songs and electronic tracks.¹

Norrissette began in multiple ways: firstly, working with electronic music was my way of ameliorating the loss of a full orchestra and vocal department with whom to collaborate during Covid-19 restrictions, which was a crucial element in the original vision for this project. I began recording and producing music at home during lockdown and this process continued until restrictions eased. It continues still to this day as I now regularly release new recordings and perform live.

Secondly, believing song to be rooted in poetry, Campbell’s poetic skill inspired me to further develop my songwriting practice alongside the opera project with my Norrissette work. My broad reasoning was that Campbell’s lyric poetry style would be complemented most naturally by songwriting. I felt that my songwriting ability needed work so I set about writing numerous songs with my own words as a practice exercise, which evolved into its own parallel project.

Thirdly, I felt frustrated that I initially had less narrative input with the libretto than I had originally imagined. All collaborations are unique, and in our particular case, while sharing many interests such as environmental change, Campbell and I had different visions for characters, narrative voice, political tropes and structural devices, as well as conflicting creative processes (I wished to collaborate more

¹ These additional works can be found in Appendix A.

continuously, Campbell preferred extended periods of creative isolation). Norrisette became my voice: I wrote lyrics and music together, having full creative control while Campbell was developing his first drafts of the libretto.

Fourthly, Campbell partially inspired the creation of Norrisette from his initial libretto draft which involved an otherworldly ‘Rainmaker’ character (see Appendix C); I decided that an electronic soundworld would be the ideal way in which to expand this character’s voice. Norrisette was incubated by my desire to develop an avant-garde soundworld and thus a more skilled electronic practice in my work.

One of the original research questions for this project was how composer and poet might interact without a director’s involvement in the early stages. Working with the BBC Philharmonic, a radio orchestra, created a unique opportunity and challenge to prepare an opera that would be experienced fully by listeners at home without the visual element of staging. Many choices I made in text-setting and orchestration are to maximise the impact of the story and music through sound alone. I wanted the audience to taste and feel the drought and rain without it being illustrated visually. Campbell’s inclusion of a Radio Song scene in the libretto foregrounds this dimension even further. In the final libretto draft, the voice that originated as the Rainmaker character has become the voice of the Radio Song. Thus Norrisette also begins her life in the Radio. The creation of the Radio Song was the moment that I found full permission to integrate my electronic practice with my operatic practice.

My subsequent collaboration with artificial intelligence software (PRiSM SampleRNN) using Norrisette recordings as source material, created WAV file outputs which I have nicknamed ‘Not-Norrisette’. These WAV files, with some editing and arranging, form the soundscape of Scene 5 in the opera, where the radio is malfunctioning.²

² PRiSM SampleRNN. Led by Sam Salem and Christopher Melen. Initiated by Sam Salem. prism-samplernn code by Christopher Melen. A PRiSM Collaboration also involving David De Roure, Marcus du Sautoy, and Emily Howard. The RNCM Centre for Practice & Research in Science & Music (PRiSM) is funded by the Research England fund Expanding Excellence in England (E3). <https://github.com/rncm-prism/prism-samplernn>
<https://www.rncm.ac.uk/research/research-centres-rncm/prism/>

The woven partnership between *Drought* and Norrisette has two main strands: that of playing with the relationship between acoustic and electronic technologies, and that of poetry and songwriting. In this commentary I describe my approach to composing *Drought* and creating Norrisette along these two strands of technology and poetry, in dialogue with the genres of opera and pop music, and with reference to the complex relationship between music and language. I have grouped my practices under the umbrella of ‘Composing a Poetic Opera’ because this overarching goal took me in numerous creative directions that ultimately found their way back to the opera premiere on the 26th October 2022. Campbell’s poetry led me to explore technology of sound, which then enabled me to grapple with the task of composing a radio opera for RNCM singers and the BBC Philharmonic.

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Chapter 1: A New Poetic Opera

1.1 Background to the Project

In October 2019 I began an innovative collaborative PhD with poet Niall Campbell with the projected end result of an opera premiere in 2022. Campbell was to write a poetic libretto in collaboration with myself, and I was to compose a score for players from the BBC Philharmonic and singers from the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM). This Collaborative Doctoral Award between RNCM and Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) received funding from the North West Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership (NWCDTP).³

Originally this PhD was conceived to foster a long-term text-led operatic collaboration in which the libretto had sufficient time to gestate as an intricate poetic work and the poet-librettist had sufficient space to learn alongside the composer, resulting in an opera which would have significant input from both parties. The joint PhD project has similarities with the MA in Opera Making and Writing and Royal Opera House Doctoral Composer in Residence schemes at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, but is unique at time of writing.⁴ The initial research questions submitted in the project funding application are listed below.

1.2 Initial Aims of the Project: Research Questions

(1) How can focus on, and documentation of, the process of collaboration between composer and poet contribute to the development of opera (and major choral work) in Britain and beyond, particularly in the context of the current dominance of ‘director-led’ development?

³ The joint opera PhD was set up by Professor Emily Howard at RNCM and Professor Michael Symmons Roberts at MMU in collaboration with Simon Webb at the BBC Philharmonic, with funding from AHRC. See press release on RNCM website: <https://www.rncm.ac.uk/news/unique-phd-collaboration-between-poet-and-composer-to-create-full-length-opera/> accessed 23/03/23, 17:22.

⁴ See Guildhall School of Music and Drama graduate course listings: <https://www.gsmd.ac.uk/study-with-guildhall/music/ma-in-opera-making-writing> and <https://www.gsmd.ac.uk/study-with-guildhall/doctoral-research-mphildmusphd/funding-research-degree/doctoral-studentships> accessed 23/03/23, 13:47.

(2) How can a composer learn from the collaborative methods and approaches of working with a poet on opera so that these inform their own work as composer of non text-led music, and contribute to wider research conversations about connections between poetry and music?

(3) How can expertise in workshop development, collaboration and performance with a major orchestra help to shape creative practice in developing text-led music for other collaborative, performative contexts such as film and radio?

(4) How can these project outputs contribute to future artistic collaborations and practice-led research scholarship through both public (and media) discussions and publications arising from the written component of the PhD?

1.3 Timeline 1: Initial Plan

This is the initial project chart I submitted at the beginning of my PhD:

January 2020	March 2020	Compose a scene
March 2020	May 2020	Workshop with BBC Philharmonic
April 2020	June 2020	Compose a second scene
June 2020	November 2020	Workshop with BBC Philharmonic
January 2021	April 2021	First draft of libretto
April 2021	June 2021	Final draft of libretto
April 2021	October 2021	Vocal score of opera
October 2021	April 2022	Rehearsals with singers
April 2021	March 2022	Full score of opera
March 2022	June 2022	Rehearsals with BBC Philharmonic
May 2022	June 2022	Premiere with BBC Philharmonic
March 2022	October 2022	Commentary & submission
October 2022	March 2023	Plan for future productions

1.4 Timeline 2: Project Delivery

This project chart reflects the actual sequence of events, as affected by the Covid-19 pandemic:

January 2020	March 2020	Composition of a scene
March 2020		Short workshop on opera scene with singers at RNCM
March 2020		Covid-19 lockdown
March 2020		Workshop with BBC Philharmonic CANCELLED
March 2020	April 2020	Conversations on Zoom with Campbell about opera themes
April 2020	August 2020	Experiments in electronic music at home
August 2020		First draft of <i>Drought</i> libretto
September 2020		Birth of Norrisette, first EP release, 2020
September 2020	June 2021	Group supervisions on Zoom about redrafting <i>Drought</i> libretto
November 2020		Second Norrisette EP release, <i>Alien</i>
March 2021		Third Norrisette EP release, <i>Paper</i> Composition of <i>Dust Mouth</i>
July 2021		Final draft of <i>Drought</i> libretto
September 2021		First live performance as Norrisette
October 2021		Fourth Norrisette EP release, <i>Future Dream</i>
October 2021		First draft of <i>Drought</i> vocal score completed

October 2021	April 2022	Rehearsals with singers and repetiteur to finalise <i>Drought</i> vocal score
February 2022		Fifth Norrisette EP release, <i>Human</i>
May 2022		Workshop of full score of <i>Drought</i> with BBC Philharmonic
July 2022		Staging rehearsals for <i>Drought</i> with director
July 2022		First festival performance and BBC radio play as Norrisette
September 2022		Final score of <i>Drought</i> completed
October 2022		Sixth Norrisette EP release, <i>Metal Hotel</i> , and first headline performance
26th October 2022		Premiere of <i>Drought</i> with BBC Philharmonic
May 2023		First physical Norrisette EP release, <i>Weird Party</i> on CD, NorriCassette and USB
July 2023		PhD commentary & submission
July 2023		Plan for future productions of <i>Drought</i>

1.5 Development of the Project

In year one of the project, Campbell and I began discussing starting points for the opera: what our artistic motivations were, what we imagined an opera to be in the twenty-first century, why we might tell a story in the form of an opera, how that opera should be structured and formed, how characterisation would work with poetry and music, and when and where the story might be set.

The collaboration progressed in the form of conversations in person and was developing towards workshops with musicians when the Covid-19 pandemic caused these plans to become impossible. Unaware of how long restrictions would last, we originally postponed workshops and meetings, and then later in 2020 began collaborating via video conferencing software to the best of our ability. With no direct access to singers or orchestral musicians, I began experimenting with electronic music at home, and this ultimately became a crucial element in the opera.

After continuing discussions with the supervisory team, my plan was to create a two-hour opera with six voices and full orchestra, and Niall Campbell (hereafter referred to as Campbell) planned to write a lengthy and complex libretto which combined his poetic expertise with the plot and structure of a play. There were alternative ways of approaching this brief, it being an open challenge to collaboratively develop a text-led dramatic work, but this was the direction he wished to go in at first. His first draft was created mainly in isolation over four months and was sent to me in August 2020.

At this point, due to the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic and its effects, the libretto and scope of the opera were greatly reduced to aid flexibility of performance, with our new aim being a 45-minute piece with two singers, small orchestra and electronic track, for a later premiere date than originally planned for June 2022. The first draft of the libretto was too long and complex for this new aim, and I also felt unable to work with it in the way I had imagined, it having been created in isolation without my input. The supervisory team (myself, Niall Campbell, Professor Emily Howard, Professor Michael Symmons Roberts and Dr Nikolai Duffy) began meeting regularly online over the following months to ensure that Campbell's redrafting of the libretto resulted in a text that I had been

involved with and which I was able to imagine musically. This process also ensured that my feedback to him was deemed fair and that he was supported in learning, as an already distinguished poet, how to create a libretto.

While he was rewriting the text, I continued working on electronic music and began using some of his early drafts to compose sketches and instrumental music for the opera, which I shared with him. Although I had envisaged having much more opportunity to pursue my own collaborative and experimental research interests, and having expected to work in a much more co-creative way throughout, we were able to make an impossible situation possible through video conferencing despite the constraints of the pandemic, and the final libretto in Summer 2021 was a text that I felt was complex and interesting, showcasing Campbell's poetic sensitivity and skill, and was able to set convincingly to music while being authentic enough to my own voice. Nevertheless there are numerous sections that I left as spoken text due to their intricacy and fast-paced conversational nature, but this was as much a stylistic choice as a necessity. I had requested that there be sections of dialogue so that the opera had an element of realism, and had also encouraged Campbell to work to his lyrical strengths by constructing multiple poems that I could compose as ballads or arias.

The collaborative peak of the work is, for me, the Radio Song, as this was the element that originated in my experiments into electronic music, which were themselves informed by the siren-like Rainmaker character in Campbell's original draft, and subsequently became the scene which Campbell described almost musically to me. I then shared numerous drafts with him because it was easy to do so, it being made wholly in my house with my own voice and recording software, before I had in-person opportunities to work with other musicians.

In 2021 I recruited four student singers with whom to work (a cast, and cover cast): Sally Pitts (high soprano), Lila Chrisp (mezzo-soprano), Elspeth Piggott (high soprano, cover), and Morgana Warren-Jones (mezzo-soprano, cover). I was also able to work with a répétiteur, James Gillett, throughout 2022, and two directors: Jude Christian, who gave us a workshop in early 2022, and Charlie Sinclair, who directed workshops and rehearsals leading up to the premiere on the 26th October 2022, which was conducted by Jack Sheen. Sheen also conducted a workshop on

the first draft of the opera with the BBC Philharmonic in May 2022. After this I fully reorchestrated the score in Summer 2022.

Perhaps due to geographical proximity (Campbell moved to Scotland in 2021) and production expertise, I oversaw the rehearsal process throughout 2021 and 2022 and produced the opera. My role involved liaising with the production team at the BBC, directing and scheduling rehearsals, managing artists, sourcing props and costumes, obtaining extra funding from the NWCDTP to pay the singers who had now graduated due to the extension of the project, promoting the opera and inviting industry professionals and opera enthusiasts to the premiere, and also being a rehearsal pianist while Gillett conducted for the majority of rehearsals. Campbell was consulted at every juncture, both in terms of composition and production, and attended several rehearsals and advised on his preferences for interpretation of the plot and characters, as well as choice of director. I regularly emailed him drafts of the vocal and full scores along with software-generated audio, and some rehearsal videos. Although the BBC have not yet broadcast the opera (currently forecast for September 2023), the hope is to widely disseminate the work and secure future, staged performances as a legacy of this PhD programme.

1.6 Research Questions

My response to the original research questions, in the light of the pandemic and its resultant barriers to practical collaboration and public dissemination, was to reframe the original concerns of composer-poet collaboration into wider questions about music and poetry, and to combine electronic music experimentation, online music releases and online discussion with questions of orchestration (instead of previously envisaged in-person orchestral workshopping and conference discussion).

1. Why write an opera with a poet? What constitutes a poetic opera? What are the challenges of reconciling the sculptural nature of poetry with the dramatic form of opera?
2. What is the soundscape of a contemporary opera?
3. How can the creation of a parallel electronic music and songwriting practice solve the issues of collaboration within a pandemic-affected opera project?

Drought, the resulting opera that I composed with Campbell's libretto, has six songs or poems which I consider to be miniature dramatic forms.⁵ The dialogue that takes place between the songs justifies and connects them by constructing character personality and memory. The flow of each song into another, punctuated by spoken text and occasional sung duet, and framed by an instrumental overture and finale, constitutes the larger dramatic form. All musical material, both sung and instrumental, is derived from the cadences, metre, character, and layered meanings of Campbell's poems, and from the wider arc of the single scene in which the opera takes place. The songs are simultaneously sculptural (expressing a timeless concept or being situated within a particular sound-sphere) and dramatic (embodying that concept or sphere in a human, evolving experience). My arrival at these definitions, and my focus on the interplay of sculpture and drama within my own compositional practice in making a specifically poetic opera, was based

⁵ As Lindenberger says, operas generally have moments of intensity, in the form of arias, balanced with recitative sections that demand less from the audience. Wagner's ambition was to elide this. Herbert Lindenberger. (2010). *Situating Opera: Period, Genre, Reception*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 115-138.

on bodies of literature concerning music and language, and on my research into librettist-composer collaborations.

Campbell's poetry in *Drought* embodies rain and the lack of rain. Wanting rain is a persistent theme throughout the libretto, and I initially aimed to create this effect through orchestration. I then decided that my orchestration, although effective, needed another dimension of sound to fully inhabit the unsettling world of the libretto and to be positioned progressively within the contemporary opera composition field. Campbell's libretto and my text-setting are relatively familiar in the landscape of what has constituted the genre of opera throughout history, so I wanted to push the soundscape of the work further to reflect the bodies of operatic work I had studied and experienced. I did this through using electronic music and through collaborating with artificial intelligence.

The collaboration process while making the libretto proved fraught with challenges, partly due to restrictions created by the Covid-19 pandemic and partly due to creative differences. I navigated these challenges by manufacturing a third collaborative voice: that of myself in another genre and guise, Norrisette. Having another 'self' with which to write freed me from many of the restrictions of the collaboration: while waiting for a libretto to materialise, while grappling with an absence of musicians, while feeling frustrated in terms of narrative voice, I called upon another voice in myself to begin a whole new practice of electronic music and songwriting. This practice then evolved into a solution for me when facing the libretto: I used my improved songwriting skills to set Campbell's poetry more effectively, and my newly honed electronic music production skills to create another dimension within the opera, the Radio Song. The Radio Song also became a highlight of my collaboration with Campbell as it was written and imagined in a way that jointly pushed us both more into the avant-garde.

1.7 Literature Review: Why Compose a Poetic Opera; How To Compose a Poetic Opera

Poet Jennifer Moxley states that “poetry and opera have, as American Poet Ezra Pound wrote of himself and his predecessor Walt Whitman, ‘one sap and one root.’”⁶

When beginning this project, I interrogated the concepts of poetry and opera to examine how these genres might be perceived in the common cultural imagination. Although recent scholarship and compositional research reframes opera in many different lights, I researched older concepts of what opera and music drama are, to better understand my further work in the field of contemporary opera, and specifically how to compose a poetic opera. This collaborative PhD, unlike other opera composition PhDs, involved the vision that a poet (rather than librettist or director) and composer should work together on drafting the libretto in a Collaborative Doctoral Award. Existing collaborative opera composition PhD initiatives in the UK include: the Guildhall School of Music & Drama Doctoral Composer in Residence programme, Cardiff Interdisciplinary Research in Opera and Drama, and Adam Strickson’s PhD in collaboration with the University of Leeds and Opera North, but none of these, and none that I can find globally, follow this exact model.⁷ This innovative poet-composer exchange led me to research libretto-writing so that I could better collaborate with Campbell on the text and subsequently the music.

⁶ Jennifer Moxley in: Elyse Kahl. (2016). The Making of An Opera: A poet and composer collaborate to create a new work in an age-old genre. UMaine Today. <https://umainetoday.umaine.edu/stories/2016/the-making-of-an-opera/> accessed 06/06/23, 17:16

⁷ Guildhall School of Music and Drama graduate course listings. <https://www.gsmd.ac.uk/study-with-guildhall/music/ma-in-opera-making-writing> and <https://www.gsmd.ac.uk/study-with-guildhall/doctoral-research-mphildmusphd/funding-research-degree/doctoral-studentships> accessed 23/03/23, 13:47

Cardiff Interdisciplinary Research in Opera and Drama. <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/research/explore/research-units/cardiff-interdisciplinary-research-in-opera-and-drama>. accessed 05/06/23 17:00

Adam Strickson. (2014). The librettist's adaptation of source in collaboration with the composer. University of Leeds and Opera North (PhD). <https://ahc.leeds.ac.uk/performance/staff/469/dr-adam-strickson> accessed 05/06/23 17:05

My research into how best to co-research and set Campbell's text was partly based on practical examples of operas and libretti throughout history, including approaches to text-setting and soundscape composition. It also encompassed aesthetics and the more abstract discussion of the relationship between music and language, music and poetry, what might constitute a poetic libretto and subsequently a poetic opera. I wondered whether poetry and opera might have some conflicts in terms of form and expression, especially in the case of Campbell's poetry, it being a commonly miniature form with layers of meaning in each line.

If music can be considered a language in itself, it can either work with or against the meaning of the poetic text in an opera. Albright (2009) views music from two angles: as language and as 'nonlanguage'. He breaks down the idea of language into different classes or sizes, from the phoneme to the idea of drama. He uses numerous instrumental examples where music can be compared to speech, but then goes on to show that each is not intelligible as direct communication of a concept that could be neatly expressed in words. Subsequently he argues it cannot be seen as nonlanguage either as when its association with speech is denied, it seems to 'chatter'.⁸ Adorno (1962) argued that music and language are inextricably intertwined, to try to separate music from language leads to meaningless music. He followed that sometimes when the two seem furthest apart in composition, but the composition is still rooted in language, they are in fact closest.⁹

Sandra Corse (1987) argued that opera has a unique position as a mediator between music and language, or a form that uses both to question the power of either to express meaning. She also posited that language has a dual existence as a vehicle for communication and as a vehicle for expression; the directly communicative and the literary are different but use the same primary resources: words.¹⁰

⁸ Daniel Albright. (2009). *Music Speaks: On the Language of Opera, Dance and Song*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (2002). "Music, Language and Composition", *Essays on music*. ProQuest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>. 113- 126. Originally published 1962.

¹⁰ Sandra Corse. (1987). *Opera and the Uses of Language: Mozart, Verdi, and Britten*, Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses

Catherine Laws (2014) discusses Samuel Beckett's treatment of the voice as a meeting point of music and text.¹¹ She comments that Beckett is focused on sound and uses repetition and pattern to foreground the sound of spoken language, making it rhythmic and sonorous. The potential for poetry or writing to behave like music is something Campbell and I have explored in the 'Radio Song' in the opera. Perhaps poetry can behave like music and music like poetry.

*I've always thought . . . that Beckett's writing is very musical. But it's very difficult to describe what this "being musical" means. I suspect that, as with everything else in Beckett, this question also defies analysis, even on purely metaphorical level. Maybe it's precisely this ability to elude analysis that makes Beckett's writing so musical. It constantly prompts interpretation but, at the same time, it refuses to provide any meaningful or useful instrument. Like music, Beckett's writing seems to say what cannot be spoken.*¹² - Luciano Berio

Lawrence Kramer (1984), when analysing the relationship between music and poetry through gesture, deliberately avoided dramatic genres such as opera because he focused on the lyrical and reflective rather than the narrative.¹³ Kramer assigned 'combinatory' and 'connotative' qualities to both poetry and music, saying that each references its own formal systems while also pointing to the world around it, but in each artform one is more foregrounded than the other. In music, the complex inner systems are beyond words but suggest complex experiences as a result of their pre-verbal associations. In poetry, all words are connotative and there are limitless possibilities for combining them in different ways, framed within a variety of formal structures that can be more or less free. According to Kramer, "direct attempts to put poetry and music together are obviously doomed to founder on this asymmetry in semiotic structure" but flow, process and "transformation of time into form" are common elements of poetry and music.¹⁴

¹¹ Catherine Laws. (2014). Beckett in New Musical Composition. *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 23(1), 54-72. Retrieved May 4, 2021, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26471249>

¹² Luciano Berio and Mary Bryden (1998). 'Beckett and Music: An Interview with Luciano Berio' in Mary Bryden(ed.). *Samuel Beckett and Music*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 189-90.

¹³ Lawrence Kramer. (1984). *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After*. California: University of California Press.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 7.

Nietzsche argued in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) that the sculptural forces of Apollo and dynamic, dramatic, musical forces of Dionysus in combination make the best art, specifically in the case of Greek music drama.¹⁵ Nietzsche built on Schopenhauer's belief that music is the closest thing to a direct representation of the Will, the spirit of the world in motion: music is the heart of all things and enlightens drama.¹⁶ Nietzsche contrasted poetry with drama, as though a poet is a spectator of other people's lives and a dramatist is one who "feels the impulse to transform oneself and to speak out of other bodies and souls".¹⁷ If music can be sculptural and poetry dramatic, then perhaps Nietzsche created false dichotomies, but nevertheless this dialectic between sculpture and drama informs both arts in opera, where the poetic libretto retains a sense of reflection while carrying of the onward impulse of plot, and music, despite its constant motion, lingers on the sculptural spectacle of vocal craft. Bernard Williams (2006), for example, discusses opera's unique position as a dramatic form that can include rapturous applause on the reception of a florid aria.¹⁸

Joseph Kerman (1989) set out his famous case that opera is a serious dramatic and musical form, and that poetry and music together convey the qualities of drama.¹⁹ He continued that Shakespeare's poetry is dramatic and poetry works with plot structure to create drama, rather than being opposed to drama through its nature as soliloquy.²⁰ The relationship between micro and macro structures in a Shakespeare play relates to the challenge Campbell and I faced in constructing poems or songs that had their own interior logic while relating to the wider plot and build up of dramatic tension.

¹⁵ Greek music drama can be seen as a precursor to *opera seria*

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. Clifton P. Fadiman (1995). *The Birth of Tragedy*. New York: Dover Publications.

¹⁷ Ibid. 8.

¹⁸ Bernard Williams. (2006). Naïve and Sentimental Opera Lovers. In *On Opera* (pp. 131-143). Yale University Press. Retrieved May 4, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq5nk.20 accessed 04/05/2020.

¹⁹ Joseph Kerman. (1989). *Opera as Drama*. London: Faber and Faber.

²⁰ Kerman also argues that non-dramatic operas do not prove that opera is not a dramatic form in itself, meaning that if we accept Conrad's assessment of Wagner, then it does not follow that these were the peak of opera or that opera is not a dramatic form.

Kerman defined drama as that which “entails the revelation of the quality of human response to actions and events.”²¹ To create a dramatic libretto, rather than a song cycle, it is then necessary to involve events and actions as well as emotive reflections. David Mason says of W.H. Auden that “...Auden the librettist... taught himself not only to write verses that could be set to music, but to rethink the dramatic structure of opera”.²² Similarly, Brigid Brophy says of Lorenzo Da Ponte: “Da Ponte learnt his craft not from precedents but from practice, the precedents having taught him that 'it was not enough to be a great poet ... in order to write a good play'.”²³

1.7.1 Creating a Libretto : Case Studies

Although not an opera, Rebecca Saunders’ *Yes* (2017) first piqued my interest in sculptural approaches to composing with text, as she arranges Molly Bloom’s monologue from *Ulysses* across the piece as though suspended in time.²⁴

*When composing I imagine holding the sounds and noises in my hands, feeling their potential between my palms, weighing them. Skeletal textures and musical gestures develop out of this. Then, like pictures placed in a large white room, I set them in silence, next to, above, beneath and against each other.*²⁵ – Rebecca Saunders

Although this is technically a setting of a literary rather than poetic text, Joyce’s method of articulation through Molly Bloom, which Adlington (1999) and others refer to as *écriture féminine*, has a flowing, repetitive style which seems between prose and poetry.²⁶

A specifically poetic-sculptural cycle is Kaiya Saariaho’s *Circle Map* (2012) in which Rumi’s text emanates electronically from the orchestra as a recorded voice. Each song functions as an immersive utterance of a poem, expanding it out into

²¹ Ibid. 214.

²² David Mason. (1995). Auden Onstage. *The Hudson Review*, 47(4), 569-581. doi:10.2307/3851712. 570, 573.

²³ Brigid Brophy. (1981). Da Ponte and Mozart. *The Musical Times*, 122(1661), 454–456. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1193558> 455

²⁴ Rebecca Saunders. (2017). *Yes*. Edition Peters.

²⁵ Rebecca Saunders quoted in: Rebecca Adlington. (1999). “The Music of Rebecca Saunders: Into the Sensuous World”. *The Musical Times*, 140(1868), 48-56. doi:10.2307/1004495. 48.

²⁶ Ibid. 56.

orchestral sound, sometimes mapped onto speech-rhythms in the instruments, sometimes a vast colouration of the words.²⁷

When working with Emily Howard for *The Anvil* (2019), Michael Symmons Roberts constructed a libretto with a ‘woven’ text involving fragments arranged in a ‘grid poem’, with an additional poem ‘The Stones of Peterloo’ that provided a narrative thread to ‘bind it together’.²⁸

Like Saunders, some composers sculpt, compile or write their own opera libretti: Jennifer Walshe’s *People & Things* (2020) has a libretto that is pieced together from different kinds of text, written to be both spoken and sung as a monologue. Liza Lim’s libretto for *Tree of Codes* (2015) is based on *Tree of Codes* (2010) by Jonathan Safran Foer, an artwork created by cutting into *The Street of Crocodiles* by Bruno Schulz (1934).²⁹ Hans Abrahamsen’s *let me tell you* (2013) has a libretto that is constructed from the restricted vocabulary that Ophelia is given by Shakespeare. The text of *The Lighthouse* by Peter Maxwell Davies (1980), written by the composer, lies somewhere between poetry and prose.³⁰ Kevin Salfen analyses Britten’s own assembled libretti: “Benjamin Britten was an anthologist. He found texts in different sources and assembled them into miniature anthologies, which then served as the basis for a number of his cyclic vocal works.”³¹

Julia Wolfe’s *Anthracite Fields* (2014) uses a text which is simply a list of names. In ‘Foundation’ Wolfe has created a landscape using swirling wind, string tremolos, sudden interjections of amplified instruments.³² In this first movement, a slow-moving sculpture is revealed over time: a memorial of stone read out aloud, the lists of names beginning with Johns. The work, although not an opera, contains a great deal of dramatic tension from the power of its incantations and its

²⁷ Kaiya Saariaho. (2012). *Circle Map*. Chester Music.

²⁸ Michael Symmons Roberts lecture at RNCM Composition seminar. 16th October 2019.

²⁹ Liza Lim. (2015). *Tree of Codes*. Ricordi

³⁰ Peter Maxwell Davies. (1980). *The Lighthouse – music and libretto by Peter Maxwell Davies*. London: Chester Music.

³¹ Kevin Salfen. (2014). Britten the Anthologist. *19th-Century Music*, 38(1), 79-112. doi:10.1525/ncm.2014.38.1.079. 79

³² Julia Wolfe. (2014). *Anthracite Fields*. Ricordi.

monolithic sound, as though the list is suspended in time. She uses the names like sounds rather than to express narrative.

Librettists have themselves experimented with many different types of text and voice, avoiding what I might dub a ‘Dummies’ Guide to Opera Libretto’ *i.e.* an anachronistic, pastiche libretto style and tone. Ian McMillan’s libretto for *The Arsonists* by Alan Williams (2017) is written for the Yorkshire accent. Martin Crimp’s libretto for George Benjamin’s *Into the Little Hill* (2006) has short, half-sentences which to me seem somewhere between speech and poetry. There is descriptive language interspersed with questions, commands, and inner monologues.³³ Wesley Stace’s libretto for Errollyn Wallen’s *Dido’s Ghost* (2021) combines the historical and mythical with the contemporary.

Libretti, I have observed over my ten years of engaging with opera, often have relatively direct or simple verbal expression to leave space for musical illustration, and while being concerned with soliloquy in the case of the aria or song, often have a focus on dramatic tension and plot structure. Corse claimed that libretti omit many literary facets which composers later add through music. This can be seen in the cases of Mozart and Da Ponte/Schikaneder, Verdi and Boito and Britten and Piper, and their various approaches to literary adaptations.³⁴ Purcell’s *King Arthur* (1691) has a libretto by John Dryden: Dryden commented that he had to simplify elements of his text to make it suitable for musical setting.³⁵ In reference to working with James Macmillan on *Quickenings* (1998), Michael Symmons Roberts said (in a lecture at the Royal Northern College of Music) that he and Macmillan decided that there are two broad approaches to a librettist-composer collaboration: Britten and Mary Myfanwy Piper’s *The Turn of the Screw* where the libretto language is pared back, and Strauss and Hofmanstal’s *Elektra* where the two

³³ Martin Crimp. (2006 libretto): *Into the Little Hill: A Lyric Tale in Two Parts*. Harlow: Faber Music.

³⁴ Corse. (1987).

³⁵ James Gifford. (2012). Dramatic Text, Music Text: Competing Nationalist Styles in Restoration Opera. *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 14(1), 21-37.
doi:10.5325/intelitestud.14.1.0021

compete to be the loudest. Macmillan decided to go with the latter approach which suited Symmons Roberts as he wanted to write to his strengths.³⁶

1.7.2 Setting a Libretto : Case Studies

Albright (2009) shows that composers such as Schubert and Schumann set Heine's poetry in a pared-back way that demonstrates its inherently musical quality. Albright claims that Elliott Carter's approach to setting the poems of Elizabeth Bishop is poststructuralist, in that he finds voices within the text. His music in general embodies human existence and the precarious state of being alive. In this chapter he also says that composers must listen through poems to the music that the poets themselves have listened to.³⁷

When working with text that is more conversational and less poetic, it follows that some composers use speech rather than song. In *Angel's Bone* (2017), Du Yun uses speech (by Royce Vavrek) set across a shifting landscape, sometimes acoustic, sometimes electronic. She notates it in a similar way to my notation in *Drought*, written across the instrumental accompaniment freely at times.³⁸ In *4:48 Psychosis* (2016), Philip Venables sets Sarah Kane's text using numerous emotive and darkly witty methods that even extend to rhythmically projecting the text on the wall at times. As Tim Rutherford Johnson puts it: "Here, Kane's pitch-black humour is essential, and timing is everything. Brilliantly, Venables silences all the voices at this point, leaving the projected text to be ventriloquised by two percussionists..."³⁹

Composers who use singing throughout, in a recitative style, to maximise drama include Harrison Birtwistle and Ethel Smyth. David Beard praised Birtwistle's collaborations with David Harsent, saying that Birtwistle had the "ability to recognise key moments in a narrative and to enact responses that maximise

³⁶ Michael Symmons Roberts lecture at RNCM Composition seminar 16th October 2019.

³⁷ Albright. (2009).

³⁸ Du Yun and Royce Vavrek. (2017) *Angel's Bone*. Channel Du Yun / Wise Music Classical
<https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/work/60571/Angels-Bone--Du-Yun/> accessed 11:39
28/04/2020

³⁹ Tim Rutherford-Johnson. (2016). Philip Venables "4.48 Psychosis", Royal Opera House at Lyric Hammersmith, London; Liza Lim "Tree of Codes", Musikfabrik, Cologne Opera, Cologne. *Tempo*, 70(278), 90-92. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26342707>. 91

dramatic effect.”⁴⁰ Ethel Smyth, according to Elizabeth Kertesz, “heightened the tense atmosphere of *The Wreckers* (1906) by employing passages of intoned dialogue, recitative on one tone, and melodrama. [Act 1, Sc. 9], techniques possibly adopted from French opera or melodrama, but these did not survive her extensive revisions of the work”⁴¹

Composers have also at times adapted libretti for their own dramatic vision while in the process of setting them musically. Through examining folios and different versions of the libretto for *Rodelinda* (1719), Andrew Jones concludes that Handel made many alterations to the libretto for ‘Rodelinda’ including changing words for dramatic effect, removing explanatory recitative to create surprise for characters, and even adding an aria to justify a character’s emotions and actions more.⁴²

1.7.3 Composing a Soundworld : Case Studies

In *Drought* I have combined a small chamber orchestra with electronic track, juxtaposing the nostalgic, pastoral world of the farm with the avant-garde lure of the city. I have looked at opera composers who have sought to merge past and future by building new soundworlds in their work, often through the use of electronics.

Giant (2023, libretto by Ross Sutherland) by Sarah Angliss is a very recent example of electronics in opera, which are used in combination with eighteenth century instruments to match the era of its subject.⁴³ In *Dido’s Ghost* (2021, libretto by Wesley Stace) Errollyn Wallen uses period instruments, amplifying the sense of eras colliding. *Cave* (2018, libretto by Nick Drake) by Tansy Davies involves live electronics that augment the singers’ voices. In *Angel’s Bone* (2015, libretto by Royce Vavrek), Du Yun’s fusion of baroque chorale, electronic music

⁴⁰ David Beard. (2012). *Harrison Birtwistle’s Operas and Music Theatre*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 9

⁴¹ Elizabeth Kertesz. (2011). Ethel Smyth's "The Wreckers": A Cosmopolitan Voice for English Opera. *Studia Musicologica*, 52(1/4), 485-497. Retrieved May 4, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43289776>. 495

⁴² Andrew Jones. (2007). The Composer as Dramatist: Handel's Contribution to the Libretto of 'Rodelinda'. *Music & Letters*, 88(1), 49-77. Retrieved May 4, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4140352>

⁴³ “World Premiere: *Giant*.” (June 2023). Britten-Pears Arts. <https://brittenpearsarts.org/events/giant>

(house, punk etc), cabaret, and contemporary classical makes for a piece that uses the right sound at any given moment to achieve a particular emotion or dramatic effect.

Jennifer Walshe often combines electronics, including live electronics and artificial intelligence software, with live instruments in her vocal works. One recent example is *ULTRACHUNK* (2018) for voice and neural network, but she combined technologies in her earlier opera *The Geometry* (2009) which is scored for chamber ensemble and electronics.⁴⁴

Kaiya Saairaho's *L'Amour de Loin* (2000, libretto by Amin Maalouf) uses electronics to expand the orchestral voice even further than her normally extensive and experimental orchestration.

Harrison Birtwistle's *The Mask of Orpheus* (1973/84) was pioneering in that its librettist, Peter Zinovieff, was an early proponent of computer music, and himself composed electronic tracks to go with Birtwistle's orchestration.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Jennifer Walshe. <http://milker.org/jenniferwalsheworklist>

⁴⁵ Tom Hall. (2015). "Before The Mask: Birtwistle's electronic music collaborations with Peter Zinovieff." In: D. Beard, K. Gloag, & N. Jones (Eds.), *Harrison Birtwistle Studies* (Cambridge Composer Studies, pp. 63-94). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781316145326.005

Chapter 2: Shaping the Libretto

Campbell's lyric poetry collections are concentrated into succinct and emotive verses. The opera we had in mind was to be two hours in duration, and so to find common ground between opera and poetry with which to work with Campbell on his starting points for writing the libretto, I initially distilled what I believed to be the essential elements of opera into three topoi:

1. **The Voice, Expanded.** The operatic voice is an extended technology, the orchestra and stage function as magnifications of this vocal display, while the plot justifies its emotive excess.
2. **Sculpture versus Drama.** Librettist, composer and director wrestle with the tension between spectacle and realism, time stopping for song and time pushing mercilessly on.⁴⁶
3. **Transformation and Transfiguration.** I observed that dramatically, musically and visually, opera involves the transformation of an everyday scenario into a numinous or tragic one.

These operatic strands were integral to our collaborative process and my own compositional practice, but it eventually became clear to me that the second topic embraced the others, the first concerning the sculpting of the voice and the third embracing opera's trope of a dramatic denouement, and that at the heart of this project was the need to wrestle with the nature of, or defining of, poetry and music as sculptural and dramatic forms. This, I thought, would tackle any difficulties with duration, sustained tension, and type of language, when moving from poetry to libretto to musical setting.

My first assumption was that the aria, which I considered sculptural and poetic, was opposed to recitative, which I considered purely dramatic and non-poetic. I have since interrogated these concepts and now posit that sculptural immanence and dramatic transfiguration meet in the aria, and the poem on which it is based, as a dialectic which creates the heights of drama.

⁴⁶ Originally I framed this as a dialectic between the sculptural aria and dramatic recitative, which I have since deconstructed.

In this sense, songwriting is at the heart of the opera. As Kramer discussed, if song is the primal root of poetry and music, then they have been searching for each other ever since.⁴⁷ Ascertaining the ideal form of poetry for me to set to music, and finding a way of combining songs with dialogue or a larger dramatic flow, were the main two focal points of mine and Campbell's conversations.

2.1 Devising A Theme and Structure

Met up and discussed plan for year. Niall wants to develop an overview of the structure and the narrative. I want to try experiments on a small scale. Agree to speak to supervisors first. Discuss themes such as fire among others. What does fire sound like?

Excerpt from Research Diary: 17th September 2019

Campbell and I had differing perspectives on process and method, as is clear from early on, but it is interesting to note that fire, which is strongly related to the theme of *Drought*, was already a common creative interest from the beginning. Perhaps this was because we wanted to find a new poetic and musical language inspired by a dynamic image that transcends language.

Making words and music that sound like fire somehow (crackling, spitting)

Telling a story about what the fire is destroying, referencing past and future in the same text and music so they are intertwined - the history and the present event.

The contrast between light and dark, maybe there is a way of achieving this in words and music.

Excerpt from Research Diary: 24th September 2019

It was early in our work process that the concept of poetry being sculptural became apparent:

Meeting with Niall... Niall explained that writing poetry is like sculpture - he works away at a poem...

'what is the texture of the line if you run your hand along it?'

Excerpt from Research Diary: 26th September 2019

Subsequently, the tension between sculpture and drama, micro and macro became a focus:

⁴⁷ Kramer. (1984). 7.

What role does the composer play in creating text? How do you relate between micro and macro?

Upscaling from poems to libretto: What dramatic tension must the poem have? What dramatic tension must the song have? How does the miniature fit within context? Niall is looking at what words carry that is dramatic.

Excerpts from Research Diary: 2nd October 2019

I began to question how music could be sculptural, as a temporal artform:

Music and time

Music as sculpture

The present having everything contained in it, the memory of the past, the possibilities of the future, the emotions associated with everything

Music contains its past and future within the present moment if it is an organic construct

And a poem as a sculpture

Creating something revealed over time then adjusting each part of the sequence to change that perception of time

Sabine and embodiment - the visualisation of something that happened over time⁴⁸

Sculpture is the visualisation of something that happened over time, the stone was carved bit by bit until something static was created but the marks and curves show the motions of the creator

Dance as sculpture created over time

Excerpt from Research Diary: 7th October 2019

Campbell's theme of fire morphed into the idea of wanting, a duality that is present in the final libretto of *Drought* as Coll's character is consumed with desire for more than the pastoral cage he is imprisoned in:

Hey Anna

I was chatting to someone about our burning fields idea and they mentioned the Buddhist Fire Sermon - <https://secularbuddhism.org/whats-burning-in-the-fire-sermon/>

I liked this bit

⁴⁸ Conversation with artist colleague Sabine Kussmaul.

“We’re on fire. We may not know it but we’re on fire, and we have to put that fire out. We’re burning with desire. We’re burning with craving. Everything about us is out of control.”

Just something I think would be good to follow up – burning as cravings and desire for material things – and have it as a physical manifestation or an act to display want and greed.

Hope the song/poem lines are going ok

NC

Email from Niall Campbell to Anna Appleby: 25th October 2019 ⁴⁹

Another early theme that emerged was that of a story being confined to a single room. Campbell came up with multiple storylines based on this scenario, then deviated from it, only to return to this restriction in the final version of the libretto.

I’m sending on an idea I had that takes more consideration about voice/story size – have you seen the movie Room – it’s about a woman and child who are held prisoner. Amazing but harrowing as hell. This more just borrows the idea of a one room story and how it might be given dynamism but how the internal room reacts to the outside world and what is going on there.

What else? Hmm – will look at Curlew River and the David Harsent piece this week too.

NC

Email from Niall Campbell to Anna Appleby: 12th November 2019

What followed these emails was a series of sketches and drafts of scenes that Campbell made and I responded to, sometimes verbally and sometimes musically. We also sat together in practice rooms and tried out different dramatic structures, moving around the room ourselves to embody the story that Campbell wanted to tell. At this point in the collaboration, we were working very closely together.

2.2 – Responding to a First Draft of the Libretto

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, our collaboration temporarily disintegrated, and resulted in Campbell spending a period of several months in complete isolation

⁴⁹ Permission for these emails to be reprinted was granted in writing by Niall Campbell.

from me, writing a full libretto draft which he then sent on to the supervisory team in August 2020. This full draft can be found in Appendix C.

There are numerous examples of difficult composer-librettist collaborations, sometimes situational and sometimes due to concerns with drama. Alice Goodman had to cut parts she liked in her libretto for *Nixon in China* (1987) and at times vehemently disagreed with John Adams; they resolved some disputes and agreed to disagree on others. This was an opera that involved close collaboration with a director, Peter Sellars, early on in the process.⁵⁰ It was difficult for Mozart to work with the librettist for *Idomeneo* (1781), Giambattista Varesco, because they were in different cities at the time, so they corresponded by sending letters via Mozart's father, Leopold. Leopold then often ameliorated the demands to prevent Varesco from becoming too dissatisfied, but this made the collaboration even more awkward.⁵¹ Mine and Campbell's online communication has some resonance with Mozart and Varesco's.

My first reaction to the libretto draft was that I wanted Campbell to leave more breathing room for me to create drama and mood above and beyond the text. There is perhaps a hazy line between a libretto that is too poetic, and one that is not poetic enough, and although this line depends hugely on the preferences of the composer, the measure of a libretto's effectiveness at narrating a story to an audience is less variable: either the audience understand the text when it is sung or they don't. We did not plan on using surtitles, so the text needed to be heard clearly, and yet I did not want the libretto to lack poetic character when this was Campbell's particular area of expertise.

In opera, the aesthetic function of language is reduced in the text because it is redistributed to the music. Librettos are literary works in which the literary qualities have been to some extent stripped away, so they tend to emphasize the communicative function of language rather than its aesthetic function. Therefore, they lean towards directness and simplicity of language. But the characteristics whereby literary language achieves its effects – contrast, repetition, symmetry, balance, control of pace, and multiple relationships among aural elements – are also the characteristics whereby musical

⁵⁰ Timothy A. Johnson. (2011). *John Adams's Nixon in China*. Farnham: Ashgate Press. 3

⁵¹ Tim Carter. (2012). Two into Three Won't Go? Poetic Structure and Musical Forms in Mozart's "Idomeneo". *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 24(3), 229-248. Retrieved May 4, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23319590>

*structures are built. So a composer reinvents, in a different medium, the ambiguity and multiple relationships of literary texts.*⁵² – Sandra Corse

Corse's positioning of the composer led me to perceive both Campbell and myself as poet-composers in our methods: we both had to consider the dual purpose of words to communicate directly and abstractly in order for the opera to have narrative and expressive power: Campbell when writing the text, and myself when setting the text. I questioned the power dynamics when working with Campbell: who owned the narrative voice in the opera? Was the libretto the final story or might the music subvert and change this narrative? Carolyn Abbate (1991) discussed the difficulties of analysing voice and narrative in music: reducing music to a text misses its existence as a performance.⁵³ The composer's voice is not the only voice, or an immutable truth, neither is the librettist's, or the audience's. Music does not narrate but "possesses moments of narration". Plot-analysis of music has infinite possible variations, none of which can be certain.⁵⁴

Kerman said that: "a libretto provides a framework, but the essential dramatic articulation is provided by the music."⁵⁵ The three elements of dramatic articulation that he described are "characterization, action, atmosphere".⁵⁶ To achieve these effects through music is a compositional challenge that involves working with the language of the libretto to magnify rather than obscure the plot, setting and characters.

Gary Schmidgall (1977) posited that opera is removed from ordinary speech by multiple levels of heightening and deals with the excesses and heights of human experience and emotion. Thus some literature is too unmusical to be set, dealing with detailed discussion or reflection that leaves no room for music, or conversely may even be too musical leaving the composer no space for their own rhythms or ideas.⁵⁷ Andrew H. Drummond (1973) stated that "effectively written librettos

⁵² Corse (1987). 15.

⁵³ Carolyn Abbate. (1991). *Unsung voices: Opera and musical narrative in the nineteenth century*. Princeton University Press.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 28-29.

⁵⁵ Kerman (1989). 25.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 226.

⁵⁷ Gary Schmidgall. (1977). *Literature as Opera*. New York: Oxford University Press.

must contain a language which can develop characterization, create mood, and sustain a consistent style. The most successful librettos are apparently those which respect natural speech rhythms without becoming mere talk set to music.”⁵⁸ Drummond summarised approaches in librettos to showing American life in its contemporary form on stage, *i.e.* ones that use colloquial and less ‘poetic’ language.⁵⁹

Below is my initial response to Campbell’s first draft, detailing how I imagined it might work, or not work, with my compositional craft. My primary observation was that he had created a text which was more akin to a play script than a poetic libretto with songs, and I wanted him to rewrite it in a way that was more poetic and less dramatically complex.

Hi Niall,

Glad it went well yesterday - E and I both like it (I haven't spoken to M).

I made a lot of notes (see below) however overall I can already imagine the kind of soundworld the opera will have, and can see the dramatic potential throughout. It's really good that you sent a long draft as it means there is plenty to choose from and I'm going to have a go at setting bits of it to music.

Thank you and congratulations on the first draft :)

All my best

Anna

Overall thoughts

Comes across as a play - lots of detail, depth, complex speech, sounds very good spoken aloud.

⁵⁸ Andrew H. Drummond. (1973). *American Opera Librettos*. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press. 141

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 145

Structure

Length: A beautiful libretto for a full-length opera or play. It is about 5 times too long for 1 hour of music so will need substantial edits within each scene (8 scenes means maximum 10 minutes per scene, and some shorter ones). Pacing affects length, faster scenes can of course have more words. There needs to be plenty of space for music, and for repetition of lines so that the audience can absorb them fully, especially as the language is rich and atypical of speech. It's great that we have the full text and the full development, so that the best bits can be selected and drawn out. This can be done collaboratively, as I could choose text to set to music within each scene, but Niall would need to choose which bits he thinks are most crucial too. (See language section below)

Form: Broadly I interpret it as Drought => Fire => Rain => Aftermath which works well. The plot makes sense too as a Pied Piper myth.

Language

I think the language could work in two ways: either the really poetic language is reserved for aria moments, and the dialogue is made more literal and easy to spit out rapidly, or poetic language is maintained throughout, and a huge amount of text is cut so that the words can be fully absorbed and understood.

Poetic language: The drought/water imagery is very effective. There could be even more of this, to create a rich contrast between the drought at the beginning, the fire in the middle, and the rain towards the end. Within each scene, there could be a build of tension towards a change in language when rain or fire arrives, or in a duet/trio there could be more contrast between voices linguistically so it is drought vs rain for example.

Dialogue: Could this be more contemporary and naturalistic? This would heighten contrast with the Rainmaker who speaks in an otherworldly way. To become more like an opera and less like a play, the dialogue sections will need to be more rapid-fire with less detail, building up to aria moments that release emotion and tension.

Characters

Stranger: Is it a frame to show that the story is an allegory? I think the frame gives us freedom to make the story very symbolic and mythical, so I do like the idea of having a frame. They come back in the second act to frame the story as a Pied Piper myth, are we

making the whole opera a myth about a rainmaker? What does the hill mean in this context, is it as a contrast to dry bushland? (Apart from the original hill of the Piper story - there is already 'into the little hill' by George Benjamin). Does the audience need to know it's a Pied Piper tale? Do we want water imagery right at the beginning to then snatch it away straight afterwards or should it be withheld?

Charlie: I like Charlie, I think she is relatable and realistic, well-rounded and human.

Rainmaker: Is she pansexual? I think this works.

I have a sense that Coll is young and wants a better life, Agnes is a dreamer, and Hamm is a bully. This definitely comes across, maybe it could be heightened in the way they speak.

I wonder how Niall would feel about me playing with the genders of the other characters? Coll could be any gender really, with an emphasis on youth, and Agnes and Hamm could be a couple of some sort rather than necessarily explicitly a husband and wife. It would be simple and subtle to remove words like 'wife' without changing the characters much. I like flexibility as it means the right voice types can be chosen musically, and the characters can be archetypes of personality rather than gender. Once gender is removed as a tool for creating character, other attributes have to be imagined more clearly and drawn out to create more three-dimensional people. Then gender can be put back in, as it were, to create a balanced cast.

ACT 1

Scene 1

At the moment it is an exchange of rich soliloquys which is very beautiful to read aloud but the whole scene could fill an hour of music by itself. I feel that the 'Aria moment' comes at the end when the Rainmaker says 'Just think of this...' as she is bringing a promise of rain into the dryness. Therefore what comes before is more Recit-style and needs to be substantially edited down into shorter dialogue, with an emphasis on the dust and dryness (which is brilliant at the beginning of the scene), and hints of rain brought in by the Rainmaker (the 'wet shirt heavy as an iron bell' is gorgeous for this).

Scene 2

This scene is a better length as I think it could be quite fast-paced and would be around 5-10 minutes of music. I could use the 'Toughen up...' and 'He won't...' sections to create

a duet argument.

Scene 3

The lines in this scene are again, quite rapid-fire which makes it a manageable length, but like the rest it could be shorter to leave space for song. Agnes gets a mini aria ('The sea can sing...') I think the Rainmaker's moment at the end of the scene should be the first time we feel a real hint of rain in the opera. So everything preceding this (apart from the Rainmaker's lines and maybe the hints from Agnes and Coll) could feel even dustier and drought-filled. This will be what I do with the music.

Scene 4

What does Charlie's song mean? I like the idea of each main character (Charlie, Coll, Rainmaker) getting one full aria (and the Hamm and Agnes getting short aria moments) especially within an hour, and Charlie's would come later on.

I love the juxtaposition of drought and water in this scene again, could the dialogue in the first half be edited down substantially to leave space for music and words to linger? I think it will climax with a duet at the end.

Scene 5

Strong start and mini aria for Hamm ('This one...'). Could we take out 'Good company for your wife'? I think this scene works extremely well for building drought imagery.

ACT 2

Scene 1

Rising heat ==> fire. Text could be edited down to leave more space for music and sense of building heat. This will be a very important musical climax as the dryness that has been maintained throughout will erupt into flames. There is also space for Coll to have an aria 'Sometimes a song is heard and you resist until you can't'.

Scene 2

This is the scene where the fire is unbearable, and then finally quenched by rain. I feel that the fire would be very loud, and I wonder whether the text could again be much shorter to leave space for the end of the scene to become rain, maybe an instrumental

section.

Scene 3

This is the scene where I imagine Charlie finally gets her aria ('I'll set alight each animal') so I like the idea of taking out all of her songs before this, so the dramatic moment of her fully expressing refusal to pay is more powerful here. Also the text will need to be a lot shorter to leave room for her aria. Her voice gets to be heard properly for the first time. I also think it could finish with a euphoric/tragic trio.

Email from Anna Appleby to Niall Campbell, 8th September 2020

2.3 – Finalising the Libretto

Following this sequence of events, it was decided that the whole supervisory team should meet together on video conferencing software at regular intervals over approximately six months until the libretto was finalised. This was partly due to the need to adapt the libretto for fewer characters and for it to have a much shorter duration. We decided that it was more likely to be performed within the Covid-19 restrictions if it had two characters instead of six, and was around 45 minutes long.

Thanks Anna,

And thanks for sharing the music too. I wonder if you could do a massive favour for tomorrow. I found the structure breakdown that you and E created really useful - but I am wanting to investigate other formats for the story as I just don't see the story being the same with so much being cut out. Could you do a similar structure breakdown that you might find musically interesting if it was just two people? Think of it as being the same setting, with C and Coll - what would a loose structure look like

Recitative

Aria/soliloquy

Soliloquy

Duet

Aria

Etc

Etc

I want to explore other avenues over Christmas and something like this might help.

Thanks Anna.

Cheers

N

Email from Niall Campbell to Anna Appleby: 17th December 2020

In David Harsent's preface for his libretto for Harrison Birtwistle's *Gawain* (1991) he says of the poem on which it is based: "I have retained little of the original save the essential narrative drift... I completed my verse play without taking account of whatever needs the music might eventually develop. The final draft had precisely to do with those needs."⁶⁰ Campbell was similarly accommodating with his willingness to rewrite the libretto after much discussion with the supervisory team. His final draft was ultimately about the need to create a text that could be set to music, although we had many disagreements about subtext and characterization.

One of my main concerns was the loss of the Rainmaker character, as I wanted to preserve an otherworldly element that could necessitate the use of electronics and a different method of singing:

Hi Niall

I've had a wrestle with this - wondering if that means you want to cut the Rainmaker character??

With two characters rather than three it would be quite different but I suppose something like this might work:

Solo character 1

Dialogue

Duet

Solo character 2

Dialogue

....

⁶⁰ David Harsent. (1991) *Gawain – libretto by David Harsent for music by Birtwistle*. London: Universal Edition

and then I don't know after that point, it really depends on the story, but ending with a duet would make sense, unless one of the characters has left in which case a solo.

If we lose the Rainmaker I'll lose the potential to use electronic music... unless one of the characters is very different to the other and has a very contemporary or otherworldly soundworld and contemporary or otherworldly character

What's your thinking?

All my best

Anna

Hi there,

I just think the character Rainmaker character can't work in the current format. It relied on a naturalized environment and building a world where all was normal but she disrupted it - and just doesn't really work in the more condensed version. But...

What I was thinking was of incorporating the spirit/some of the spirit into Coll - and trying to find a way for him to give voice to what she was to represent. Meaning we can retain that musical difference between drought and strangeness - but without the actual character.

On a side note - Have you seen the libretto for The Corridor? I'm not so much interested in the mythic or content - but it's form which is just like a series of song/poems in dialogue with one another might serve as useful.

Hope all's well,

N

Email Exchange between Anna Appleby and Niall Campbell: 18th December 2020

After many exchanges in the group supervisory team, Campbell and I began speaking together as a pair to work out the details of each individual song and scene. I began sending him electronic versions of my musical sketches to enable the collaboration to be more two-way from this point.

Dear Niall,

Hope you're doing ok this week -

I have managed to make a sort of Prelude sketch for the opera, based on the things we discussed last week. Felt very inspired. I've attached a NotePerformer audio file here which will give you a sense of it... there will be more music in coming days too...

All my best

Anna

Email from Anna Appleby to Niall Campbell: 12th January 2021

Hey Anna,

I've started writing Charlie's song - and wondered what your perspective on the speed or emotion would be? I've tried to write something that changes pace a bit: fast to slow - but going to try a few angles before Friday.

Cheers for now,

N

Hi Niall

Not sure about Charlie's song, I think maybe it is a slower and more reflective moment but potentially it is also a tantalising/desperate attempt to distract Coll - depends on the structure around it too?

I think if it reads less like a clear-cut song and more like a memory or poem, but then I can set it as a song, that will work best probably, but open to discussing any ideas. Really looking forward to seeing what you've tried out.

Let's chat more about it on Friday

All my best

Anna

Email Exchange between Anna Appleby and Niall Campbell: 10th March 2021

Hey Anna,

Here's what I showed to M a few days ago -

*There's a few changes to the radio song - have added some allusions to *The Golden Bough* which is a book that describes planting fertility rituals from ancient times, ie burying wheat in the shape of the god Osiris which was said to promote better crops. T.S. Eliot actually made allusions to it too in *The Waste Land*. Which is also a nice reference considering our themes.*

The dialogue is going to be changed a lot - as I said in the meeting there seems a separation between the characters and need to think of ways to bridge that.

What also might be useful is the last song - again it's more a exercise in how it might go - but it's at least an attempt.

Looking forward to chatting on Wednesday

N

Email from Niall Campbell to Anna Appleby: 30th April 2021

The libretto was finalised in the summer of 2021, and can be found in Appendix D. The Radio Song, mentioned in these emails, was for me the collaborative peak of our project, as it was imagined by Campbell in response to my request for electronics to be present and justified within the score, partly because I was disappointed by the exclusion of the character who had previously inspired me to improve my electronic music craft: the Rainmaker. It was also the moment at which Campbell created his most experimental poetry which enabled me to create a new soundscape. The remainder of the libretto needed, in my opinion, to be clearly heard for its depth of meaning and subtlety to be communicated adequately, whereas the Radio Song was designed to be obscured.

Chapter 3: Composing *Drought*

What does a contemporary opera sound and feel like?

Lachenmann's quote doesn't go far enough: composing means building and then playing an instrument.⁶¹ Are contemporary composers stuck with surface? Are they still improvising on / building their 'instruments'?

Can I start thinking about the music and the sound before Niall provides any text? Niall talks about 'burning a field' - what might this sound like? Instrumentation? How might I introduce some kind of momentum / how might I start an opera sonically?

Excerpt from Research Diary: 2nd October 2019

3.1 Dust Mouth

While Campbell was constructing what was to become the final libretto, I began work on a string quartet, *Dust Mouth*, based on his opening stanza, as a miniature study or companion piece for the opera:

Coll:

My mouth is full of dust –

I close my eyes and I can feel it –

Dust. Grit. Sand. Falling on me.

Damn the drought.

I need to leave.

This opening stanza ultimately became the overture, and in some ways became the entire opera.

I wanted to explore the potential in creating musical poems that embodied Campbell's text, so I made the string quartet using only the text rhythms of this stanza. The rhythm of every line of musical material is derived from the text, the words being uttered by the strings as though they are Coll.⁶² The quartet opens with an agitated, uncomfortable, contrapuntal statement of 'My mouth is full of

⁶¹ Helmut Lachenmann (1996). *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung*. Wiesbaden. p. 77

⁶² This practice of setting a poem wordlessly to music is one I have continued in my piece *Sonnet 43* for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

dust – I close my eyes and I can feel it’, continues towards a unified declamation of ‘Dust. Grit. Sand. Falling on me’, the climax occurs at the point of ‘Damn the drought’, and the resolution at ‘I need to leave’.



Figure 1: Sketches and excerpts showing motivic material derived from ‘My mouth is full of dust - I close my eyes and I can feel it’ and ‘Dust. Grit. Sand.’

My approach in *Dust Mouth* was inspired by Adorno’s theory: composing a quartet based on the rhythms and structure of Campbell’s poem meant that, despite there being no heard text in the piece, the musical material was inescapably tied to the poetic language. *Dust Mouth* cannot be understood as a text without reference to the poem on which it is based, so it doesn’t function with the same type of communication as language does, and yet it is to me a musical poem that can exist on its own terms without knowledge of Campbell’s stanza, or the opera. *Dust Mouth* is close to the poetic text in emotive content and succinctness of melodic delivery rather than actively describing to the audience that their mouths are full of dust. Yet, as I will discuss later, the dryness of sound and synaesthetic suggestion were central to my orchestration of the opera, and one BBC producer commented that she felt her mouth was actually dusty and dry while listening to the opera. Still, this experience is not divorced from the information that the characters are communicating directly through words, and from the title of the opera, so it is impossible to know from this instance whether the music alone would have created this response.

Dust Mouth is crafted from a poem which captures a particular feeling in a particular moment. It doesn't narrate a story and yet this part of the libretto communicates with directness rather than abstraction. It is a very literal description of what the character is experiencing. If, as Kramer says, the 'combinatory' is foregrounded in poetry as the art of reinventing words through repositioning them, the everyday stuff of communication that Corse also mentions, and the 'connotative' is foregrounded in music as its expressive emotive content is heard first, then in a poetic opera both must jostle for attention. Unless, as Corse says, some qualities are subdued to leave space for both artforms to breathe fully. I would critique Kramer's definition of the way music functions, as music can have both the combinatory and connotative foregrounded simultaneously: just as in poetry, it is the way in which the composer chooses and plays with motifs and themes that creates the emotive and expressive content. The distinction between poetry and music still seems to hinge most clearly on the directly communicative linguistic material of the former. In the case of Beckett, this distinction breaks down along with the building blocks of speech. Breaking down the text into motifs for strings in *Dust Mouth* meant discarding connotative elements and foregrounding the combinatory methods I used for developing these motifs, just as Beckett develops motifs in his work.

3.2 Scene I: My Mouth is Full of Dust

Following on from *Dust Mouth*, in orchestrating the opera, I limited its timbral scope to the atmosphere created by Coll's anguish. I wanted to create the sensation of having a mouth filled with dust, the feeling of being trapped in a drought, and the tantalising promise of rain. The orchestra consists of only double reeds, percussion, prepared piano and strings.

The percussion is chosen based on whether it sounds dry and dusty (albeit not quite to the full extent of Rebecca Saunders' percussion solo *Dust* (2018), which I discovered after composing the opera) or suggestive of water and the kitchen.⁶³ My percussion setup was inspired by meeting with Paul Patrick, Principal

⁶³ Rebecca Saunders. (2018). *Dust*. Edition Peters.

Percussionist at the BBC Philharmonic, who showed me the entire selection of instruments that they had available at the studios.

For example, the Wind Wand or Bullroarer, as well as being a nod to the original Australian inspiration for the opera (a setting which is now flexible as drought could take place in almost any country), has an expansive and dry sound perhaps reminiscent of acres of arid farmland. The Sizzle Cymbal is one of the clearest examples of a dusty percussion sound, and I combined it with effects which contain and restrain the resonance of strings (such as col legno, Bartok pizzicato, and Blutack-damped piano). My own experience as an oboist gives me a synaesthetic relationship with double reed instruments as the reed has its own dry taste which I relate to the piercing tone of the instrument, in contrast to the metallic feel of a flute which I omitted entirely.

The image displays two pages of a musical score, numbered 21 and 22. The score is for an orchestration of an opening scene. The left page (21) shows measures 358-362. The right page (22) shows measures 363-367. The score includes parts for Oboe I, Clarinet A, Bassoon I, Contrabassoon, English Saxophone, Bass Drum, Collage, Piano, Violin I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. It also includes percussion parts for Sizzle Cymbal and Tam-tam. The vocal line includes lyrics: "feel it, Dust. Grit. Sand." and "Fall - ing on me. Damn the drought." The score features various musical notations such as dynamics (p, f, mp), articulation (sostenuto, pizz, ord.), and performance instructions (ad lib. throughout).

Figure 2: Orchestration of opening scene

3.3 Scene I (continued): Breakfast Tantrum

Coll:

Then it is breakfast time –
Shall I close my eyes? Will that help?
Or what about this:

Mother bring the wine; Waiter bring the feast;
Don't spare the cost – bring all of it.
Mother, you haven't moved.
Nothing – nothing again. Nothing always.

Charlie:

Nothing's what we've got. Eat it. Drink it.
Do what you want – it's all we got.

Coll:

Ah, this old chestnut.
Make do, eh? Make and mend, eh?
Mum, that's not for me – thank you for the meal;
You stay – I'm gone.

I'll tell you what – you can have my future share of meals –
Make a feast – nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing.

Orchestrating this scene in Campbell's libretto caused me to name it 'Breakfast Tantrum' as I realised the ideal soundscape to bring out the childish petulance in Coll's words was that of percussive kitchen utensils. To the percussion section I allocated a coffee grinder, a toaster (unplugged), a metal draining rack, a baking tray full of cutlery, and a dustbin in which to pour the cutlery unceremoniously. This was somewhat inspired by Ligeti's *Nouvelles Aventures* (1965) in which plates are smashed.

Figure 3: Excerpt at H1 showing 'Breakfast Tantrum' percussion

I composed 'tantrum percussion' in Coll's own part so that the mezzo-soprano must bang her fists on the table and hit cutlery together, making the percussion section an extension of her own fury.

Figure 4: Excerpt at II showing Coll's own 'percussion'

This scene is a clear example of Campbell maximising a conversational rather than poetic quality in his writing to make space for drama, while using short phrases to make space for music. The compositional material in this section is contrapuntal with moments of semi-fugue, as I felt the fast harmonic rhythm further heightened the tension between Coll and Charlie. There are unabashedly insolent chord clusters hammered down like fists, and my text-setting works to exaggerate the meter and accents already present in the phrases spat out by Coll in particular.

3.4 Scene II: Drip, Drip

Charlie

...remember, remembering, the drumming sound
of downpours in the daylight.

No thirst – or want – just the thrilling soak –

drip, drip – it filled the feeding troughs
and filled the wells.

Drip, drip – you worked in it,
shirt as heavy as an iron bell.

Drip, drip – drip, drip – you were so happy then,
cassia and wildberry at our ankles,
light on your back – and the rain will come again.
Be patient – want less – give it time

Coll

Drip drip – Is this water torture?

Drip drip.

Hell was green and thick instead of dust. How great!

Campbell's clever and poetic dual use of 'drip, drip' to suggest both long-awaited rain and water torture was the chief inspiration for this scene. I began setting Charlie's song (as Campbell suggested to me) as a straightforward pastoral lullaby, with nostalgic rippling ostinatos and nineteenth-century harmony, and then gradually transformed it into a darker song which suggests Charlie's manipulation of Coll. I did this through choosing orchestration that might suggest frustrated rainfall and the ominous dripping of water torture: the restraint of the blutack-damped piano, col legno strings, scraped tubular bells, and subsequently the creeping insistence of angular, dissonant string motifs in the recapitulation. I also added the recurring chromatically rising scale that originally appears in Scene I, as a threatening overlay to Charlie's seemingly sweet melody. The interplay between poetry and music in this song is a temporal one: the text already has every layer present within it, but I reveal its depths over time. The rich metaphor and imagery in Campbell's text inspired me to create a simple, homophonic texture to bring the

inner musicality of the words to the forefront. I then added complexity through repetition: the second iteration of the lyrics is darkened and obscured. In this way the first half of the song is more sculptural, displaying the high soprano's agility and conjuring an image of lush green farmland, and the second half becomes dramatic through transformation of something ordinary into something otherworldly and ominous.

The musical score for 'Drip, drip' is presented in a multi-staff format. The instruments and parts are: S. D. (Soprano), B. D. (Baritone), Char. (Character), Pno. (Piano), Vln. I (Violin I), Vln. II (Violin II), Vla. (Viola), Vc. (Violoncello), and Cb. (Contrabasso). The lyrics are 'drip, drip, it filled the'. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, and *f*, and performance instructions like 'Tam-tam scrape', 'Crotale on Snare Drum bowed', 'pizz', 'col legno', and '(pizz)'. The time signature changes from 3/4 to 4/4. A box labeled 'P1' is present in the Vln. I part.

Figure 5: Excerpt from 'Drip, drip' showing 'water torture' orchestration

The image shows a musical score excerpt for a scene. It includes a vocal line for a character (Char.) and piano accompaniment (Pno.). The vocal line has lyrics: "down-pours in the day-light, No thirst, or want, just the thrill-ing soak,___". The piano accompaniment features a rising chromatic line in the right hand and angular string octave displacement in the left hand. The score also includes parts for Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.).

Figure 6: Excerpt from 'Drip, drip' showing angular string octave displacement and rising chromatic line in the piano

3.5 Scene III: Radio Song

Need. Brightness. Taste the...

Overflowing... And silver...

Grapes and... We made figurines
from the wheat. Lips kiss and... Endless.

Silk and pearl and... insurance is more
important now than ever.... wild fire. Osiris welcomes...

Thorn. Pure roses and... luck...
order now to receive your... Ice flow and dance...

and – *This is the first night of the rest of your...*

This is it... Skin and breath and...

Creating the Radio Song was one of the pivotal moments in mine and Campbell's collaboration: this song arose out of my desire to include electronic music in the score, which itself arose from Campbell's previous draft and the siren-like character of the Rainmaker. Campbell's vision was expressed as follows:

I imagine it as a strange almost disconcerted, distorted song. A sort of shifting mirror into which a main character sees the image that they want to see. While to everyone else it appears unclear or alternative. It is shifting and liquid with perhaps the lyrics overlapping each other. – Niall Campbell

I followed Campbell's description faithfully, weaving together a multi-layered sound-poem with numerous iterations of the text in fragments and expressed through different versions of my own voice. I created this in Ableton Live, using a condenser microphone and manipulating almost every sound in the track from my own voice, with the exception of some samples and dance beats to give it the quality of a radio flickering between channels. It is almost entirely a sculptural piece: time is frozen while the track plays, and my purpose in creating it was to embrace numerous sound qualities rather than to develop a narrative thread.

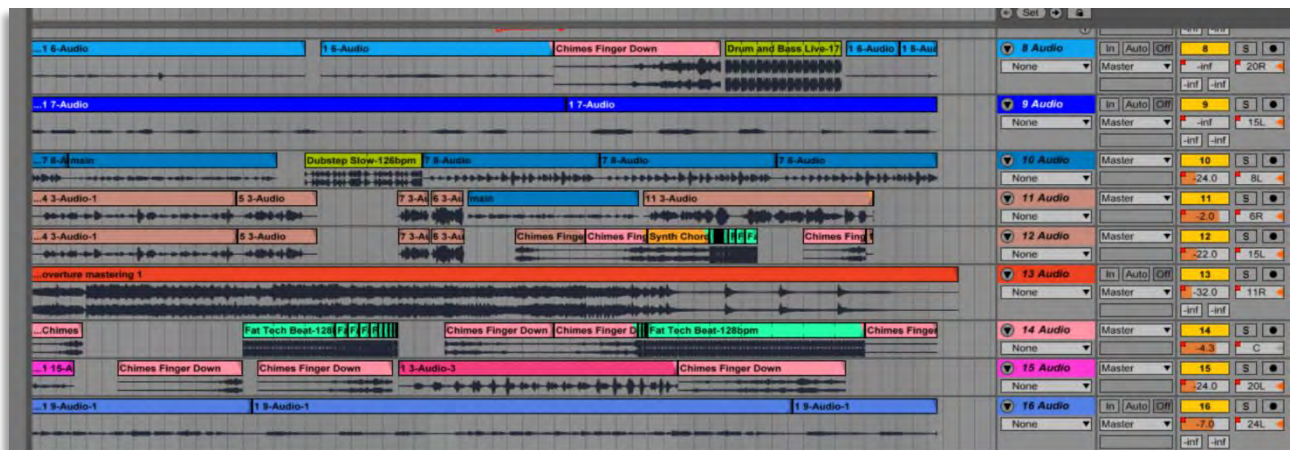


Figure 7: Screenshot of 'Radio Song' Ableton project

In the Radio Song, I also used a recording of Campbell's own voice, which was a way for me of making peace with some of the earlier creative conflicts in terms of voice and authorship.

3.6 Scene IV: Star and Moon

For this scene, Campbell suggested a more simple, ballad-style song to give the audience a chance to sympathise with Coll for the first time, after he has been portrayed to be selfish and obstreperous. His poetry is full of sounds of excess, suggested to be those he hears in the radio and all it promises of city life.

Coll:

I hear the sound of wine poured out
of plates being smashed and night-time shouts
I hear the sound of speeding cars
and blood like thunder inside my ears

I hear the sound of hard desire,
wildness spreading like a new struck fire
and me walking down the dim lit street
star and moon and completely free

Charlie:

And then – you know that I know this –
You’ll drink until it spills across
your clothes, the floor, the thirsty ground

Coll:

Perhaps, perhaps – but boy, what fun

Charlie:

You’ll touch it all - but waste it too

Coll:

I’ll eat the forests and drink the moon

Charlie:

You’ll use it up – and throw it off

Coll:

I’ll swill the oceans around my mouth.
‘Here’ is the land of always thirst –

‘There is the land of more, more, more than enough.

The stanzas have balanced verse structure which continues with the same metric form in Charlie’s lines as they begin to argue, so setting this scene as a song worked in a similar way to Scene II (‘Drip, drip’): I began with a straightforward emotive setting which is gradually undercut by tension, including the re-emergence of the rising semitonal line motif, and an insistent, syncopated rhythm in the accompaniment which could either represent Charlie berating Coll or Coll’s unquenchable thirst. I chose to repeat Coll’s text so that it could turn from something open and free to something chained to the pulsating beat of the accompaniment, defiant against Charlie’s efforts to reason with, control or subdue Coll.

The image displays a musical score excerpt for the opera *Star and Moon*. The score is arranged in a system with six staves. The top staff is for the Coll character, with lyrics: "night-time shouts, I hear the sound of speed-ing cars, _ And". The piano accompaniment (Pno.) is shown in the second staff. The string section consists of Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The Viola and Cello parts feature a prominent, rising chromatic accompaniment starting in the second measure, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and the instruction "threatening, incessant". The Violin parts play chords, with the first Violin part marked *mf* and the second Violin part marked *mf*. The Viola and Cello parts are marked *p* and "threatening, incessant". The Contrabass part is marked *p* and "threatening, incessant". The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, and *p*<, and performance instructions like "sul G".

Figure 8: Excerpt from *Star and Moon* showing entry of rising chromatic accompaniment

3.7 Scene V: Radio Glitch

As opposed to the sections between songs that I chose to set as either spoken text or brief sung exchanges, this scene felt like such a heated argument that I decided to make it a whole spoken scene with underscoring, provided by a ‘broken radio’, this being the subject of their dispute. Scene V also has the greatest naturalism in the libretto in terms of linguistic style, being closest to ordinary dialogue, with the exception of “dry earth, dead animals, want” and “you are an empty cup that nothing ever fills”. I deliberately left the first phrase as speech, despite Coll’s assertion that it is a song or dance, because I neither wanted to validate nor contradict his statement musically. Charlie’s cup metaphor felt emptier to me without being sung. This scene is stripped almost completely bare: the libretto is left open and simplified for music, and the music does not come. The radio is broken.

Coll:

No – it needs to keep playing. Keep playing!
What is wrong with you (*to radio*) – piece of junk,
piece of garbage – just like everything else,
it falls apart, it hates it here.

Charlie:

Let me see. Give it to me.

Coll:

You broke it -
Is this another thing you did while I was sleeping?

Charlie:

Nothing. I did nothing.
It broke - but all things break - get used to it.

Coll:

Always the same – it all breaks.
What am I meant to listen to now?
I’ve heard that song too much: dry earth,

dead animals, want.
That's your song.

Charlie:

I wouldn't say that.

Coll:

It is! You sing it: dry earth,
Dry earth, animals, want.

I bet you dance to it.
I bet your heart pounds to it.

Charlie:

And what's yours then? Comfort?
No, it's not even that – you are an empty cup
that nothing ever fills.

Coll:

“You have nothing – be happy;
Here, now have less – be happier...”
Why should I stay – for you –
To keep your farm from falling apart?
Nah, not for me.

Charlie:

No – not for you.

To create the ‘broken radio’ effect I used material from my collaboration with PRiSM SampleRNN, a machine learning programme. PRiSM SampleRNN was trained solely on my Norrisette music (see Chapter 4) and its outputs were a ghost of my own voice and dance beats. Its outputs were ideal for this scene: the radio, which is previously an object in Scene III that can be switched on and off, is anthropomorphised when Coll says “it hates it here”. PRiSM SampleRNN seems to have its own particular character and voice, and continues wailing erratically as Coll and Charlie attempt to fix it.



Figure 9: Screenshot of 'Radio Glitch' Ableton project

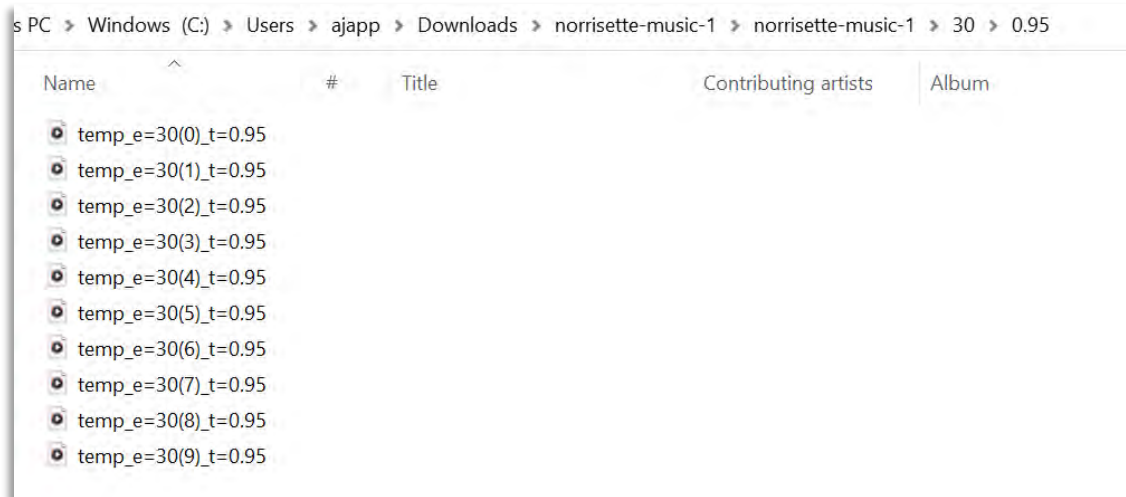


Figure 10: Screenshot showing files received from PRiSM SampleRNN via Christopher Melen

3.8 Scene VI: Weak, Slow, Lazy

I left the 'Radio Glitch' track playing into Scene VI so that the radio continues to have a life of its own when the 'music' begins again. This juncture is crucial dramatically and musically, as it is the collision of technologies and genres: electronic dance music or hyperpop battles with operatic aria, recorded music and artificial intelligence fight with live voice and orchestra.

Charlie:

...Here, there isn't much
But let me help you pack:
A few coins – let me spit on them for luck –
Some wool – I know you like your softness;
And here – take this memory of me
Saying this to you – you are an embarrassment,
Weak, slow, lazy, a thorn tree
with not one bit of fruit.

This scene, being the moment at which Charlie loses her patience and unleashes a tirade against Coll, seemed to me the time to intensify the 'water torture' idea from Scene II and transform it into a frustrated rainstorm in the hammering of the prepared piano, in combination with Coll's 'breakfast tantrum' percussion section, which is now claimed by Charlie, and with her violent coloratura passages of melismas on 'weak, slow, lazy'. It was this kind of poetic material that led me to choose a high soprano for Charlie as I felt she could continue the tradition of characters such as the Queen of the Night while representing more of an ordinary, middle-aged farmer. The high soprano voice also contrasts starkly with Coll's voice, considering that I chose Coll to be a mezzo-soprano 'trouser role'.

Figure 11: Excerpt from 'Weak, Slow, Lazy' showing dustbin percussion, prepared piano 'rainstorm' material and high coloratura passages

3.9 Scene VII: Darkness Behind the Door

The broken radio fades away into the beginning of Scene VII, as though its anguish has been quietened by Coll's decision to leave.

Coll:

Oh lord, oh throat, oh thirst,
 What is this darkness behind the door?
 Why is the void here?
 Mother – please open up again

A storm is coming – I can hear it,
 I don't want to be alone out here

I just wanted to bite the apple once...
Then once, again. Then once and once
then all of them.

I thirsted more than others
I don't know why. Rain quenched nothing –
And now its raining dust and dirt – not rain
And now its raining dust. Did I waste everything?

Oh god, am I being pulled back – to do it all again.
No, give me rain. Please no, give me rain.

Campbell and I were in agreement that the opera should end with a memorable, melodramatic aria. This song portrays the moment that Coll opens the door to what he believes is the outside world, on his way to leave for a city life, and instead discovers that there is a void beyond the door and his hands are old, meaning that he is not the young man he thought he was. I thought this aria the perfect moment for the prepared piano to finally be allowed to 'sing out' fully, thus the removal of the strips of blutack near the beginning. The truth is revealed to Coll, and the rain finally arrives.

In the postlude to the song, I let go in full force orchestrally: at this point there are no more words, and the ensemble takes over from Coll's voice to plumb the depths of his despair. This postlude combines the main musical themes of the opera: the opening motifs from *Dust Mouth*, the rising chromatic line that permeates the whole work, and the melody of 'Darkness Behind the Door'. At this point in the piece any memory of the radio music is obliterated by the momentum of the live orchestra. The sculptural timelessness of any of the songs or poems is lost to the dramatic insistence of the orchestra with a similar ferocity to the opening string quartet. The instrumental prelude and postlude cannot fully narrate, but they are derived from the cadences of Campbell's libretto and occupy an emotive space between language and pure atmosphere. I feel that at this point the orchestra is acting as a larger voice, amplifying Coll's own into a cavernous space.

The image shows a musical score excerpt for 'Darkness Behind the Door'. It includes staves for Cym., B. D., Coll., Pno., Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., and Cb. The Coll. part has lyrics: 'o-pen up a - gain, A storm is com - ing,'. The Pno. part has an instruction 'remove blutack'. The Cb. part has dynamic markings: *mf*, *f*, *ord.*, *f*, *p*, *ff*, *p*, *ff*, *p*.

Figure 12: Excerpt from 'Darkness Behind the Door' showing instruction for pianist to remove blutack

Effectively *Drought* can be read as a single scene in one room over one short time period being enacted between two characters who have great dramatic tension with one another, and who happen to speak in metaphor. As it is a radio opera, the sound of the poetry and music together creates the setting of a drought-stricken farm. This poetic sound is sculpted over time by Campbell and myself, and provides depth for the dramatic interplay between Coll and Charlie. The additional metaphysical layer of the void, the purgatory in which Coll has found himself, is conjured and justified through the poetic language which draws the piece away from the naturalistic and everyday. Equally, to sing at all is an act of transfiguration where speech becomes a sculptural, heightened voice.

Aside from soundworld, *i.e.* that of the Radio Song, 'Darkness Behind the Door' is closest to my Norrisette work in terms of genre and form, with a simple rhythmic accompaniment and a musical theatre-esque character. Developing my

songwriting practice alongside composing the opera led to me creating a strong and accessible melody at the end, but the opera simultaneously informed my Norrisette practice, and birthed an entirely new wing to my creative work.

Chapter 4: Norrisette and Not-Norrisette

Conversation with Ellen Sargen. How does one really collaborate with a performer? Is it more about their craft and training in e.g. improvisation? How and why does a performer take ownership of a piece?

Excerpt from Research Diary: 3rd October 2019

There were numerous inspirations for the birth of Norrisette, including Campbell's Rainmaker character and the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic. A seed planted by earlier conversations with my colleague Ellen Sargen (composer) about her research into performers' alter-egos, led me to realise that the creation of an alter-ego for myself might give me the confidence to perform and record my own work. This was a crucial solution to my crisis in the Covid-19 pandemic when no performers were available for me to collaborate with effectively. I initially attempted to work with student singers over video conferencing software but the first months of the pandemic were too chaotic and uncertain for any stable collaboration process to emerge online.

The portfolio of songs and electronic tracks that I have included in this submission, begin with my experiments as Norrisette before I collaborated with artificial intelligence (PRiSM SampleRNN), during this collaboration, and afterwards. I have also included music videos that I created at home, and examples of cover artwork. All photography, costume, design, production, recording was completed by myself.

4.1 Norrisette: Before PRiSM SampleRNN Collaboration

Angel

03'15''

This track was an early experiment in recording and producing a song at home: it uses a simple melodic refrain over a pedal note and focuses on the use of my voice and piano or cymbal samples, with drum samples interacting with the voice more as the track develops. The subject matter of the song is apocalyptic, which on reflection chimes with the themes that Campbell and I were discussing around the libretto, as well as embodying the pandemic anxiety that was present at the time of composition. The lyrics include “And then the ocean tore in two, and then the mountains were like fire” which is an almost biblical vision, relating to the themes of burning that Campbell had raised early on in our collaboration.

Secret Code

02'41''

This track was a later development of my use of samples and voice: the voice is an instrument in the track as well as the main melodic line, and I created the drum samples from scratch with more of a free rhythm than in ‘Angel’. Initially this track involved a full piano accompaniment, which I later removed to leave a sparse and haunting landscape. I subsequently created a music video at home to accompany the song, using a minimalist black and white palette throughout.



Figure 13: Screenshot from 'Secret Code' music video

This was my most experimental piece of production at the time, but is still within the bounds of a contemporary pop song.

Sheets of Paper

02'17''

Another track on *Paper* using similar sampling techniques, I included this in my portfolio alongside 'Unread' because I believe it to show a development of my songwriting technique into a stronger, miniature form. Around this time I was considering ideas of poetry and miniature forms, and the creation of EPs constructed from several short songs has a parallel with the idea of a song cycle.

Old Name

01'58''

Like 'Sheets of Paper', this track is very short and uses a stripped-back soundworld. This was my first release as just voice and piano, so is closest to a classical song in that sense. It was the second song on my EP *Future Dream*, which has an environmental theme and more poetic lyrics than my previous work. I think at this point the themes in *Drought* were influencing my songwriting to a large extent, and my own lyric-writing was improving in response to regularly working with Campbell, a skilled poet.

Bone Forest

03'11''

'Bone Forest' is, by contrast to 'Old Name', one of my earliest complex pieces of production as it involves more of a full band sound which was entirely generated at home using samples. I used percussion to suggest rattling bones, and the vocal performance was intended to sound as airy and ethereal as possible. Each track on the EP *Future Dream* is influenced by a different classical element (Water, Earth, Air and Fire), and this track explores different environmental technologies to do with air. The 'bone forest' refers to wind turbines.

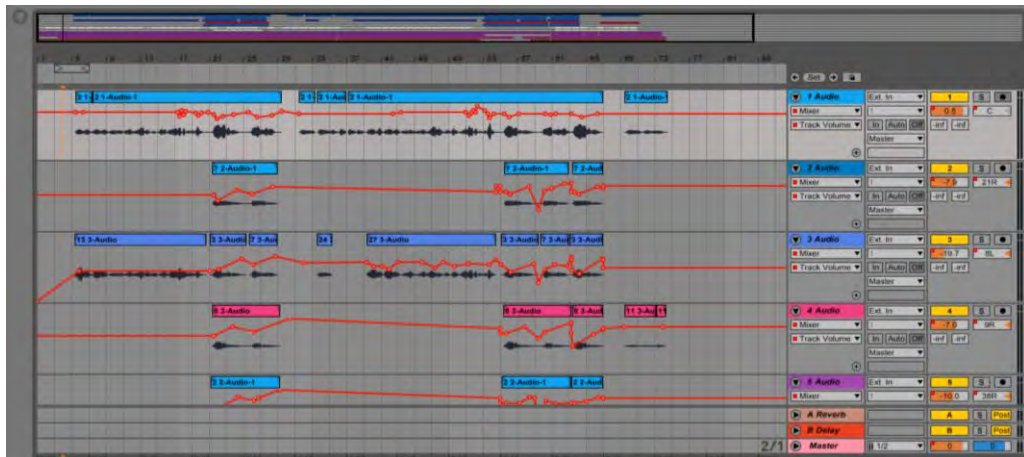


Figure 15: Screenshot from 'Bone Forest' Ableton project



Figure 16: Future Dream EP cover art

Prometheus

03'17''

The final track on *Future Dream*, 'Prometheus' was my first dance track, focusing on repetition of simple ideas and a driving pulse. It has no bass line and is minimalist in construction. I think that the mythical inspirations behind this EP were likely influenced by discussions with Campbell about myth and poetry, as well as my own reading around music and language. The music video encapsulates the tongue-in-cheek nature of the song and the environmental concerns within it.



Figure 17: Screenshot from 'Prometheus' music video

The Half Of It

02'55''

My final song before collaborating with PRiSM SampleRNN, 'The Half Of It' was designed to be slightly unsettling for the listener as I multi-tracked two piano recordings so that the accompaniment is not fully synchronized. The lyric-writing in this song has a mixture of the literal and metaphorical, something which I later reflected on when I came to the realisation that poetic, multi-layered lyrics were more satisfying to me musically.

4.2 Not-Norrisette: PRiSM SampleRNN Collaboration

PRiSM SampleRNN, an open-access neural audio synthesis (AI) software tool, developed by the Royal Northern College of Music's Centre for Practice & Research in Science & Music (PRiSM) is able to generate new audio outputs by 'learning' the characteristics of any existing corpus of sound or music. It was trained by Christopher Melen (PRiSM Research Software Engineer 2019-23) on one hour of my music, namely all of my existing Norrisette recordings, and this was the sum total of its knowledge. Examples of the outputs that it generated from each training cycle are included in the folder *10. Not-Norrisette: Outputs from PRiSM SampleRNN*.

The training process began with me sending Melen my entire output of Norrisette recordings as WAV files, which he then fed to the PRiSM SampleRNN software.

Once he had trained the programme on my music, he sent me several folders of its first three training cycles, which consisted of numerous 15-second WAV files. These files were PRiSM SampleRNN's response to the sounds and shapes of my original audio files, and therefore included samples that resembled my own voice and my own original music production. It was effectively imitating my music, so I nicknamed it 'Not-Norrisette'. This was the first collaboration I had ever undertaken with machine learning software, and it fundamentally shifted the way I viewed my own practice, like holding up a distorted mirror to my work.

I began to select my favourite WAV files from the training cycles, choosing ones which seemed most varied or haunting. There was a strange emotive aspect to the files, and a sense of them being alive, because the software had reappropriated my own voice and imbued it with its own distinctive quality, something unique to the way in which it was created and trained by PRiSM and Melen.

Not-Norrisette: Outputs from PRiSM SampleRNN

Not-Norrisette 1 (training cycle 1) 00'29''

I have included this particular sample as it represents how most of the first training cycle outputs had this one sound: that of a reconstructed 'Norrisette' voice wailing on a high pitch with small disruptions. It seemed that the main piece of information that PRiSM SampleRNN had gleaned from my recordings was that a high, thin, vocal sample was the most likely occurrence, and so it produced this in the WAV files. It is simultaneously my voice and not my voice.

Not-Norrisette 2 (training cycle 2) 00'29''

This sample shows the development of PRiSM SampleRNN's learning process from just replicating my voice to incorporating other elements from the tracks such as percussion. It was interesting for me to hear these percussive samples imitated without rhythmic device or pattern, just as another kind of voice.

Not-Norrisette 3 (training cycle 3) 00'29''

This is the sample that sounded most developed to me. It felt to me like the beginnings of a new voice that sang in long phrases and breaths with echoes of the different sounds I had used in my tracks.

Having chosen my favourite samples, I began to interweave them with new music to create songs that were a kind of collaboration between myself and Not-Norrisette.

Reservoir

02'48''

I first composed this as a song with voice and piano, and then created a 'duet' between PRiSM SampleRNN material and my own voice. I largely left the samples unedited but repeated them when they seemed harmonious in the chorus, for example.

The image displays a musical score for the song 'Reservoir' by Anna Appleby. The score is written in 4/4 time with a tempo of 76 beats per minute. It features two systems of music. The first system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the lyrics 'O-pen your eyes, You know I love you, But we can't live like'. The piano accompaniment includes a box labeled 'Trigger Electronic track and Click track'. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics 'this for long, O-pen your eyes and see the rain storm in-side the win - dow,'. The piano accompaniment continues with a melodic line. Dynamics such as *p*, *mf*, and *mp* are indicated throughout the score.

Figure 18: Excerpt from score of 'Reservoir'

Whale House

03'33''

The title of this track came from my impression that the Prism-SampleRNN voice sounded somewhat like a twisted kind of whale song, and I thought it would be a

whimsical name for a dance track that involves the typical ‘four-on-the-floor’ kicks of house music. Originally I added no human vocals, but at the last moment realised that some kind of refrain would elevate the track from being an experimental noise piece to a memorable dance number. It is now my go-to party piece for live performances, as the obsessive and absurdist question ‘Do you like it in the whale house?’ invites significant audience participation (and slight fear). The music video, like that for Secret Code and Prometheus, has a specific colour scheme, wardrobe and editing style – I use repeated visual motifs in a musical way.



Figure 19: Screenshot from 'Whale House' music video



Figure 20: Human EP cover art

4.3 Not-Not-Norrisette: After PRiSM SampleRNN Collaboration

Collaborating with PRiSM SampleRNN enabled me to work more reflexively as Norrisette: realising what sounds were most prominent in my work gave me more self-awareness in both composition and production. Furthermore, the original and haunting soundworld that was created by PRiSM SampleRNN, when embedded into my tracks, gave my music a new quality that subsequently led me down more of an avant-garde path. I believe that my later recordings, despite not involving PRiSM SampleRNN, exhibit a more experimental approach. There are sounds and ideas that I am now much more willing to incorporate into my tracks because of the challenging palette that PRiSM SampleRNN presented me with.

The additional parameter that undoubtedly influenced my work to a large extent was that of live performance: as I began to perform more regularly, my method of creating new tracks and songs changed; I was now thinking about what would be most possible to replicate in a live performance setting, and what would be most effective when heard over a club sound system. Nevertheless, I continued to produce some music that was too challenging for my regular live sets, as I wanted to focus on creating concept EPs that explored a particular theme.

Wild Being

04'15''

This track emerged directly from my live performances: the rhythmic build-up and mixing was constructed for my live-looping at *Fluff*, the night of queer electronica that I run regularly with my colleague Markus Hetheier. Many of the samples I used were more experimental and varied than those I had used previously, reflecting the new direction I had gone in since working with PRiSM SampleRNN. My attention to detail was greater as I was now aware of how the overall sound picture might look to a software programme, and of whether it was fresh and exciting enough for a live audience who had come to expect the weird and wonderful. I included a greater variety of drum samples, more layers of instruments and sounds, and wilder samples such as my own 'cat noises', screams, and sped-up, looped vocal improvisations. The video for 'Wild Being' uses more layering, softer editing, and more colour grading than my previous videos. It also feels more lo-fi.



Figure 21: Screenshot from 'Wild Being' Ableton project



Figure 22: Screenshot from 'Wild Being' music video

Metal Hotel

03'16''

After releasing 'Wild Being', I created an EP called *Metal Hotel* which was centred on experimenting with metallic sounds and with the genre of metal, wholly using electronic music and samples, and not live instruments. This EP was far more avant-garde and sonically adventurous than anything I had made previously, and I believe that my collaboration with PRiSM SampleRNN had influenced the scope of what I thought possible for my music. I felt confident to make and perform music that was distanced from songwriting and closer to experiments with noise. Crucially, this EP was made immediately after I handed in the complete final

orchestration of *Drought* to the BBC Philharmonic. As a result it represents a new chapter in my musical research, and yet the lyrics of all four songs are immensely tied to the ending of *Drought*: the horror, regret, fear and isolation experienced by Coll at the end of Campbell’s libretto and my score was palpable in this EP. The lyrics in ‘Metal Hotel’ include: “Decisions have consequences, I’ve built myself an iron box, the door is shut, the door is shut, hell, how did I get here? There’s no turning back.” Coll’s aria at the end of *Drought*, as I discuss later, has a very similar sentiment. At the point of creating this EP, it had become clear to me that Norrisette was almost a kind of method-composing project related to the opera: I was inhabiting the themes and characters of Campbell’s libretto and approaching them from a wholly different angle to the one I used when composing and orchestrating the opera.

Little Lights

03’52’’

As in ‘Metal Hotel’, this track uses heightened spoken delivery, and is closer to being an experimental piece of sound-art or a soundtrack, than a song. It also has a grainy edge that relates to the lo-fi sound quality of the PRiSM SampleRNN outputs, and is primarily focused around metallic sounds and textures.

Ribcage

02’49’’

‘Ribcage’ has the structure of a classic song with verses and chorus, but its audio production is far riskier and more counterintuitive than in any other track I created. Its identity is closer to the PRiSM SampleRNN outputs than to my other songs, and it has an unfinished, raw feel to it. The lyrics in the verses are perhaps too ironic and not poetic enough to be wholly successful, as there is a political message hammered home through them with attempts at humour. This was a song that made me really appreciate the opportunity I had had to collaborate with a poet, because I again realised how difficult lyric-writing could be.

A Quiet Death

03’14’’

‘A Quiet Death’ displays, in my opinion, my best songwriting. Its lyrics are poetic but simple enough to work with musical layers, the harmonic progressions are more complex and satisfying than in some of my earlier songs, and the verses and chorus have their own memorable identities. I also think the production I used for

it, although very simple, is effective because it does not obscure the song but emphasises its ghostly qualities. It is the fourth and last song on the ‘Metal Hotel’ EP and I think the structure of the EP follows a dramatic arc which ends with something akin to a final aria. There is a cohesive palette in this EP of lo-fi, metallic qualities, and I am sure that my vision for this was improved greatly by my recent orchestration of *Drought*, where I had focused on creating a sparse, focused soundworld.

Fluffwerk

03’10’’

My most recent track, ‘Fluffwerk’ has the most sophisticated sound design that I have achieved yet and includes live synthesizers, multiple vocals, a lo-fi PRiSM SampleRNN-inspired quality, and sped-up samples of my other songs within it. In this track I had progressed from an insular, pandemic-affected mentality to more of a collective aim, influenced by ‘Fluff’, the night of queer electronica that I had been running with my colleague Markus Hetheier for over a year. I wanted to encapsulate the live performing experience I had gained as Norrisette while representing the community around ‘Fluff’. Norrisette in ‘Fluffwerk’ has become a fully-fledged, albeit raw-edged, project which is separate from *Drought* and the pandemic.



Figure 23: Screenshot of 'Fluffwerk' Ableton project

4.4 Method Composing

That Norrisette and Not-Norrisette became reintegrated into the opera through the inclusion of the Radio Song and Radio Glitch scenes, seemed serendipitous at first,

but later I realised that this whole experimental process was a necessary part of me extending my acoustic and orchestral imagination. The resulting orchestration of the opera is doubtlessly more detailed and sophisticated because of my self-initiated training in music production, where every sound matters.

Norrisette was also a form of method composing: if method acting involves inhabiting the character fully, method composing involves living inside the piece somehow. When I created Norrisette, I was singing about themes that were often related to the opera, and I also became the voice of the radio itself.

What I did not fully understand at the time of creating Norrisette, was that I was in effect constructing a living, online *Gesamtkunstwerk* where composition, text, production, photography, film, costume, design, lighting and editing all came together. I made everything by myself at home and broadcast it on social media, living as my alter-ego and narrating different stories through each concept EP release.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Drought is a poetic opera: it revolves around six songs which I composed from Niall's poetry. The original research questions for this PhD concern collaboration between composer and poet within an opera context and the impact of this collaboration on a composer's practice in both text-led and non text-led music. I began an exploration of music's relationship with language and how poetry might function in the context of opera. The sculptural qualities of poetry and the dramatic qualities of opera and stage works left me with a challenge of how to reconcile the two forms, and ultimately I settled on song as a poetic and miniature dramatic form: the same conclusion reached by so many opera composers before.

The collaboration between poet and composer might seem straightforward if language is at the heart of music, and song is rooted in poetry. Campbell's poetic skill inspired me to further develop my songwriting practice alongside with Norrisette. However the struggles of our collaboration included issues of narrative control and storytelling, as well as difficulties of communicating fully during the pandemic, especially without musicians to perform sketches of work to Campbell.

I used Norrisette as a direct way of speaking: I could fully realise music from start to finish at home and have full narrative control, to balance my frustration at not being able to collaborate fully with Campbell.

Norrisette took me into songwriting, which itself solved some of my struggles with composing a poetic opera. So we come full circle. This portfolio demonstrates both the sweet and bitter fruits of working together: I developed a whole new musical methodology because of the fraught nature of our collaboration, which in turn became the toolkit for creating the opera and making the collaboration work.

I am working on ways to integrate my work as Norrisette with my work as a contemporary classical composer. I create music for electronic technology as Norrisette, and music for the technologies of the orchestra and the classically-trained voice as Anna Appleby. My work for both are still distinct because of the confines of my performance contexts: work is commissioned from Anna Appleby for specific acoustic performance settings, and work is created by Norrisette to be performed in venues (bars, clubs, music festivals) where using synthesizers,

backing tracks, samples and amplified vocals is the current best option as a solo performer and producer who is trained in keyboard and voice. Alongside moments of electronic and orchestral convergence in *Drought*, I have been exploring ways to combine genres and technologies in new ways in my work, for example through my Glyndebourne commission *Bird* with countertenor and live electronics which reimagines Papageno's aria, or through my arrangement of *Reservoir* for voice and piano with electronic track featuring 'Not-Norrisette' samples (see Appendix A).

Musical technologies interact with genre, as they were developed alongside genres and vice versa. The orchestra and operatic voice were, and are, extended to accommodate the imaginations and demands of composers, while these demands are limited themselves by the constraints of physics, human ability, and the reasonable scope of commercially-operating ensembles. Likewise recording technology and electronic software have inspired the birth of numerous genres, and are themselves constantly expanded by the aural imaginations of producers. This field is being further developed by experiments with artificial intelligence.

Ultimately, Norrisette is my parallel opera in this portfolio. It is a digital operatic project for contemporary audiences, encapsulating all of the drama that I could embody by myself at home in the pandemic, and has evolved into a living stage work that I re-enact regularly. She is my twenty-first century *Gesamtkunstwerk*, living digital opera, incorporating artificial intelligence, social media, electronic music, songwriting, fashion, film, photography and digital art. The three topoi that I initially suggested as fundamental elements of opera (The Voice, Expanded; Sculpture versus Drama; Transformation and Transfiguration) are all present within my work as Norrisette: my voice is expanded through electroacoustic experimentation and collaboration with artificial intelligence; my songwriting holds within it a tension between playing with sound and following some kind of emotional, dramatic form; there is an otherworldly quality to Norrisette which is my drag, my alter-ego, a transformation of myself into something new.

Although I created Norrisette in isolation, the field is now open for future collaborations. She is one of my original contributions to knowledge from this poetic opera collaboration project, as a progressive answer to the question of how to make opera of the future.

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Appendix A: Complete List of Musical Outputs (since October 2019)

i. Compositions by Anna Appleby

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/39cue31ak8urh949mnemi/h?dl=0&rlkey=1gde0p307iyaisra6xxq5tzqh>

Uptake, alto saxophone, bass guitar and piano, commissioned for PRiSM 8Cubed and premiered by Riot Ensemble, 3'30" (2020)

Bird, countertenor and electronics, commissioned by Glyndebourne for Jamie Hall, 10' (2020)

13.8 Billion Years, soprano saxophone, commissioned by Riot Ensemble and HCMF for Amy Green, 5' (2020)

Shudder, voice and electronics, commissioned by Carolyn Bolton for Choreodrome, 15' (2021)

Heartland, TBB, commissioned by The Sunday Boys and Corridor of Light Festival with poetry by Deanna Rodger and Robert Montgomery in collaboration with Emergency Exit Arts, 4' (2021)

Pay the Piper, commissioned for Glyndebourne Youth Opera with librettist Hazel Gould and Balancing the Score, 20' of 60' (2022)

Tin Man, ballet for horn, cello, percussion and electronics, commissioned by Joss Arnott Dance Company with funding from the RPS Drummond Fund, PRS, and Arts Council England, 45' (2022)

To the Shore, fanfare for 3 trumpets, commissioned for the trumpeters of LPO for the opening of the Glyndebourne Festival 1'30" (2022)

Drought, opera with libretto by Niall Campbell for soprano, mezzo-soprano, chamber orchestra and electronics. Premiered by RNCM singers and BBC Philharmonic with funding from AHRC, 45' (2022)

Sonnet 43, symphony orchestra, commissioned by the CBSO for Sounds New, 4' (2023)

Bridges, chamber orchestra, commissioned for Young Sinfonia, 10' (2023)

Electric Aeroplanes, saxophone quartet, commissioned by Laefer Quartet, 10' (2023)

ii. Songs / Electronic Tracks by Norrisette. Complete discography available at <https://norrisette.bandcamp.com/>

2020 (EP) by Norrisette (2020)

1. A Face That Isn't You
2. Angel
3. Wish That I Could
4. Secret Code
5. Prayer
6. Leaves

Alien (EP) by Norrisette (2020)

1. Not Fair
2. Android Jenny
3. Planet Earth Viewed From The Moon
4. Permission To Land

Christmas Can Wait (Single) by Norrisette (2020)

Paper (EP) by Norrisette (2021)

1. Unread
2. Sheets of Paper
3. Ink
4. Inside The Second Dimension

When (Single) by Norrisette (2021)

When (Remix) by Norrisette (2021)

Future Dream (EP) by Norrisette (2021)

1. Hydra
2. Old Name
3. Bone Forest
4. Prometheus

Human (EP) by Norrisette (2022) featuring samples from PRiSM SampleRNN

1. The Half Of It
2. Human
3. Reservoir

4. Whale House

Wild Being (Single) by Norrisette (2022)

Metal Hotel (EP) by Norrisette (2022)

1. Metal Hotel
2. Little Lights
3. Ribcage
4. A Quiet Death

Fluffwerk (Single) by Norrisette (2023)

Weird Party (EP) by Norrisette (2023)

1. Metal Hotel
2. Wild Being
3. Prometheus
4. Whale House
5. Fluffwerk
6. A Quiet Death

Appendix B: Selected List of Performances (since October 2019)

i. Anna Appleby performances (my own compositions performed by other artists)

25th OCTOBER 2019

Performance of *Knocking* by harpist Eira Lynn Jones at Harp on Wight International Festival

10th NOVEMBER 2019

Performance of *The Manchester Peace Song Cycle* at Manchester Cathedral

18th NOVEMBER 2019

Performance of *From the River* at the Royal Opera House Crush Room with mezzo-soprano Stephanie Wake-Edwards and pianist Matthew Fletcher

2nd DECEMBER 2019

Preview performance of *Head Above Water* piano duet created for Joss Arnott Dance with pianists Andrea Emanuele and Teresa Desiderio at CRAL del Banco di Sicilia, via Rosolino Pilo, Palermo, Italy

12th DECEMBER 2019

US Premiere of *Knocking* with Shana Norton at St David's Episcopal Church, Austin, Texas

4th SEPTEMBER 2020

Online performance of *Hrakningar* with Nordic Viola at Orkney International Science Festival

6th SEPTEMBER 2020

Performance of *Winds of Iona* with Helen Lacey at Boco Arts Cuckmere Festival

20th NOVEMBER 2020

Online premiere of *13.8 Billion Years* with saxophonist Amy Green for Riot Ensemble / Zeitgeist / HCMF commission

27th APRIL 2021

Online concert with Nordic Viola and Ear To The Ground for 'Art Making in the Anthropocene' featuring *Hrakningar*

1st OCTOBER 2021

World premiere of *Dust Mouth* with Piatti Quartet at Stapleford Granary

6th OCTOBER 2021

Online performance of *Uptake* with University of Liverpool

21st and 22nd OCTOBER 2021

Premiere of *Heartland* with The Sunday Boys at Corridor of Light Festival, Manchester

22nd NOVEMBER 2021

Live premiere of *13.8 Billion Years* with Amy Green (Riot Ensemble) at HCMF

25th, 26th, 27th FEBRUARY 2022

Premiere of *Pay the Piper* with Glyndebourne Youth Opera

MARCH-JUNE 2022

Premiere and first UK tour of *Tin Man* with Joss Arnott Dance and Psappa

21st MAY 2022

Premiere of fanfare *To the Shore* with London Symphony Orchestra trumpeters to open Glyndebourne Festival

26th OCTOBER 2022

Premiere of *Drought* at Media City UK with BBC Philharmonic conducted by Jack Sheen. Libretto by Niall Campell. Directed by Charlie Sinclair. Starring Sally Pitts and Lila Chrisp.

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2022

Second UK tour of *Tin Man* with Joss Arnott Dance

29th JANUARY 2023

Premiere of *Sonnet 43* with CBSO conducted by Clark Rundell for 'Sounds New'

MAY-SEPTEMBER 2023

Third UK tour of *Tin Man* with Joss Arnott Dance.

11th and 15th JUNE 2023

European tour of *1967 in the Red House* with the Sunday Boys: Paris and Bologna.

15th JULY 2023

Premiere with Young Sinfonia at Sage Gateshead.

19th JULY 2023

Performance of *Reservoir* at Kings Place with Riot Ensemble, Hannah Williams and Stephanie Lamprea.

ii. Norrisette performances (performing my own songs and electronic music)

23rd SEPTEMBER 2021

Support for Sylvette at Deaf Institute, Manchester

9th DECEMBER 2021

Headline at FLUFF # 1, Fuel Café Bar, Manchester

27th APRIL 2022

Headline at FLUFF # 3, Fuel Café Bar, Manchester

20th JUNE 2022

Support at Feline Fest # 2, Night & Day Café, Manchester

25th JUNE 2022

Support for Veneer at Dulcimer, Manchester

23rd JULY 2022

Solo set on Nebula Stage at Bluedot Festival, Jodrell Bank, Cheshire

28th SEPTEMBER 2022

Support for Krapka:Koma at Castle Hotel, Manchester

8th OCTOBER 2022

Headline at METAL HOTEL, Aatma, Manchester

11th NOVEMBER 2022

Headline at AUTUMN NIGHT, International Anthony Burgess Foundation, Manchester

19th NOVEMBER 2022

Support for Scatterchild at Lion's Den, Manchester

9th FEBRUARY 2023

Headline at FLUFF # 7, Fuel Café Bar, Manchester

17th MARCH 2023

Support at EVIL THINGS # 2, Off the Square, Manchester

8th APRIL 2023

First DJ gig for Sounds From the Other City Festival takeover at Feel Good Café,
Manchester

22nd APRIL 2023

Solo set on 33 Oldham Street stage at Intermission Festival, Manchester

30th APRIL 2023

DJ and promotion for FLUFF at Sounds From the Other City Festival, Salford

26th MAY 2023

Headline at Fuel Café Bar, Manchester

27th MAY 2023

Solo set at Low Four Studio Festival, Manchester

5th JUNE 2023

Support set for Haru Nemuri world tour at The Peer Hat, Manchester

8th JULY 2023

Support set for Anna Meredith and the RNCM Festival Orchestra at Manchester International Festival

Appendix C: First Draft of *Drought* Libretto by Niall Campbell

Appendix C is available at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/m5sz6ocz34z73xvke6dja/h?dl=0&rlkey=0phdbkae3qs6o7tqx85olbxx>

Appendix D: Final *Drought* Libretto by Niall Campbell

Appendix D is available at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/jt4aov9evvew5je92xfe9/h?dl=0&rlkey=2o307b8aa3067z4ekhbwcs622>