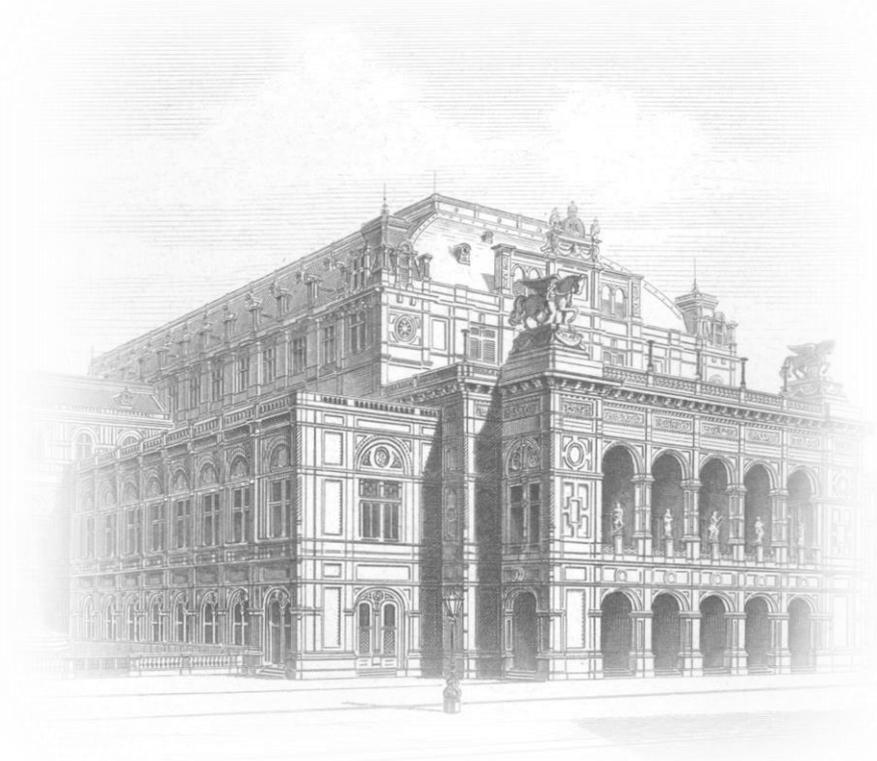


Opera Studies Day 2018

9.00am–5.00pm, Saturday 14 July 2018

Adam Concert Room, New Zealand School of Music – Te Kōkī
Victoria University of Wellington



Schedule

9.00am	Arrivals
9.15am	Welcome
9.30am	Session 1 – London Contexts Nicola Saker (Katherine Mansfield Birthplace Society) 'The Thoroughly Musical Mansfield' Sarah Chesney (University of Oxford) 'Glorious Queen or Spanish Schoolgirl? Rossini's <i>Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra</i> in London'
10.30am	Session 2 – Staging and Production Sally Victoria Blackwood (Sydney Conservatorium) 'A critical analysis of the auteur creation of <i>Project Faust</i> opera/ballet' Georgia Jamieson Emms (NZSM, VUW) 'A Very Kiwi <i>Figaro</i> '
11.30am	Morning Break
11.45am	Plenary 1 Kenneth Young (NZSM, VUW) 'How Can I Help: A Conductor's Role'
12.30pm	Plenary 2 John Davidson (Classics, VUW) 'Shadows of classical antiquity in modern opera'
1.15pm	Lunch
2.15pm	Session 3 – Operatic Psychologies Margaret Medlyn (NZSM, VUW) '"The Pagan Madness": Opera's Heroines in Negotiation with Hysteria' Corrina Connor (NZSM, VUW) '"Wie leichtsinnig doch diese Männer sind!": <i>Die Fledermaus</i> at the Court Opera' Olivia Lucas (NZSM, VUW) 'Analysing the Operatic Scream'
3.45pm	Afternoon Break
4.00pm	Plenary 3 Nonnita Rees (Creative New Zealand) 'Opera – an art for all New Zealanders? Creative New Zealand's current and future support for opera in Aotearoa'
4.45pm	Closing Questions and Remarks
5.00pm	Finish

Abstracts

Sally Victoria Blackwood – Sydney Conservatorium of Music

A critical analysis of the auteur creation of *Project Faust* opera/ballet

Project Faust is a new opera fusion work conceptualised and created by Sally Blackwood for Louisville Ballet and Kentucky Opera. This 2018 world premiere production was created over an extended creative development period of two years by an ensemble of opera and ballet artists, led by Sally Blackwood and a creative team from the US, UK and Australia. The ensemble developed a performance language and storytelling aesthetic that aims to step outside the bounds of both opera and ballet for the creation of a new and innovative hybrid art form with a strong political voice. *Project Faust* asks: What's your price? What would you sell your soul for?

Sally Blackwood is an opera director, specialising in the creation of new operatic forms. Sally has developed an innovative integrated method for collaborative interdisciplinary performance practice in the creation of hybrid forms of opera, including opera/ballet work. *Project Faust* forms an element of Sally's DMA research examining the curation of opera in contemporary culture and its role in examining gender bias and power relationships in the formation of personal and national identity through performance. *Project Faust* relates to the contemporary dialogue concerning the future direction of opera. The work aims to explore, redefine and examine the assimilation and displacement of "opera" into contemporary culture. The creative research explores a deeper understanding and relationship between the medium of grand opera, operatic storytelling, and contemporary opera/music performance. As the curator of this creative research Sally interrogates and experiments with content and form through practice-based research in performance and theoretical critical analysis.

Sarah Chesney – University of Oxford

Glorious Queen or Spanish Schoolgirl? Rossini's *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra* in London

Nineteenth-century Londoners were accustomed to seeing their country on stage. English-language operas and prose dramas frequently adopted an English setting, or adapted British history. But an Italian opera based on English history was unusual. In this paper, I wish to explore how Italian – and particularly Rossini's – operatic style and subject affected *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra's* reception in London in 1818, following its premiere in Naples three years earlier.

Elisabetta was Rossini's second opera to appear in London, just six weeks after his first, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. This first production of *Il barbiere* subsequently altered audience perceptions of *Elisabetta*. Critics branded Rossini a comic composer and felt he had not treated *Elisabetta's* subject seriously enough. Compounding this view, London's *Elisabetta*, the French soprano Josephine Fodor, had also sung the prima donna role of Rosina in *Il barbiere*. Further, the King's Theatre management had deprived Londoners of other serious opera that season due to cost-saving and revenue-boosting measures. Despite reviews criticising Rossini's music as unoriginal (a charge that would continue for years), the opera mostly conformed to Londoners' expectations of Italian style. I will take a closer look at the cuts and changes made for the London performance to examine how they exacerbated *Elisabetta's* characterisation as

rash and despotic monarch. Such a depiction contradicted the glorified image of Queen Elizabeth I already largely established in Regency England.

Corrina Connor – Victoria University of Wellington (NZSM)

'Wie leichtsinnig doch diese Männer sind!': *Die Fledermaus* at the Court Opera

My paper discusses the performances of Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* at Vienna's imperial court opera (1894–1897), drawing together the circumstances of its transition from the Theater an der Wien to the Hofoper with the social implications for masculinity of recent medical, literary, and political change. Scholars have long identified a paradigmatic shift in thought about gender and sexuality in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, specifically its medicalization, led primarily by the medical-psychiatric research of physicians including Emil Kraepelin, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and Albert Moll. Furthermore, the experience of masculinity became a dominant theme in Austrian literature, which young authors, notably Schnitzler and Hofmannsthal, explored in their writing. Within their work, an emerging picture of masculinity as a more multi-dimensional construction was often linked, implicitly and explicitly, with nationality and social status. At the same time, the political climate of Vienna underwent a significant shift, as the overt nationalism espoused by Georg von Schönerer and Karl Lueger, spelled a definitive end to the Liberal era. In this context, *Die Fledermaus* has been regarded as a symbol of nostalgia, an example of operatic *Heimatkunst* providing refuge and solace for a Vienna disquieted by social upheaval. However, I argue that new insight may be gained by reading this 'second premiere' of *Die Fledermaus* as a product of the 1890s, showing especially how aspects of modern medicalized Viennese masculinities could be reified on stage.

Georgia Jamieson Emms – Victoria University of Wellington (NZSM)

A Very Kiwi Figaro

If not packaged correctly, opera doesn't sound particularly attractive to the average New Zealander: sit for three hours watching a show in an entirely foreign language that was written 300 years ago. In many New Zealand cities we are overwhelmed with the choice of arts, theatre and musical events, not to mention the full range of home media options. Georgia Jamieson Emms, founder of Wanderlust Opera, and lecturer in Diction and Language for singers at the NZ School of Music is presently tackling the problem of an aging opera audience. One of her tried-and-tested solutions is simple: sing in English.

Singing in the language of the audience is nothing new. In Germany one can attend *Orpheus in der Unterwelt*, in England *The Daughter of the Regiment*, in France *La Flûte enchantée* and in Hungary *A víg özvegy* (The Merry Widow). But a translation for luring the locals of Palmerston North, Carterton and Gisborne (to name a few) has to be relevant and relatable, funny and with a distinctly Kiwi flavour.

Drawing on her experience of translating Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and *The Marriage of Figaro* from Italian into English for a 21st century audience, Georgia will illuminate on her creative process and methodology as a translator, and the practicalities and challenges of revamping a classic.

Olivia Lucas – Victoria University of Wellington (NZSM)

Analysing the Operatic Scream

In Act II of *Tristan und Isolde*, as the love duet strains toward musical and sexual climax, the moment of would-be arrival is destroyed by Brangäne's 'piercing scream' (*grelle schrei*) as the lovers are discovered by King Marke. The scream is scored, showing its rhythmic placement, but no pitch is indicated; this is not a stylized scream rendered by the singing voice, but a genuine emotional, dramatic and musical rupture. Following Wagner's persistent use of the scored, but non-notated scream, in which character's emotions rupture the capacity of singing, the world of opera has been filled with screams depicting both emotional ruptures, as characters' experiences become so intense as to overflow their capacity for song, and bodily ruptures, as characters experience shocking physical pain, often while being murdered.

Whereas screams in opera present moments of rupture, screaming permeates popular music to the extent of forming a vocal performance norm in certain genres. Extreme metal's incomprehensibly screamed vocals have long vexed scholars, and have been analysed variably as efforts to transcend the tyranny of lexical meaning and as simple textural effect that compliments the menace of distorted guitar timbres.

Analysing screams in contexts where they are musically normalised affords opportunities to critically revisit contexts in which they are interruptive. This paper offers an analysis of screaming that attempts to bring together screams as operatic rupture and screams as musical surface, screams as involuntary release of inner subjectivity and screams as externalised acts of sonic creativity.

Margaret Medlyn – Victoria University of Wellington (NZSM)

'The Pagan Madness': Opera's Heroines in Negotiation with Hysteria

Of hysteria's many faces, vulnerability most lends itself to the circumstances of the operatic heroine. Many heroines are victims, often driven by their misfortunes to madness through sadness and grief, which, while exacerbating their positions, does make for some wonderful heart-rending music on the way.

But what is hysteria or 'pagan madness'? Which heroines show signs of hysteria? How is it embodied? Azucena in *Il trovatore* is a character so traumatised by grief that she seems to act irrationally, and without a plan. Kundry, famously called a hysteric, can be understood to be suffering from what today would be a post-traumatic stress disorder. Is dwelling on and singing about one's grief and committing to impulsive actions in distress a sign of hysteria? The term pagan madness draws up primal memories, limbic memories of prehistoric rites, ritual and trance – witness Elektra's dance of grief at the end of the opera when, task done, she drops dead. Can the behaviour of some operatic heroines also be linked to ritualistic rites of passage?

In this presentation I will examine the transitive state, the human state, of the circumstances of grief and stress that offer up the rich narratives that are mined by operatic composers. Steering a course between the victim and the oppression of the female, I focus on three operatic heroines who submit to the attractive force that makes the compelling stories and music of *Elektra*, *Parsifal* and *Il trovatore*.

Nicola Saker – Katherine Mansfield Birthplace Society
The Thoroughly Musical Mansfield

Katherine Mansfield first known professional ambition was to be a musician. She studied piano and then, with considerable persistence, the cello. It was only when her parents denied this ambition that she settled on being a writer. Her musicality is evident throughout her written work, both in terms of its structure and also its imagery.

Music was woven into Mansfield's life experience, one example being when she left London in 1908 to join her lover, Garnet Trowell, who was working as a violinist in the orchestra of the Moody Manners Opera Company. She briefly worked in the chorus of the company (she had a "pure, high soprano" according to her friend, Ida Baker, who also musically trained).

'The Thoroughly Musical Mansfield' will draw upon Nicola Saker's thesis 'The Performative Katherine Mansfield' (VUW, 2017) to explore this little-known aspect of New Zealand's most famous short story writer.

Plenary Abstracts

John Davidson – Victoria University of Wellington (Classics)
Shadows of classical antiquity in modern opera

This paper considers the extent to which opera from Wagner onwards displays an engagement with Greek literature in general and specifically tragedy, time constraints meaning that the Roman dimension must be omitted. Greek tragedy was held up as a model for the very development of opera in the Renaissance, and subsequent eras have certainly not lost sight of it. As Gluck had done before him, Wagner turned back to the Greek past as a way of escaping what seemed to be unnecessary accretions to the art form. His ideal theatre, which ultimately found realization in Bayreuth, owed its basic design to the theatre of Dionysus in Athens, albeit mediated through Roman theatre buildings. The structure of the *Ring* builds to a great extent on the Aeschylean trilogy, the *Oresteia*. These Greek tragedies are based on the myths surrounding the House of Atreus, the same cycle which lies behind the Strauss/Hofmannsthal *Elektra*, another work to be considered, along with works such as Xenakis' *Oresteia* and Taneyev's more expansive treatment of the same subject. As time allows, operas based on the Theban cycle will also be discussed, such as Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, Enescu's *Oedipe*, Turnage's *Greek*, and Anderson's *Thebans*. Also related to Thebes is the story of Dionysus' triumph and the destruction of King Pentheus. The best known modern operatic version of this is Henze's *The Bassarids*, although a 'masked version of it can be seen in Symanowski's *King Roger*. In the discussion, both the libretto and the music may be taken into account.

Nonnita Rees – Creative New Zealand
Opera – an art for all New Zealanders? Creative New Zealand's current support for opera in Aotearoa

During 2015 Creative New Zealand reviewed its funding, priorities and initiatives for supporting opera in New Zealand. It looked at the state of play of opera in New Zealand, current international trends and issues for opera in contemporary New Zealand and made recommendations on Creative New Zealand's support for opera up to 2020. A role for

one professional opera company was established within the Arts Council's **Totara** (Arts Leadership) programme to serve Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. Other opera companies and opera projects are supported through the **Kahikatea** (Arts Development) and its contestable grants programmes. In addition to mainstage productions from the national opera company, festivals and orchestras are also presenting operatic repertoire and the quality of singing by choirs, opera singers and the training offered for these artists is exceptional by international standards. Excellent outreach and educational programmes are available in various art forms including opera.

Looking to the future Creative New Zealand has announced that its approach to investment in the arts will feature diversity and reach, dynamic and resilient arts. Will opera in the twenty-first century continue to be a major player in the New Zealand arts scene?

Kenneth Young – Victoria University of Wellington (NZSM)

How Can I Help: A Conductor's Role

A Conservatorium/School of Music operatic production necessarily requires a certain suspension of the sort of practices and expectations that a conductor might have when working in a professional opera company situation. The students are learning a new craft, they're very anxious about it, and so a conductor is much more of a contributing facilitator in these circumstances rather than a 'Musical Director.' The vocal tutors have a certain agenda for each student which will be dependent on where they are in their development. The director, meanwhile, has a performance to achieve with students not experienced at responding to a director's requests and considerations. The standard will vary from cast to cast, soloist to soloist.

Meantime, the student orchestra, who themselves are not experienced in accompanying an opera, let alone playing in a pit, require extra attention. Having the orchestra, accurate, supportive, attentive and consistent for the vocal students is of prime importance.

Like any 'first' in a person's life; the manner of how the production proceeds can be of pivotal significance for all the students, orchestra and casts. Much depends on how the conductor assimilates the varied requirements and responds to them.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everybody who contributed their time, energy, and scholarship to the Opera Studies Day, and especially our three plenary speakers, Nonnita Rees, Kenneth Youth, and John Davidson.

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