

PORTFOLIO OF COMPOSITIONS
**Towards a New Aesthetic in Contemporary Instrumental Ensemble,
Vocal and Chamber Opera Composition**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

by

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ABSTRACT

This submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy focuses on works for large instrumental ensemble in conjunction with the voice. Instrumental ensemble and vocal mediums such as the orchestral art song, the song cycle and the opera in one act, provide platforms to explore the expressiveness of the lyrical dramatic voice and the dialectic tension between composing for the solo voice with a range of instrumental ensemble forces. The portfolio of compositions includes the orchestral song, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance*; the orchestral song trilogy, *Spirit Songs*; and the opera in one act, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*. Issues of composition technique, vocal expression and operatic narrative are examined and in addition the three named works explore notions of post-colonial heroic representation of subjects that might not usually attract ideological recognition in Western European art music contexts. Methods for developing inclusive, post-modern musical language for the mixed instrumental and vocal ensemble are explored; including the employment of spoken word expression and the integration of popular music idioms within contemporary Western European art music contexts.

In the writing of lyrics for the songs and libretto for the opera, increased responsibility is assumed in the completion of vocal works in addition to musical consideration to find the effects on the works when the roles of composer and writer are combined. With the opera in one act for solo voice, forming the major contribution to the portfolio, critical components that lead to effective music drama are assessed.

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INTRODUCTION

This commentary to the portfolio of compositions comprises three main sections: the first section gives an overview of the composition techniques that are generic to all of the works; the second is an analysis of individual compositions and the contexts that underpin them; and the third section concentrates on the largest work in the thesis, an opera in one act for solo voice. Beginning with solo instrumental compositions, increasingly larger forms are employed as mediums for exploration in instrumental ensemble composition technique and vocal expression towards finding a aesthetic that offers a more inclusive musical language for Western European art music forms. Experimentation in the smaller works is reviewed and employed, as appropriate, in the larger works.

The instrumental ensemble has provided an effective medium of exploration for this thesis. I set up the Shirley Thompson Ensemble in 1995 with the aim of employing varied and diverse instrumental combinations for performance. Most often the ensemble comprised a small string section with one or two additional woodwind or brass instruments, percussion (usually the drum kit) and sometimes the voice. The Shirley Thompson Ensemble was inspired by the rise in composer-led ensembles performing at the time, such as the Steve Martland Band and the Steve Reich Ensemble. These ensembles suggested to the composer a fresh take on the presentation of art music for the ensemble and perhaps a shift from the ensembles that mostly performed what might be described as modernist, 'difficult' music. On the contrary the composer-led ensembles mentioned appeared to relish the employment of sometimes pulse-led, music with the inclusion of the drum kit, shifting consonant harmonic textures and instrumental scoring drawn from popular music idioms.

Once I formed my own ensemble, I took the opportunity to explore a post-modern approach to composing for the medium. After previous explorations in Second Viennese School music styles, post-Stravinsky excursions and experimentation with 'complex' processes, I filtered 'serious' conventions and absorbed them into a musical language that was becoming increasingly harmonically consonant, sometimes pulse-led and integrated with idioms from popular music styles. I aimed to communicate to and gain the interest from a diverse, mass-mediated listener. A comparison could be made here with the recent and commercially successful film, *Atonement*, where the director Joe Wright, introduces the hymn, *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*, by Hubert Parry into the original film score with the aim of triggering mass nostalgia and thereby universal references. I employed a comparable composition technique in a previous work, *New Nation Rising: A 21st Century Symphony* (2003), (completed before the making of *Atonement*) where universally recognisable music extracts were employed within original thematic material to evoke nostalgia and make an audio linguistic connection to the listener.

The aim with the works in this submission is to explore the notion of a 'new aesthetic', that continues from the experimentation outlined above. Through the medium of the Western European instrumental ensemble in conjunction with the solo voice, a range of compositional issues as well as accompanying contextual concerns are examined. Before exploring composition for the instrumental ensemble, the medium of the piano is briefly employed to examine technical compositional issues. The submission continues with, what are considered to be, progressively larger mediums such as the orchestral song and orchestral song cycle, culminating in the

composition of an opera in one act. Bjorn Heile suggests ‘*there has been a small paradigm shift in the arts and humanities from “text” or “discourse” scholarship to “performance” and “the performative” and “the body” or “the bodily” exemplified in the field of opera/music theatre creativity and performance.*’¹ I interpret this comment by Bjorn Heile to mean a shift in focus from complex, difficult scores that may be considered typical of a modernist approach to composition, to a consideration of the levels of creativity that the performer might bring to the realisation of a score. To this end I compose with the potential creative contribution by the performer in mind and this is perhaps best exemplified in the vocal works where dependence on the unique ability of the performer is pivotal.

This thesis also considers post-colonial issues that arise from my focus on narratives from territories previously colonised by Western Europe and specifically from Africa and the Caribbean. The impact of a post-colonial approach, it is suggested, will contribute to the notion of a ‘new aesthetic’ in contemporary classical composition. The observation by Hans Keller that ‘*great music diversifies a unity; mere good music unites diverse elements*’² will come to bear on this submission. While the employment of diverse stylistic compositional components will be explored, the aim of the works will be to achieve a synthesis towards a ‘new aesthetic’ containing these elements. Through the creative composition process it is intended that a distinct contribution will be made to the field and some significant contextual issues examined.

¹ B. Heile, *Recent Approaches to Experimental Music Theatre and Contemporary Opera*, (Oxford: 2006)

² H. Keller in J. Dunsby, *Thematic and Motivic Analysis* (Cambridge: 2002)

COMPOSITION TECHNIQUES: AN OVERVIEW

*'The independent, aesthetically not further reducible unit of musical thought in every composition is the theme... the musical microcosm... Everything in the structure is a spontaneous continuation of the theme, conditioned and shaped by it, controlled and fulfilled by it.'*³

Several compositional techniques are employed in this portfolio with the aim of attaining a post-modernist 'new aesthetic' in contemporary instrumental ensemble, vocal and chamber opera composition. Focus is placed first of all on attaining coherency of thematic material, harmonic functionality and clear musical lines. To achieve coherency in these domains within the compositions, several methods are employed. They include the following:

- thematic working
- polyphonic functionality
- balancing self-prescribed harmonic 'consonance' and 'dissonance'
- harmonic stasis
- regular time signatures and extensive syncopation
- infusing popular music idioms
- creating narrative-led structures

The composition techniques outlined are applied to find their effectiveness in the creation of a variety of instrumental and vocal works and will be identified through the thesis.

Thematic working

Several compositions are employed to develop thematic working procedures. In the work *A Little Rain*, the aim is to discover the possibilities of developing limited pitch material in the creation of a short piano work. Starting with a single note, B above middle C, I found that significant variation could be gained by simply altering the rhythm of the note. With the semi-quaver B as the main component in the thematic material, constantly altering position in the proceeding 4/4 bars, significant variation was developed as well as syncopation that added beneficial complexity to the effects of the method. While developing limited pitch material in the passage, notes forming an inverted E minor 11th chord were gradually added.

The employment of limited pitch material in *A Little Rain* provided a basis for developing the procedure in the employment of extended quasi-melodic motifs. The first song from the song cycle, *Tapestry*, provides an example of the method. The voice begins with a melodic phrase [A] in bar 2 and this is varied through rising pitch to form phrases A1 and A2 (bars 4 – 9). In the next section of the work a motif in bar 15 – 16 [B] in the top line of the accompaniment consisting of

³ E. Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, in J. Dunsby, *Thematic and Motivic Analysis* (Cambridge: 2002)

one bar is repeated, but with slight variation in pitch at the end of the phrase, along with an extension of the length of the phrase in bars 16 - 18 [B1].

Example 1: *Tapestry* – variation of post-tonal melodic motifs

Con moto ♩ = 76
 Legato Ad lib

mp The long line

[A]

7

mf The long line

[A2]

The motif is taken higher in pitch in bars 18 - 19 [B2] and varied in bar 19 [C] by the alternate placing of pitches within the phrase in bar 20 [C1] and bar 21 [C2]. The fourth motif in bar 26 [D] is varied through taking the pitch higher [D1] in bar 27 and then extending the length rhythmically in bar 28 [D2]. The four motifs [A, B, C and D] form the main components of the piece and serve as the thematic material throughout the song.

A third example exploring the variation of post-tonal melodic motifs is *Odyssey*, the viola concerto in one movement. The oboe in the opening bars of the piece has a melodic motif in bars 2 - 4 [A] which is developed in bars 4 - 6 by taking the phrase higher in pitch and extending the phrase with semi quaver ornamentation [A1]. In bars 6-8 the same melodic motif is varied by employing a different time signature, from 4/4 to 5/4, varying the flow of the melodic line [A2]. A melodic motif introduced in bar 8 [B] becomes the main thematic material for the solo viola throughout the work and a number of possibilities for the variation of motif B are used. The motif [B] is either fully repeated as in bar 10 or by slight variation of pitch and rhythm as in most of the following bars including in bar 11 [B1]. In bar 34, the beginning of the dramatic climax to the piece, the rhythmic element of the original melodic phrase [A] is employed in an ascending

configuration (in the solo viola, oboe, clarinet and trumpet parts) to create intensity in the thematic material [C]. The motif [C] is then varied through ascending pitch to further intensify the thematic material and build momentum in bars 36 - 54. A combination of motifs B and C produce the motif D in bar 85 and forms the thematic material for the solo viola cadenza-like section that concludes the work.

Example 2: *Odyssey* – extended post-tonal melodic variation

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Viola (Vla.) and Violin 1 (Vln. 1). The Viola part is in the alto clef (C4 on the second line) and the Violin 1 part is in the treble clef. Both are in 2/4 time. The Viola part starts with a trill (tr) and a melodic motif [A] in bar 67, which is then varied through ascending pitch in subsequent bars, marked with 'legato' and triplets. The Violin 1 part is shown below, with a dynamic marking of 'f' (forte).

Polyphonic functionality

Polyphony is explored as a function to create lush textures and dramatic climaxes and this technique is pertinent to the instrumental ensemble compositions. The use of polyphony to create dramatic climaxes is explored in the mixed ensemble work, *Voice of Change*. Here a melodic motif [A] in the soprano, mezzo-soprano and baritone parts in bar 67 becomes the foundation for a counter melody in the trumpet [B] in bar 68. The polyphonic texture is developed by variation of the motif [A] in the piano [A1] and again in bar 68. Melodic and rhythmic variation of the melodic motif [A] is explored for twenty-five bars leading to a declamatory climax of block chords, employing the original motif [A] from bars 91 – 93 and which brings the piece to a close.

In the orchestral song, *Sound the Abeng*, polyphony is again explored as a way of creating lush textures and dramatic climaxes. Here a melodic motif in bar 15 [A] is employed by the trumpet and trombone and varied by the oboe in bar 16 [A1] and then by the bassoon in bar 17 [A2] building a section of polyphony with a chromatic semi quaver motif in the lower string section (viola, cello and double bass) [B] that was created in bar 15. Using the components described, motifs [A] and [B] are developed by melodic and rhythmic variation for seventeen bars to create a dramatic climax, emphasised by a fortissimo dynamic in bar 28.

Example 3: *Sound the Abeng* – polyphonic functionality

25

S.

Ob. *f* 5 7

Bsn. 6 7

Tpt. *ff*

Tbn. *ff*

Timp.

Perc.

Vln. 1 *ff*

Vln. 2

Vla. *ff*

Vc. *ff*

Db. *ff*

The opera in one act, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*, also explores the technique of building dense polyphonic textures that lead to dramatic fortissimo climaxes as in the two previous examples (*Voice of Change* and *Sound the Abeng*). At the start of the work, in bar 1, a motif in the piccolo part [A] is varied by the flute in bar 2 [A1] and is supported by a counter motif in the bassoon, trumpet, trombone, and tuba [B] also created in bar 1. The phrase is developed in bar 3 with the oboe and trumpet to create a second counter motif [C] and the orchestral phrase is brought to a climax by employing a third counter motif with the bassoon, french horn, trombone and tuba [D] resulting in, what may be considered, a dense polyphonic texture by bar 6. The orchestral phrase as seen in bars 1 – 6 is explored through melodic and rhythmic variation from bars 8 to 14 to produce a similar effect and represents a paradigmatic example in this submission of the function of polyphony.

Balancing self-prescribed harmonic ‘consonance’ and ‘dissonance’

It is necessary to bring some perspective to the meaning of ‘consonance’ and ‘dissonance’ in the context of creating the works for this submission. With the employment of ‘consonance’ and ‘dissonance’ broadly perceived in the evolution of Western European art music as relative procedures, a more precise meaning may be best proposed through acoustic analysis. However, the context of ‘consonance’ and ‘dissonance’ in these works can be viewed as practices that were developed after the examination of serial and atonal harmonic exploration: ‘consonance’ is perceived as the employment of harmonic thematic material that is centred upon tonal centres and diatonic modes; ‘dissonance’ is perceived as the employment of harmony constructed through relatively dissonant intervals.

The assimilation of ‘consonant’ and ‘dissonant’ instrumental and orchestral harmonic passages is explored for the potential to form contrasting but coherent thematic material. Explorations in the assimilation of ‘consonant’ and ‘dissonant’ harmonic passages are employed through the following methods: firstly, by the assimilation of juxtaposed ‘consonant’ and ‘dissonant’ passages; secondly, by the creation of tonal, quasi melodic lines within ‘dissonant’ thematic material; and thirdly by interspersing brief, dissonant passages in consonant instrumental/orchestral passages. Perhaps comparison with bitonality in the harmonic procedures of works by Charles Ives, such as *Three Places in New England*, will assist in the aim to illuminate the described method.

In the orchestral song, *Voice of Change*, the juxtaposition of ‘consonant’ and ‘dissonant’ passages is explored. The work begins with tonal, consonant thematic material in bars 1 – 13 where the aim is to evoke the underlying narrative, expressing ‘hope’ and ‘change’ in local communities. The intention of this method is to associate the meaning of ‘hope’ and ‘change’ musically, through the use of varying degrees of ‘consonant’ harmony and its perceived alliance to openness and inclusiveness. A pivotal melodic line in the trumpet (bar 14) links the preceding consonant, triadic passage, with more abstract, ethereal and ‘dissonant’ chromatic material in bars 15 – 28. The ‘dissonant’ passage connects to the preceding ‘consonant’ passage by a piano entry in bar 28 that introduces a V9 – I chord in D with the trumpet carrying the major 9th note that smoothens the transition between the two harmonically contrasting passages.

The employment of tonal vocal lines and ‘dissonant’ harmonic instrumental/orchestral thematic material is explored with several of the vocal/choral compositions and will be discussed in more detail in the section Vocal Expression. However, to give an example at this juncture, the procedure was employed in the orchestral song, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance*. The work opens with shifting harmonic tonal centres: E minor in bars 2 – 5, C sharp minor bars in 5 – 7, back to E minor in bars 8 – 9, and C sharp minor in bars 10 – 11. The voice enters in bar 11 with a melodic line in the tonal centre of C sharp minor. With the climax of the opening section from bar 22, the vocal part lies in the tonal centre of B minor, but is accompanied by relatively ‘dissonant’ chromatic chords in the orchestral texture in bars 21 – 29.

The effectiveness of short interspersions of ‘dissonant’ harmonic passages within predominantly ‘consonant’ textures is used in the comedy opera songs, *Much Pride and Some Prejudices*. In the song, ‘A Rejection,’ the harmonic thematic material resides in the tonal centre C sharp major from bars 21- 28. This is interrupted by a 2-bar ‘dissonant’, chromatic motif in bars 29 – 30 along with a change of time signature, before returning to the ‘consonant’ tonal thematic material in bar 31 – 37. The ‘dissonant’, chromatic thematic material is again introduced in bars 38 – 39.

Example 4: *A Rejection* – interspersing ‘dissonant’ chromatic material

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Alto Saxophone and Trumpet. The Alto Saxophone part is written in treble clef, 3/4 time, and begins with a melodic line marked *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *f* (forte). The Trumpet part is also in treble clef, 3/4 time, and begins with a chromatic motif marked *mf* and *f*. The time signature changes to 4/4 at the end of the excerpt.

In the explorations described it was discovered that assimilation between the ‘consonant’ and ‘dissonant’ harmonic passages was best acquired through finding common harmonic connections that would link the passages seamlessly. However, it was not perceived necessary to find harmonic links in the employment of tonal vocal lines and ‘dissonant’ harmonic instrumental/orchestral thematic material, as the ‘consonant’ vocal line worked well as contrasting melodic material to the relatively ‘dissonant’ orchestral harmonic material.

Employing harmonic stasis

To create contrast and punctuation in the polyphonic passages, the interspersion of often slow-moving chords that can be dissonant or consonant, at key points in the thematic material, is explored. In the solo piano work, *Meditation*, repeated chords beginning in bar 43 for the duration of five bars, worked as a climax to end the previous section of extensive polyphony. The introduction of this slow-moving harmonically stasis chord also worked as a catalyst for

new thematic material in the following section (from bar 46). It was thereby discovered that employing slow-moving chords, after a passage of polyphonic density, could assist in the creation of strong climaxes.

In the orchestral song, *Blow the Trumpet to the New Moon*, slow-moving harmonically static chords in the string section are explored as prominent thematic material to characterise the opening section of the work (bars 1 – 28) and to contrast with the triplet quaver movement in the woodwind, brass and timpani. With the string section high in register and sustaining a chord comprised of a minor 2nd, augmented 4th, perfect 4th and then a fifth interval, the aim is to create an ethereal atmosphere. The sustained chord with relatively dissonant intervals, employed to create tension in addition to the ethereal nature of the passage from bars 2 – 11, resolves to a consonant chord beginning in bar 13. In parallel with the music, the resolution to ‘consonance’ aims to reflect the resolution of tension in the narrative of the song.

Example 5: *Blow the Trumpet to the New Moon* – employing harmonic stasis

The image shows a musical score for four string instruments: Violin 1 divisi, Violin 2, Viola, and Cello. The score is in 3/8 time and features sustained chords with a minor 2nd, augmented 4th, perfect 4th, and fifth interval. The dynamics are marked *mp*. The Violin 1 part is divided into two staves. The Cello part is marked *8^{va}* (ottava).

Harmonic static chords are used to create a comparatively ethereal atmosphere in the thematic material for Scene 2, ‘All in a Dream’, from the opera, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*. Here rhythmically articulated but slow-moving harmonic chords, characterise the passage in bars 117 – 124. A syncopated staccato triplet motif in the oboe, trumpet and flute sustain an octave with a minor second chord, while the bassoon, trombone and tuba intervene with major 7th intervallic leaps in bars 117 – 118. Sustained chords in the strings counter the triplet staccato movement as described in the woodwind and brass. The orchestral phrase of three bars (117 – 119) reaches its climax in bar 118 with a sustained, dissonant chord (carrying a predominant inverted minor 2nd that is created by a C sharp in the double bass, C natural in the cello, trumpet and oboe and B

naturals in the flute and trombone). The broken chord of predominantly perfect fifths in the harp from bar 119 adds to the ethereal atmosphere and completes the orchestral phrase.

Further to the experiments conducted above, it could be argued that the interspersion of slow-moving harmonic chords is effective in creating contrast and punctuation in the polyphonic passages. The procedure is equally effective in creating tension after an instrumental/orchestral passage of polyphonic density.

Regular time signatures and rhythmic diversity

Several of the compositions retain common time signatures throughout the duration of the work. However, within the framework of a bar it could be argued that high levels of rhythmic diversity are explored. Syncopation within bars and across the bar-lines is employed intensely to create rhythmic variety. Common time signatures are employed to support the sometimes-complex rhythmic motifs that are expressed most effectively within simple beats.

In the concerto movement for solo viola, *Odyssey*, the rhythmic interest in the solo viola part is created within the bar as can be seen in bar 9. Triplet quavers are ornamented with semi quavers and syncopation across beats of the bar. To create greater urgency and drama a rhythmic motif is employed that begins on the second beat of the triplet, syncopating the notes across the beat and across the bar-line as can be seen in bar 34. From bar 85 there is a final rhetorical flourish that develops in rhythmic complexity and increasingly higher register for 8 bars.

Example 6: *Odyssey* - rhythmic diversity within common time signatures



Syncopated rhythm within and across the bar-line has the effect of propelling the thematic material in the orchestral texture of the work, *Odyssey*. There is an example of this effect that begins in bar 1 with a motif that includes syncopation within the bar and across the bar-line in the oboe, clarinet and trumpet. A held syncopated chord in the upper strings supports the motif. The rhythmic motif in bar 1, develops with increased syncopation and rhythmic complexity inside the bar as well as syncopation across the bar-line by the end of the opening section of the piece, to produce a climax in bars 5 – 8 and introducing the entry of the solo viola in bar 8.

A syncopated rhythm forming a soul/funk riff that might usually be performed by an electronic bass is scored for the cello and bass to find if they will function as an effective alternative. This scoring is explored in the song, 'A Rejection', from the comedy opera songs *Much Pride and Some Prejudices*. After a rhetorical solo trombone opening in bars 1 – 20, the syncopated riff in the cello and double bass (bars 31 – 32) leads the thematic material except for interruptions by a

non-syncopated chromatic motif in bars 38 – 39. The alto saxophone and the trumpet in bars 41 – 42 imitate the syncopated riff that is first seen in the cello and double bass. Similarly a syncopated cello and double bass line characterises the opening of the song, ‘A Proposal’, the second song from *Much Pride and Some Prejudices*. The rhythm flows freely in bars 1 – 11 and then develops into a syncopated groove that characterises the material from bars 12 – 13. The riff in the cello and double bass is inverted to form a syncopated motif in the clarinet and alto saxophone (bars 12 – 13).

Complex syncopated rhythms within the bar and syncopation across the bar-line also characterises Scene 3, ‘A Celebration’, in the opera, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*. The thematic material at the beginning of the scene is comprised with the aim of creating propulsion in the thematic material. To achieve this, a motif, syncopated at the beginning of the phrase and comprised of a rapid movement of demi-semi-quaver notes in bar 230 is created. To compound the effect of propulsion in the woodwind in bar 230, a syncopated element is added to the counter-motifs in the rest of the orchestral texture. The syncopated motif is extended by an inversion in the flute and bassoon and displacing their entry to the fourth semi quaver of the bar with the intent of doubling the propulsive effect in the orchestral texture.

Thematic material with syncopation across the bar line characterises the vocal and orchestral texture from bar 263 – 276 where the intention is to build a climax to end the scene. The syncopated motif begins in the brass section (bar 263), low in register, ascending in pitch and increasing in dynamics from bars 263 – 266. The voice assumes the motif and is first of all doubled an octave lower by the french horn and then by the trumpet and trombone, leading to a dramatic climax in bar 276.

Infusing popular music idioms

Elements from popular music idioms are used as source material for vocal, instrumental and orchestral thematic development. Infusions of melodic motifs, rhythms and gestures styled from the genres of contemporary gospel, r’ n’ b/soul and dub step are used in the following ways including:

- the development of vocal lines
- the employment of the spoken word
- the cello and double bass functioning as the electronic bass
- the use of pulse-led instrumental lines with the drum kit or orchestral percussion

The approach in the compositions that employ popular music idioms requires clarification. The aim is to discover techniques for assimilating melodic and rhythmic nuances from the styles suggested into what may be considered contemporary classical orchestral and vocal thematic material. To speak of employing elements from popular music styles presents a broad canvass of possibilities, but I have aimed to narrow the usage to named idioms and to specify the areas of assimilation within the orchestral and vocal thematic material. It could be argued that once the melodic and rhythmic borrowings are taken out of their usual context, they no longer function as stylistic material but become entirely assimilated without evidence of their original source.

However, it could be counter-argued that the level of borrowings detected in the new thematic material provides evidence and effects of usage.

In the song *Tapestry* (from the song cycle of the same name) the idiomatic rhythm of reggae is drawn upon to form the thematic material for the piano accompaniment.

Example 7: *Tapestry* – reggae-styled rhythm

♩ = 84
VOICE

PIANO
mf

However, unlike the use of a reggae riff that is generically employed with repetition, the motif [A] in bars 14 – 15 is employed but varied and extended in bars 15 – 16 [B]. In this way, instead of using the riff conventionally, the technique of thematic variation from the genre of classical music impacts upon the motif. The borrowing of the reggae rhythm is not obvious but used with subtlety and, it might be argued, seamlessly. The bass line in the left hand of the piano with a riff that draws on reggae rhythms, exhibits thematic material that aims to function as an electronic bass guitar line.

A more obvious employment of the assimilation of popular music idioms can be found in the comedy opera songs, *Much Pride and Some Prejudices*. Here the effectiveness of the cello and double bass lines functioning in the role of the electronic bass is explored. The double bass could be employed solely in this functionality but doubling it in octaves with the cello creates, it could be considered, a stronger musical line. A funk-styled riff in the double bass and cello to accompany the vocal part in the song, ‘A Proposal’, beginning in bar 37 - 38 [A] is embellished with ascending semi-quavers to create variation of the line [B] by bar 39.

Similarly in the song, ‘A Rejection’, a funk-styled riff in the double bass and cello accompanies the vocal line in bars 34 – 35. The repeated riff is interrupted by the interspersion of a contrasting chromatic 2-bar motif throughout the orchestral thematic texture as can be seen in bars 42 – 44.

The emulation of the drum kit by orchestral percussion is experimented in several of the compositions, including *Much Pride and Some Prejudices*, *Tapestry* and *Voice of Change*. Conversely the drum kit is employed to emulate orchestral percussion. The drum kit is used in two ways within the orchestral texture: firstly, to provide pulse-led thematic material and secondly for percussive effects in the way that light percussion is employed in classical orchestral composition. In the work, *Voice of Change*, orchestral percussion is employed to

create pulse-led thematic material as can be seen in bar 17, as well as for its percussive effects in bars 2-11 with the crash cymbals and the tom toms, wind chimes and cymbals in bars 12 – 30.

Similarly in the comedy opera songs, *Much Pride and Some Prejudices* the drum kit is employed for pulse-led sections of the thematic material and as orchestral percussion for more abstract orchestral textures. Employing the drum kit in these ways is used in the song, *A Rejection*, where the drum kit is employed as light orchestral percussion in bars 1 – 20 and from bar 21 where the pulse-led music is characterised by a motif in the drum kit that draws on the idiom of hip hop.

Narrative-led structures

The creative impetus for the compositions is sometimes based upon varying degrees of narrative content, rather than by purely abstract, independent musical concepts. While creating works for various musical forms, the employment of narratives has sometimes played a role in structuring the work. The compositions with text or libretto have explicit narratives and the thematic music material has aimed to add additional layers of intent and meaning to the narrative such as subtext, metaphor and irony. The subtler narratives, or works without text or libretto, sometimes rely on the development of thematic music material derived from a programmatic or narrative source. This method of developing thematic material might be described as tone painting, but the initial impetus towards the programmatic, progresses to independence on the musical material. The process of creating structures through the use of thematic material and then with narrative impetus was explored in several works and exemplified here with two works, *A Little Rain* and *The Woman Who Refused to Dance* respectively.

In the solo piano work, *A Little Rain*, the structure of the work is based on an underlying and simple narrative about rainfall. The narrative is based on rain falling intermittently and then gradually falling more heavily. The intermittent rainfall is reflected in bars 1- 9 of the composition with the main thematic motif [A]. Gradually the rain falls more heavily and this is reflected in the work by variation of the main thematic motif [A1] from bars 9 – 16. The rainfall becomes heavier and this is reflected in the composition with the entry of the bass line in the left hand in bar 17 with motif B. The rain begins to taper off as reflected in the composition in bar 39 with a return of the motif [A1]. However, the rain does not disappear completely and this is reflected with a combination of motifs [A] and [B] to form motif [C] which brings the composition to an end. Overall, the structure of the work could be described as: A/A1/B/A/C.

The orchestral song, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance*, explores the creation of a compositional structure that employs lyrics and text as a basis for its structure. Thematic material [A] reflects the reflective ethos of the narrative in bars 1 – 10. This thematic material is varied [A1] when the voice enters in bar 11. In bar 21 a new motif [B] reflects the words with its idea of ascension. In bar 26 the motif [C] in the orchestral thematic material reflects the wistfulness of the protagonist. From bar 30 – 39 motif [C] is varied and becomes C1. In bar 40, the dramatic climax of the work and the section that carries spoken words, a new motif [D] is created in the orchestral thematic material with interspersions of [C1] through to bar 51. Bar 52 signifies the introduction to the second verse and the first motif [A] is re-introduced. The remainder of the song is symmetrical of the first part and motifs [A1] then [B] followed by motif

[C] brings the work to a close. The resulting structure can be described as:
A/A1/B/C/C1/D/A/A1/B/C.

I discovered that the compositional techniques outlined and employed to attain coherency of thematic material, in what may be described as a post-modern 'new aesthetic', may be considered effective. The compositional techniques explored were equally effective in generating thematic music material with distinct components and alternative approaches to melodic, rhythmic and harmonic procedure within the Western European art music context.

VOCAL EXPRESSION: AN INTRODUCTION

*'At such moments we touch the border of those feelings which only music can express'*⁴

The sequence of compositions in this thesis is devised to show progressive use of the compositional techniques, explored in the first chapter, from comparatively small-scale to relatively large-scale works. The compositions for voice are specifically sequenced with this purpose in mind. Beginning with a song cycle for solo voice and piano accompaniment, there follows compositions for orchestral song, including an orchestral song trilogy, and then the comedy opera songs. The opera in one act, *Nanny of the Maroons*, represents the summation in the exploration of compositional techniques. Approaches to the various forms of the art song, are described in the relevant chapters. Issues of vocal expression considered to be most pertinent to the vocal compositions include those of:

- pitch and texture
- identity and representation
- vocal performance and theatricality

The approach to composing for the voice draws on several vocal and choral traditions. These vocal forms vary broadly and include: traditional hymns such as those of Charles Wesley; the Passion music and Cantatas of J. S. Bach; the operas of Mozart; the song cycles of Schubert and Schumann; and from more recent Western European history, the vocal works of Igor Stravinsky, Luciano Berio, Benjamin Britten and John Adams. My approach to composing vocal music also draws on vernacular music traditions outside of the Western European art song lineage, such as contemporary gospel, folk, jazz and popular music idioms. With a stylistically inclusive approach to vocal composition, the aim in this series of works is to achieve coherency of the key components of the compositional technique such as pitch and texture. Elements of style and structure serve to determine the uniqueness of each work. Narrative themes exploring issues of identity and representation in the context of post-colonial discourse are, it could be asserted, a significant impetus to the compositional process of several of the vocal compositions and will be analysed in conjunction to the appropriate works.

Pitch and texture

Contemporary avant-garde composers have infrequently employed the lyrical voice as a channel of expression, it may be argued, since the beginning of the 20th century. The trend for employing instruments and orchestras as a means of experimental expression, rather than the lyrical voice, may be detected from before World War I. With the experimentation in the 'serious' song of composers such as Arnold Schoenberg in *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), a shift from tonality made for a declamation of vocal expression that was virtuosic and difficult. Instrumental and orchestral mediums potentially offered to experimental composers more options for exploring complex pitch material and, it would seem, a preferred aesthetic. It could be said that to a large extent, this trend continued through the 20th century and up until the current time. However, with some styles

⁴ J. Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (London: 1989) p.5

of post-modern composition, employment of tonality has increased in vocal composition. It may be considered that such composers as John Tavener, Arvo Part, Henryk Gorecki and sometimes John Adams are notable exponents of the use of relatively lyrical and tonal vocal lines

Having explored the employment of the voice through extended techniques, the lyrical vocal line is explored in this thesis to gain coherency in the use of pitch material. Aesthetically, the primary concern has been to create post-tonal melodic lines for the vocal medium that progress smoothly, with relatively small intervals such as major and minor seconds and thirds, and sixths as well as perfect fourth and fifth intervals. This practice is explored in several of the compositions and it is possible to draw comparisons here with the step-like style in the vocal lines of traditional hymns, contemporary gospel, folk and other vernacular styles where smooth vocal lines predominate the thematic material. This practice signifies a populist approach in the creative process and an inclination towards notions of inclusiveness in the choice of composition components.

Larger intervallic leaps, of major and minor sevenths and ninths as well as octaves are employed in the vocal lines to add variety and for dramatic effect. The pitch material explored for the voice in the works is often relatively consonant with chromatic inflections. There is frequently significant distinction between the melodic motif material employed for the voice and the instrumental lines. There is no caution in intervallic pitch material for the instruments with their generally easier facility to pitch notes. On the contrary, the aim is to fully explore the registers of the individual instrumental lines and the employment of large intervallic leaps is unrestrained. Thereby there is little compunction to be as experimental with the pitch material in the voice as this practice is explored with instrumental writing. The level of pitch exploration in the instrumental lines is represented by a paradigm example with the concerto movement for the solo viola, *Odyssey*, where the pitch material may be described as post-tonal with the absence of a distinct tonal centre or tonal centres.

The research pertaining to pitch in the vocal line has also been to discover if the juxtaposition of smooth, melodic vocal lines with mostly stepwise movement, work aesthetically with angular and large intervallic instrumental lines that build into relatively dissonant polyphonic textures. The vocal lines often develop with relatively complex and syncopated rhythms, sometimes building dense vocal and orchestral texture. When this occurs it needs to be ascertained if the density of the texture overwhelms the vocal line as prefaced earlier. For example in the orchestral song, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance*, the mezzo soprano part is required to be assertive in the dissonant, polyphonic orchestral texture in bars 15 – 18 ‘I want to fly.’ This is partly achieved by doubling the vocal line with the trumpet. The same technique is adopted in bars 26 – 29, where the trumpet again doubles the voice ‘Give me the sky.’ The orchestral song, *Blow the Trumpet to the Blue Moon*, represents a leading example of combining simple melodic pitch material with highly syncopated and rhythmically complex exploration.

Example 7: *Spirit Songs - Blow the Trumpet to the Blue Moon*

44

M-S. some - times laugh at my self

Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

As prefaced above, specific elements are employed from popular music idioms to discover if they will serve effectively as source material for what may be considered contemporary classical art music vocal expression. The use of improvised spoken word in the neo soul idiom of delivery, is possibly the most assertive of the components assumed from popular music idioms. The technique employed in the compositions are adopted from the work of Gil (Gilbert) Scott-Heron in the 1960s and 1970s who developed spoken word soul to deliver his socially and politically charged poetry to music with some vocalising. The form and style of Scott-Heron was adopted and developed by exponents of neo soul in the 1990s and latterly from the beginning of the 21st century by r' n' b'/hip hop artists. The practice of interspersing improvised spoken word, in the neo-soul idiom, with the vocal line is experimented in several of the works. Improvised spoken word interspersions are also explored with polyphonic and relatively dissonant orchestral thematic material to find its impact. This exploration is evidenced in the orchestral song, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance I* (bars 30 – 51).

The approach to pitch and texture explored in the vocal writing in this submission is considered to build on the lyrical, art song of tonal melodic properties by developing the rhythmic component with intricacy and introducing popular music song elements.

Post-colonial concerns: identity and representation

During the compositional process of this thesis one of the aims has been to discover the effectiveness of employing vocal forms as a vehicle to convey issues involving identity and representation. Historically the art song has been employed as a medium for setting poetry. Several of the vocal compositions in this submission raise issues of identity and representation as a starting point to the compositional process. Compositions including *Tapestry*, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance*, *Spirit Songs*, *Voice of Change* and *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* explore issues of identity and how to best represent their associated narratives through the conventions of Western European art music.

As a British, London-born and raised woman of Caribbean heritage, issues of identity and representation have impacted significantly on the compositional process of the works. It may be considered that much post-colonial literature deals with manifold issues of identity and representation. The loosening of political ties from European colonial powers in African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern and Asian countries manifested in the explosion of independence for many countries that began in the 1960s. The notion of exhuming 'The Other' was developed by Francophone philosophers such as Frantz Fanon and Aime Cesaire in the 1940s and 1950s. These leading existentialist thinkers on colonial activities, identified and reconfigured what colonial powers had rejected as inferior, negative or 'The Other', to be perceived as of equal importance and value. What may be considered to be a classic book by Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*,⁵ strongly expounds decolonisation and, it might be argued, became the model for anti-colonial ideology:

*'In the sphere of psycho-affective equilibrium it is responsible for an important change in the native. Perhaps we haven't sufficiently demonstrated that colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.'*⁶

The current trend in postmodernism has helped to propel the discourse on non-Eurocentric cultural narratives with studies set up for people wanting to discover and present balanced accounts of their histories and cultures. Edward Said is possibly considered to be the most influential theorist on post-colonialism through his book, *Orientalism*,⁷ which criticised the Enlightenment from the perspective of post-colonial considerations. In the book Said argues that Western intellectual notions of nationhood is entirely skewed towards ideologies of the West, although he partially retracts these ideas in his next major publication, *Culture and Imperialism*,⁸ where he suggests that Enlightenment ideals are not seen as the preserve of Europeans.⁹ However, consideration relating to notions of 'The Other' remains strident in the publication:

⁵ F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (France: 1961)

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ E. Said, *Orientalism* (London: 1978)

⁸ E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: 1994)

⁹ T. Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism* (Manchester: 1999)

*'Almost all colonial schemes begin with an assumption of native backwardness and general inadequacy to be independent, 'equal', and fit.'*¹⁰

Artistic and cultural practitioners from post-colonial new nations have progressively asserted confidence in their ancestral identities as represented in their work. Writers through several literary forms including novels, short stories and poems, have focused on issues of cultural identity and the way forward after severe erosion of the respective culture. Notable writers such as the novelist Ayi Kwei Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons*¹¹ aims to assert an African perspective to the history of the continent; Gabriel Garcia Marquez establishes Columbian culture through vivid story-telling in his works such as *Love in the Time of Cholera*¹²; and more recently Arundhati Roy with novels such as, *The God of Small Things*¹³, has contributed to the establishment of Indian literature.

Several of the vocal works in this submission assert issues of identity from an African, Caribbean perspective as well as related diasporas, in alignment with my own cultural and ideological concerns. *Tapestry*, the first vocal composition presented in the portfolio sets the poem, *Tapestry*, by Grace Nichols, a post-colonial poet of African Caribbean ancestry. In the poem she conveys her thoughts about the multi-ethnic make-up of Caribbean people and asserts her heterogeneous identity in the poem with pride, as seen in the following extract¹⁴:

Excerpt from *Tapestry* by Grace Nichols

An African countenance here
A European countenance
An American cast of cheek
An Asiatic turn of eye
...The Tapestry is mine

With centuries of political and cultural repression by European colonial powers, all kinds of narratives, including historical accounts from post-colonial countries, have been lost or submerged. *The Woman Who Refused to Dance*, *Spirit Song* and *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* represent paradigm examples of the artistic possibilities when revived narratives are employed. Each work features a female protagonist of African descent whose narrative has been mined from historical remnants and sometimes in the aural traditions of their native cultures. In the case of the work, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance I*, representing a political illustration was the impetus for creating the narrative, as there were no written texts or aural recollections available. The aim with each of the protagonists in the vocal works mentioned is to represent the women in an epic and heroic manner. As well as asserting the identities of the women from cultures that

¹⁰ E. Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, (London: 1994) p.96

¹¹ A. K. Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (London: 1973)

¹² G. M Marquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera* (Bogota: 1985)

¹³ A. Roy, *The God of Small Things* (India: 1997)

¹⁴ G. Nichols, *Tapestry* in S. Brown and I. McDonald (eds.) *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry* (Oxford: 1992)

have previously unmerited such attention, their representation also accords with feminist principles of retelling narratives from a female perspective. As told from the female perspective, previously untold histories can be transformed to accord with feminine and feminist sensitivities. My aim through the compositional process has been to transform the women from passive, voiceless individuals that are being swept along by events in their lives that they can not control, to assertive, positive characters aware of their impact and denouement.

Voice of Change, a musical representation of the first 100 days of Barack Obama in US presidential office, explores political and cultural values that are central to my own, being empathetic of the phenomenon occurring in the election of the first African American US president. The work reflects on a speech given by Barack Obama at the annual Prayer Meeting for world leaders (5 February 2009) and meditates on issues concerning the building of cohesive societies from the grassroots of communities upwards and of building peace by developing dialogue between warring factions instead of by physical combat and annihilation.

It might be questioned whether it is possible to represent credible post-modern, post-colonial values within an artistic genre that is a manifestation of European colonial hegemony? Without a critical mass of composers creating in Western European art music conventions and dealing with post-colonial issues (perhaps Anthony Davis with his opera, *Malcolm X* and Alvin Singleton with his work for speaker and orchestra, *Umoja*) the effects of the practice is in its infancy. I suggest that the aesthetic value and positive affects of the artistic endeavour possibly supersedes political encumbrances and further suggest that the means perhaps justifies the end result.

Vocal performance and theatricality

One of the aims in creating the vocal lines has been to contain the pitch within the centre of the specific vocal range so that the smoothest and fullest tone may be elicited. There has been little experimentation in these works with extended vocal technique as you might find for example in the works of Luciano Berio, including the *Sequenza III* for woman's voice (1965). The concern has been to create quasi-melodic, post-tonal vocal lines that carry the respective narratives in an inclusive, while idiosyncratic style, that may translate directly to a broad spectrum of listeners. Vocal effects in the abstract did not appear compatible with the main aim of the vocal compositions. The level of rhythmic complexity and syncopation in the lines that lean towards jazz-styled interpretation may be considered to require performers that are classically trained but with empathy for non-Western art music styles.

The theatricality of the vocal parts in the compositions is an important factor in the creative process. Although the song cycles and orchestral vocal works may be described as art songs, the theatrical element adds to the nature of the form. The aim has been to shift the vocal declamation from purely musical expression to the embodiment of personae by the vocalists in the mode of a method actor. In addition there is an expectation that the vocal performers will perform their roles in a manner associated with performers of popular music idioms, a mode that may be perceived to be outside of the conventional style of art song delivery.

The introduction of improvised spoken word components to the compositions has created, it may be considered, a cross-cultural hybrid. The spoken word element, as executed by exponents of the works, has inspired improvisatory aspects in the performances including gesticulation that has added to the theatricality of their presentation. In the contemporary gospel-inspired work, *Voice of Change*, it is intended that vocalists be choreographed in movement associated with contemporary gospel performers and it is of equal importance that the vocalists are able to render a technically musical delivery as well as a correspondingly theatrical articulation.

NEW APPROACHES TO INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLE COMPOSITION

*'...the mixing of styles which remain musically distinctive... the rejection of divisions between serious and fun music...'*¹⁵

The medium of the instrumental ensemble has evolved through the 20th and 21st centuries as a most valued vehicle for expression by contemporary classical composers. The growth in instrumental ensemble composition has occurred possibly as an alternative to composition for larger orchestral configurations. Since World War II there has been, it may be considered, far fewer opportunities for the performance of new work by the national and international orchestras whose programmes largely consist of established orchestral compositions from the classical and romantic periods and more occasionally the early to mid-20th century. The practice of the major orchestras performing classical and romantic orchestral repertoire has evolved through what may be perceived as cultural conservatism resulting in part from the need for orchestral entrepreneurs to make a profit from concerts or at least balance their budgets. To this end promoters endeavour to attract audiences by programming, what they consider to be a desire for 'established' works. The discourse between institutions and agencies about developing audiences for orchestral and especially contemporary orchestral music is intense and circular.

Compositions for the instrumental ensemble by composers such as Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Hindemith at the beginning of the 20th century, presented possibilities of how effective the medium could be as a channel for expression of new music. Instrumental ensembles now perform in a great variety of configurations and composer-led ensembles have been very important vehicles for several contemporary musicians. The versatility of the instrumental ensemble structure, as well as practical concerns about economic viability, has made the medium ideal for stylistic experimentation and development.

The medium of the instrumental ensemble has provided the facility to explore several facets of compositional technique in this thesis. Issues examined during the process include:

- orchestral texture and colour
- instrumental technique
- instrumental combinations with the sung and spoken voice

A variety of forms have been employed in the creative process of the compositions, including the orchestral song, the concerto (movement), the comedy opera song and the opera in one act. The structures for various ensemble scorings have evolved through prioritising the development of thematic material in general and in setting the lyrics, libretto and text in the vocal works in particular. For example, the form of the viola movement, *Odyssey*, is constructed through the exposition of the solo viola material. The setting of the lyrics, libretto and text in the vocal works has determined the formation of the structures for those works. In the orchestral song, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance*, the instrumental ensemble thematic material is arranged with two verses of lyrics and a middle section of spoken word text. The alternative was to structure

¹⁵ D. Strignati, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* in J. Story (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (Brighton: 1994), p.435 in T. Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism* (Manchester: 1999), p.172

the thematic material and texture first and to then make the lyrics fit around this, but the former method was employed.

Exploration of instrumental technique is employed to affect particular orchestral textures and colour rather than to create effects in individual instrumental lines. It was not a concern during the creative process to explore individual instrumental effects such as sul ponticello, col legno and microtones etc. in the strings; hyper vibrato and multi phonics etc in the wind. However, when extended instrumental techniques are employed, these are sparingly used. Focus on the employment of the cello and double bass lines in an esoterically electronic bass guitar style and of the employment of the kit drum in an orchestral percussion capacity are given particular attention.

One of the main endeavours in the ensemble compositions has been to find how far orchestral instruments and the voice can be simultaneously and equally set in the foreground. This technique is explored in a variety of scorings. It could be proposed that the use of full orchestral scoring may have offered more options in orchestration. However, it is deemed that a larger orchestra would have rendered under utilised instruments in the endeavour to allow the voice clarity in the orchestral texture. The employment of fewer instruments facilitated the exploration of dense polyphonic textures as well as offering fluidity for the varied effects of the voice.

THE COMPOSITIONS

VOICE and PIANO

Tapestry

Song cycle for female voice and piano

Texts by Grace Nicholls and Olushola Oleleye

The song cycle for voice and piano, comprising the songs *Tapestry*, *Epilogue* and *New Day* explores the variation of post-tonal melodic motifs in the vocal line and piano before advancing to the compositions for the voice and instrumental ensemble. The main discourse about the compositional process of these works is explained above. However there are three other areas of the compositional technique explored in preparation for the larger works. These include the following:

- setting the text
- developing chromaticism in the vocal line
- developing polyphonic texture in the piano
- employing popular music-styled rhythms

The reasons for setting the poems which comprise the song cycle, *Tapestry*, are referred to in an earlier section on notions of post-colonialism. The aim in setting the text is to convey a persona in the poem asserting pride and confidence in their Caribbean identity. There is no detection of vulnerability or doubt in the persona of the text and the aim of the musical setting is to reinforce the attitude.

Tapestry – Epilogue

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
From the root of the old one
A new one has sprung¹⁶

In the second song, *Epilogue*, it would have been possible to create a quietly assertive persona by setting the words with each syllable per note and placing the vocal range in the lower to middle part of the soprano voice. However, in setting the text with pitch material in the upper end of the soprano range with long held notes, an assertive declamatory affect is achieved.

The third song, *New Day*, explores the development of chromaticism in the vocal line. The pitch material is mostly diatonic until bar 40 when the introduction of chromatic notes changes the atmosphere from an open, extrovert ambience to one where there is a sudden chilliness. The diatonic line resumes from bar 44 and a warmer ambience to the song returns. A variation on the chromatic line in bar 54 recalls the chilling effect.

¹⁶ G. Nichols, *Epilogue in Caribbean Poetry* (Oxford: 1992)

Building polyphony in the first song, *Tapestry*, is a technique explored in the larger orchestral works such as, *Wildfire*, and the orchestral song cycle, *Spirit Songs*. The song cycle, *Tapestry*, begins with a homophonic passage that is interrupted in bar 15 by a melodic motif. The melodic motif is varied through the song to create a polyphonic texture in the right-hand stave. A reggae-styled riff in the bass stave aims to affect the use of an electronic bass guitar and is a technique re-visited in compositions such as the comedy opera songs, *Much Pride and Some Prejudices*. The riff is also employed as a reference to the Caribbean identity explored in the text.

ORCHESTRAL SONG

The Woman Who Refused to Dance I **Voices of Change** **Spirit Songs**

Having explored the employment of the solo voice with smaller forces in the context of the art song, exploration in vocal expression progressed to possibilities with larger instrumental groupings. The orchestral song is perceived in this context as an orchestral configuration of the art song retaining the same properties and ethos. Outside of the operatic form, *Four Last Songs* (1948) by Richard Strauss, perceived to be a widely performed orchestral song in the dramatic soprano repertoire, *Spring Symphony* (1949) by Benjamin Britten, and more recently, *Symphony No. 3* (1976) by Henryk Gorecki, provide reference points for the function of the medium with respect to this submission. I reference these works for the level of gravitas they evoke. It is the perceived spirit and ethos of these orchestral songs I aim to achieve in using the orchestral song medium and not the musical language of the works.

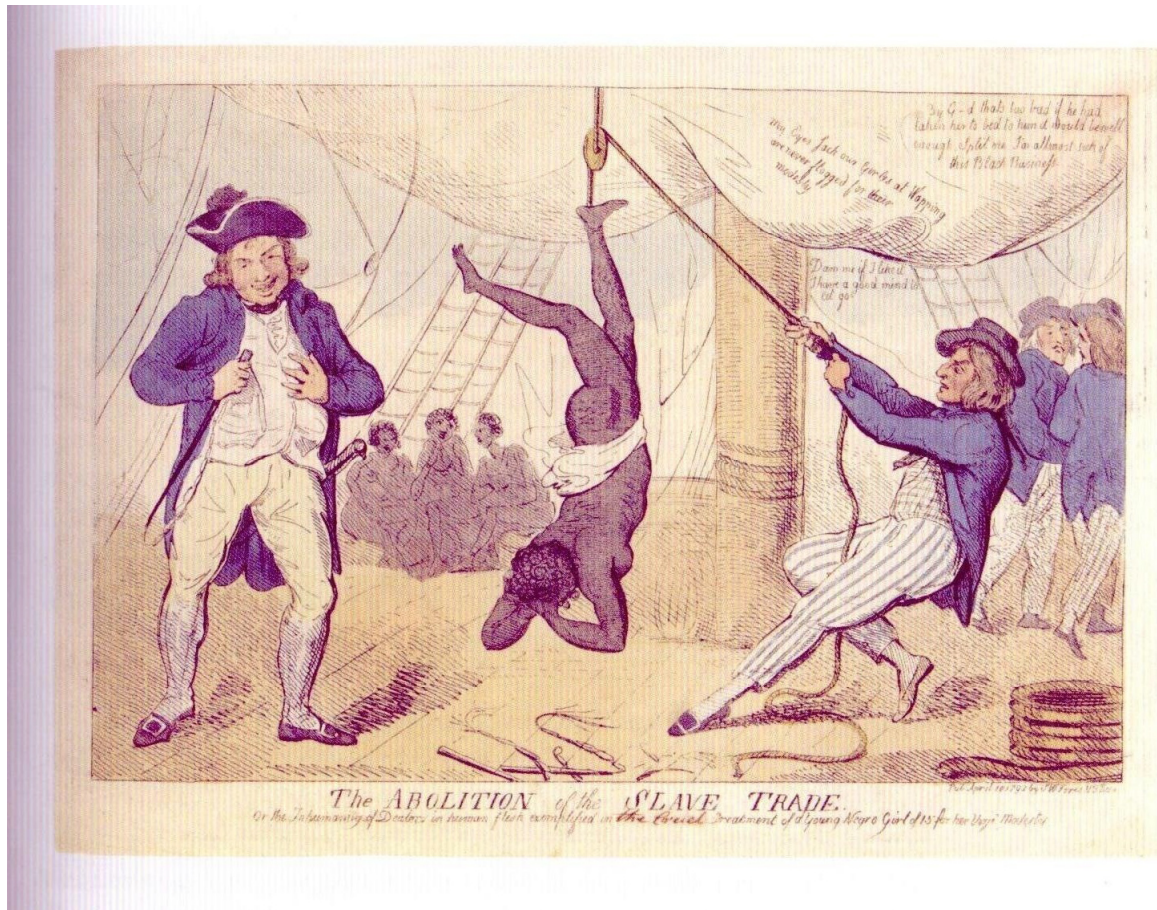
The Woman Who Refused to Dance I for female voice, violin, cello, piano and percussion

In the process of composing the orchestral song, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance I*, the following issues are focused upon:

- representation of the protagonist
- balancing orchestral textures with the vocal lines
- spoken word improvisation

Selected techniques employed in the vocal and piano work, *Tapestry*, are developed in the work for instrumental ensemble, *The Woman who Refused to Dance I*. The artefact and political illustration entitled, 'The Abolition of the Slave Trade, Sub-titled Or the Inhumanity of Dealers in human flesh exemplified in the Cruel Treatment of a Young Negro Girl of 15 for her Virgin Modesty', was the inspiration for the work that I first saw at the parliamentary exhibition, *Parliament and People: commemorating 250 years of the abolition of the transatlantic trade in enslaved African people*. The illustration is a coloured print of a woman on a slave ship who is being punished for refusing to dance (see following illustration).

1792 and a Colour Print by Isaac Cruikshank
National Maritime Museum ZBA2503



'The Abolition of the Slave Trade, Sub-titled Or the Inhumanity of Dealers in human flesh exemplified in the Cruel Treatment of a Young Negro Girl of 15 for her Virgin Modesty'

Representation

During the process of formulating a narrative for the composition, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance I*, it was necessary to contextualize the political illustration described. Through research I discovered that the young woman had refused to dance when ordered to do so by Captain Kimber. For this, she was flogged and hung as punishment for insubordination. She died five days later and William Wilberforce was to use this incident in a parliamentary speech to exemplify the brutal treatment of enslaved African people by slavers. The hand-coloured etching by Isaac Cruikshank was created and published on 10 April 1792, five days after a pivotal political speech by William Wilberforce in the House of Commons aimed at advancing the law

to abolish the trade. Political prints of this kind were popular in late eighteenth-century London and beyond.¹⁷

Musical realisation of the artefact presented archetypical post-colonial issues. I decided to create a composition that would honour and pay tribute to the woman in the illustration, now addressed as *The Woman*, and use the example to represent the very many men and women whose acts of resistance during the trans-Atlantic slave trade remain untold. Although *The Woman* had been immortalized as a faceless being in the most immodest of stances, the aim in the composition is to imbue the persona as heroic, with dignity, modesty, power, grace and spirituality. The scoring of the composition reflects images in the political illustrations: the female solo voice and spoken word artist represent *The Woman* being hung and the instrumentalists represent empathetic bystanders.

To invent a narrative about the unnamed woman in the print, a number of questions were raised: why did the woman refuse to dance on the slave ship that day? Was it a regular occurrence for slaves to refuse to dance on the ships? Was she aware of the growing political and social protest that was aimed at abolishing the trade in slaves? Who and what had she left behind in her native country in Africa? Potential responses to these questions lay the foundations for the narrative that led to the formation of the following lyrics:

The Woman Who Refused to Dance I

Give Me the Sky
I want to Fly
Away to Find My Destiny ...

No, I won't Dance!
No, there's no chance of that!
I must return
To my Maker
With my dignity
With my Spirit ...

Words by Shirley J. Thompson

Balancing orchestral textures with the vocal line

The unnamed woman, who was hung on the slave ship of Captain Kimber, retains her dignity and a determined composure through representation in the compositional process in several ways. The creation of a lamenting cello line, accompanied by chromatic chords in the piano from bars 1- 10 aims to create an atmosphere of serenity and stillness. The subtext of the narrative is that *The Woman* resists aggressive response to the depraved and inhumane behaviour of her

¹⁷ S. Farrell, M. Unwin, J. Walvin (eds.), *The British Slave Trade: Abolition, Parliament and People* (Edinburgh: 2007)

captors, as this would betray a lack of self-possession to her torturers, giving them further satisfaction. Conversely, as suggested by the lyrics, the woman reflects on the beauty of nature around her, rising above the humiliation and ugliness of the scene. The aim with the soprano line is to represent The Woman in a mystical, transcendental state. The soprano represents the exterior persona of the protagonist. However, the spoken word artist from bar 30 represents the frustrated and true feelings of The Woman. Here the intention is to build thematic material suggesting agitation to reflect the fractured emotional state of the hanging woman. Rapidly flowing semi-quavers build through the strings and piano, culminating in repeated fortissimo semi-quaver chords. The spoken word artist is instructed by the composer to contemplate and respond to the presumed state of mind of The Woman, suffering under the atrocious condition illustrated in the drawing, as well as to illuminate glimpses of her imagined past life.

In the final part of the composition from bars 52 – 82 the serenity of the first section, recalls the soulful cello line, to suggest a shift back from the inner emotional turmoil of The Woman to the outward composure expressed in the soprano role. An assertive and defiant entry by the soprano, singing high in register: ‘No, I won’t Dance!/No, there’s no Chance of that!/I Must Return/To My Maker/ With my Dignity/With my Spirit’, suggests that the unnamed woman decides to pay the ultimate price for insubordination, that is, she would rather die than live as a slave. The legacy of the trade in enslaved African people is a highly sensitive discourse in several contexts, including that of post-colonial considerations, and the work aims to represent some of the issues raised.

Spoken Word Improvisation

Introducing spoken word improvisation to the instrumental thematic material of *The Woman Who Refused to Dance I* required the development of a technique integrating the practice of spoken word improvisation and notated orchestral composition to bring this into effect. It is necessary to explain the perceived distinction between composing for a speaker or with a spoken word artist in the context of these compositions. In my experience, a speaker will declaim a text that is compiled in advance of the performance. Introducing the performance of a spoken word artist is drawing on the post-modern tradition of neo-soul artists who usually present their own poems/prose in an idiomatically neo-soul manner of improvised performance.

The spoken word exponent required an audio realisation of the score, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance I*, in order to absorb the structure and content aurally (as spoken word artists are not usually able to read notation). After sufficient absorption of the music, a discussion about the proposed narrative ensued, and cue points for the spoken words were mutually decided upon. The spoken word artist would assume the inner voice of the unnamed woman, thus providing the opportunity to develop text that would provide insights to her imagined emotional state while being hung on the slave ship. This contribution would be interlaced between the sung sections of the composition. In essence, two sides of the character of the unnamed woman are represented: the spoken word artist represents the anger, determination and tenacity of the protagonist while the soprano represents the exterior persona of poise, serenity and peaceful acquiescence. Influenced by a post-modern, eclectic approach to composition, I employed a spoken word artist

to imbue an element of improvisation and theatricality into the nature of the composition and thereby introduce increased diversity to the orchestral mix.

It was not certain that the employment of spoken word improvisation would inspire the same level of theatricality without the focus of representing a protagonist, as was exhibited in the performance of the orchestral song, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance I*. The decision about levels of theatricality lay with the spoken word artist in the moment of performance.

Voice of Change

for speaker, solo singers and instrumental ensemble

The work, *Voice of Change*, focuses on several components in the composition process. These include: employing ‘consonant’ and ‘dissonant’ passages in juxtaposition as explained earlier; integrating spoken word improvisation in the notated score as discussed in the previous orchestral song, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance*; and employing orchestral percussion in imitation of the drum kit as well as for its light percussion effects. The creative process also aimed to reinforce and reflect aspects of the political ideology and a social vision of Barack Obama, not only in the choice of text, but also in the thematic music material.

The idea of discernable passages of ‘consonance’ and ‘dissonance’ represents a paradigm example in this submission. The advent of the first one hundred days in US presidential office for Barack Obama is the focus for the work and a response to a speech by the incumbent US president. Given at the National Prayer Meeting in February 2009, the speech promotes the building of cohesive societies and the generation of peaceful communities by developing dialogue between warring factions. Moral values expounded in the speech are central to my own societal views. The theme of building cohesive societies, which is taken from the speech, is represented through the composition with the musical concept of ‘consonant’ and ‘dissonant’ passages working together effectively. The opening section of the composition from bars 1 – 14, could be described as employing ‘consonant’ musical language with the use of G major as its tonal centre. From bar 15 - 29 the harmonic material could be described as being less tonally centred with the employment of abstract, relatively dissonant harmonic language and in the context of the composition represents a passage of ‘dissonance’. The notion of unity to conclude the work is implied with the employment of a passage centred in the key of A major where a consonant tonal harmonic centre indicates coalescence in the method of the compositional process of the work.

In the work, *Voice of Change*, the spoken word element is fully written, and thereby not improvised, in contrast to the other works in the compositions that employ a spoken word artist. I created text that was based upon the content and sentiment of the National Prayer Meeting speech given by President Obama in February 2009 and created music considered to be empathetic of the content of the text. One of the challenges during the creative process was to effectively balance the content and meaning of the text with the length of the musical passages. The speaker is required to deliver the text theatrically in the persona of President Barack Obama and the challenge was to create text that afforded authenticity of the character in a performance.

Careful consideration of the language, tone and pace of the written text is afforded in the aim to achieve this.

Orchestral percussion is employed in the orchestral song, *Voice of Change*, to emulate the usual employment of the drum kit. It is employed to create a pulse-led rhythm, as can be seen in bar 17, as well as for its usual light orchestral percussive effects in bars 2-11 and with the crash cymbals and the tom toms, wind chimes and cymbals in bars 12 – 30. Performance of orchestral percussion in this context requires a performer that is able to instil the appropriate ‘feel’ in the pulse-led sections and correspondingly render the precision required of orchestral percussion performers in the orchestral context. The two skills are not generally required in contemporary classical orchestral composition and pose an extra challenge when seeking an effective exponent.

Spirit Songs – orchestral song trilogy

for solo female singer/s and large instrumental ensemble

In the orchestral song trilogy, *Spirit Songs*, the following issues were focused upon:

- creating music drama
- resolving dialectical tension between the vocal line and the orchestra
- interspersing spoken word improvisation
- developing smooth vocal lines
- balancing levels of preferred ‘dissonance’
- musical subtext

Creating music drama

The orchestral song trilogy, *Spirit Songs*, was considered as a dramatic, as well as a musical, exploration from the onset of creating the composition. The orchestral songs are conceived as scenes or episodes from an extended musical dramatic work. In fact the song, *Sound the Abeng*, is developed later on in the thesis to create the opera in one act, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*. The other two orchestral songs, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance* and *Blow the Trumpet into the New Moon*, have the potential to be developed similarly. The process for creating the narrative explicated in the previous section, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance I*, was applied to each song in the trilogy. The impetus for each of the songs is an image of a historical icon previously submerged by narratives perhaps considered to be more relevant to the Eurocentric historiography and meeting with issues being addressed in post-colonial contexts. Research to find the historical background of each image contributed to the content of the narratives drawn. The orchestral song cycle, *Spirit Songs*, is conceived as a tribute to the resilient spirit of millions of enslaved African people who were brutally forced to migrate to the Americas during the 16th to 19th centuries. The narratives of the three women featured in the song trilogy are employed because they are considered to exemplify dramatic heroic acts of resistance during the described period. The narratives also accord with my desire to create heroic narratives of hereto little known protagonists from post-colonial territories and diasporas thereof.

The creation of *Spirit Songs*, is explored for dramatic potential in representing the identities and as well as the character traits, of the protagonists. In the first song, *Sound the Abeng*, the music intends to draw a scene that portrays the protagonist as she sets off for battle with a handful of ill-equipped maroons of 17th century Jamaica, against the might of the encroaching and fully armed, British militia. In the second song, an orchestral remix (in post-modern parlance and approach) of the previous instrumental composition, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance I*, a young African woman refuses to dance on a slave ship and is hung for insubordination. In the third song, *Blow the Trumpet Into the New Moon*, Dido Belle, the daughter of a naval officer and an enslaved African woman, uses her influence as niece of the Earl of Mansfield and Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, to help bring about the Act of the Abolition of the trans-Atlantic trade in enslaved African people in 1807 while enduring lowly status and presumed vulnerability in the household.

Several components from the instrumental vocal work, *The Woman Who Refused To Dance I*, are explored in *Spirit Songs*. These include developing a compositional process to facilitate the interspersion of spoken word improvisation; developing smooth, vocal lines that may be described as bearing features of soul and gospel music vocal styles; and balancing the level of preferred ‘dissonance’ in the orchestral thematic material as explained above.

Sound the Abeng

In addition to exploring the issues mentioned above the orchestral song, *Sound the Abeng*, experiments with compositional techniques that include developing:

- increased chromaticism in the instrumental lines
- characterisation of personas through the vocal line and the orchestral thematic material
- and developing structures for the orchestral song.

After exploring increased chromaticism in the vocal line of *The Woman Who Refused to Dance I*, the technique of creating instrumental counterpoint with increased chromatic lines was used to create an atmosphere of disquiet and disturbance. In the narrative the protagonist, Queen Nanny, is suffering with deep anxieties about confronting the might of the British militia with an ill-equipped fighting force. To create a feeling of ‘anxiety’ in the orchestration, the use of trills or flutter-tonguing in the instrumental lines could have been pursued. However, the employment of chromatic notes in the oboe line (representing the Abeng¹⁸) in bar 2 and the bassoon counterpoint in bar 6 at the very beginning of the composition, set the tone of disquiet. These chromatic elements form the basic thematic material of the work and the described instrumental lines are interspersed with spiccato semi quavers in the strings from bar 16 to increase the tense mood.

¹⁸ The abeng or cow horn is a musical wind instrument mainly associated with the Maroon cultures of the Caribbean and Latin America.

The character of Queen Nanny is explained above, however, the process of developing the persona was first explored in the orchestral song, *Sound the Abeng*. Here a dramatic scene is created firstly through the text with the character of Queen Nanny setting off to battle with the British militia. Characteristics of bravery and simultaneous vulnerability are represented in the text. Accompanying traits of assertiveness and powerfulness are established as Queen Nanny urges the Villagers to pick up armaments for battle and these characteristics are reinforced in the orchestral thematic material. The vulnerability of the character is drawn in the lines of the refrain where, out of sight, Queen Nanny quietly appeals to God for guidance and deliverance from the hands of the enemy. The scene is created through the following text:

Sound the Abeng

Come Sound the Abeng
Let the drums roll
Our time for freedom has begun
Let us go forward with strength

Have Mercy Oh Creator
Oh guide us all!

Over hills and gullies,
Through wind and rain,
We must fight hard and long
To make our gains.

Have Mercy Oh Creator
Oh guide us all!

The nature of the text acts as a paradigm example of the style in which facets of the identity of the characters and their character traits are developed in the orchestral song cycle, *Spirit Songs*. As explored in the preceding vocal ensemble work, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance I*, the text aims to simultaneously convey inner thoughts and conversely exterior action by the persona that does not reflect the true emotional state of the character. This method of characterisation is sourced from operas by Mozart, such as the *Marriage of Figaro*, and can be identified in successive operatic styles from the 18th century to the present day. The character is explored in the above text by portraying the exterior persona in the verses with bold and assertive language and by showing her more vulnerable interior persona in the refrains.

The musical material enhances the outer persona in the vocal line and with the orchestral thematic material. The vocal line is wide-ranging in register, reaching the note B nearly two octaves above middle C in bar 49 with the intention of reinforcing the assertive and strident stance of the exterior persona. The vocal line is maintained high in the soprano tessitura to retain intensity in the mood of the character. Syncopated polyphony is employed as the orchestral thematic texture to achieve a feeling of propulsion and forcefulness, again reinforcing the external persona. In addition the vocal line cuts through dense polyphonic texture further amplifying the power of the protagonist.

On the contrary the refrain sections of the text, expressed as asides in the drama of the song, are almost whispered and show the vulnerability and sensitivity of Queen Nanny in the moment. 'Have Mercy Oh Creator/ Oh guide us all!' The accompanying orchestration transitions from chromatic instrumental lines and dissonant harmonic language in the verses, to diatonic vocal lines and consonant harmony in the refrains (see bar 52) to affect a softening of the persona. In the refrain section (see bars 84 – 91) the vocal line demands a swift adjustment in interpretation by the singer from a bold and assertive expression to a soft and vulnerable disposition of a person appealing for mercy. The juxtaposition of 'dissonant' to 'consonant' passages was explored earlier.

The orchestral thematic material for the orchestral song, *Sound the Abeng*, was created with two verses of prose and refrain as a basis for the thematic material. A relatively symmetrical structure of ABABC is created instead of a through-composed possibility. The following two songs in the cycle are created similarly.

The Woman Who Refused to Dance

The second song in the orchestral cycle is a remix for larger ensemble of *The Woman Who Refused to Dance I*. The issues raised in the instrumental version apply to the orchestral arrangement and as a reminder, these include:

- the exploration of protagonist representation
- narrative and lyric/prose development
- experimenting with levels of dense and dissonant orchestral thematic material while securing the clarity of the vocal line
- exploring a method of interweaving improvised spoken word improvisation in the notated composition process

Additional issues are explored in the orchestral arrangement and these include:

- the creation of greater polyphonic thematic material
- the assumption of a dramatic persona by the orchestral performers

Example 8: *Spirit Songs - The Woman Who Refused to Dance*

38

10

A

Expressively

M.S. *mf* Give me the sky

Ob.

Bsn. *mp*

Tpt.

Tbn. *mf*

Timp.

Perc. *f*

Vln. 1 *fp* *mp* *8va*

Vln. 1 *fp* *mp*

Vln. 2 *fp* *mp*

Vln. 2 *fp* *mp*

Vla. *fp* *mp*

Vla. *fp*

Vc. *mp*

Vc. *mp*

Db. *mf*

Db. *mf*

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score, page 40, starting at measure 38. The score is for a full orchestra and a solo voice (M.S.). The music is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Give me the sky" in measure 38. The orchestration includes woodwinds (Oboe, Bassoon, Trumpet, Trombone), percussion (Timpani, Percussion), and strings (Violins, Violas, Cellos, Double Basses). The score is marked with various dynamics such as *mf* (mezzo-forte), *mp* (mezzo-piano), *f* (forte), and *fp* (fortissimo). The section is labeled "A" and "Expressively". A first ending bracket spans measures 39-41. A *8va* marking is present above the first violin staff in measure 40. The page number "40" is located at the bottom right.

After creating the instrumental song, *The Woman Who Refused to Dance I*, for solo voice with the violin, cello, piano and percussion, employing a large ensemble presented the opportunity to explore greater orchestral colour and potentially transform the level of forcefulness of the work. However, the balance between the orchestra and the voice needed to be maintained. The employment of divisi, arco and pizzicato strings from the beginning of the composition is used for the purpose of building greater depth and richness in the orchestral texture than was possible in the original version of the work (see Example 8 above).

The orchestral thematic material was not created to be subservient to the vocal line. There was potential to create sparse, homophonic orchestral textures, but this option was quickly discarded as it was considered that the nature of the narrative demanded dialectical tension between the vocal line and the orchestration. The instrumental lines (instrumental performers) are perceived as ‘commentators’ and ‘bystanders’ in an empathetic way to the hanging of the unnamed woman on the ship and in this context, the orchestral instrumentalists perform an almost physical role in the shaping of the drama. The orchestral thematic material and texture form the emotionally anguished subtext to the serene, poised stance of the unnamed woman. The orchestral texture is designed to represent the frenetic activity in the mind of the protagonist. It is a concept that is explored further in the opera, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*, where the orchestra perform a similar role. Repeated glissandi in the lower strings and accented semi quavers in the full orchestra heighten the mood of turbulence on the ship and in the mind of the unnamed woman (from bar 46). After a lush, introspective opening to section B in the score when the unnamed woman reflects on her current situation, the orchestral thematic material changes in the middle section to more gritty and demonstrative and this cadences the angry response to her captivity.

The vocal line throughout the orchestral song explores the spectrum of the mezzo-soprano register with a range from G sharp below middle C to the note B, over two octaves above it. The intention was to create a vocal line that integrates aspects of jazz and soul idioms into the medium of the contemporary art song. The integrated components from jazz and soul styles are broadly considered to be in the employment of small diatonic intervals to form lines that ascend or descend in a smooth fashion in conjunction with degrees of syncopation. The intention is also to imitate improvised flourishes that a soul or jazz singer may express in a performance. The integrated components from the contemporary art song are broadly considered to be in the employment of chromaticism and frequent, large intervallic leaps. The song is through-composed, again borrowing from the art song (see Example 8 above).

Blow the Trumpet Into the New Moon

During the composition process of the third orchestral song in the cycle, *Blow the Trumpet in the New Moon*, the issues explored in the previous two songs are taken to different levels of effectiveness. For recollection, these issues include:

- representation of the protagonist in a post-colonial context
- creating narrative and lyrics after a figurative image
- achieving balance between the orchestral texture and the vocal line
- assimilating popular music and art song components

However, the focus for this song is in the creation of the narrative, lyrics and musical subtext.

Musical subtext



Dido Elizabeth Belle with her cousin in a painting previously attributed to Johann Zoffany (1779)

The interpretation of a painting by an unknown artist (though previously attributed to Johann Zoffany in 1779) that features Dido Belle at her Kenwood House home in Hampstead, London remains open to much conjecture. The orchestral song, *Blow the Trumpet Into the New Moon*, is an experiment in creating another musical narrative that aims to lionise a historical figure without factual evidence of their deeds, but by assembling significant circumstantial evidence.

The context for the narrative can be found in the Appendix (Dido Elizabeth Belle) and has been briefly explained above. Like the previous songs in this orchestral trilogy the narrative and then the libretto is created in a style that distils the essence of the presumed character traits of the protagonist as drawn from an historical image. With little factual information about Dido Belle, a scenario based on supposition and purposeful representation of heroic ideals, is developed to form the structure of the song. The aim of the narrative, lyrics and musical material is, again, to reflect the identity and presumed character traits of a persona. It was deduced from the painting of 1779 that Dido Belle is outwardly of an agreeable disposition where she is drawn as stooping behind her relative, suggesting her deference within the gentrified family. However, in discovering her potential interests and activities through book research it was further deduced that a sharp, intellectual, and politically conscious persona might lie behind the deference. Although Dido Belle was raised with the values of the 18th century English female gentry, written sources about her reveal that she had strong empathies with the working classes and the growing population of people of African descent, like herself, who were living in London at the time.¹⁹

In creating the narrative and then the libretto, the intention is to capture the possible element of subversion in the life of Dido Belle. As an accepted member of the gentry, she managed the household duties of the Mansfield family in her role as housekeeper. It was deduced through

¹⁹ English Heritage pamphlet, sponsored by the Friends of Kenwood: *Slavery and Justice – Dido Belle and Lord Mansfield* (London: 2010)

research²⁰, however, that she had empathy with the groundswell of anti-slavery sentiment that was sweeping through Britain at the time. Her possible involvement in the anti-slavery movement is drawn in the prose as follows:

Blow the Trumpet into the New Moon

It may appear
That I suit this veneer
I stand apart
And sometimes
Laugh at myself

Chorus

Blow the trumpet
Blow the trumpet in the new moon
It's time for change
Let it be now before the sun sets
Come join with us
Join with all the liberators
We're fighting for change
Blazing a trail around the world

It won't be long
Before I will see some changes.
There's been a start
I've played my part in this process.

Chorus

Blow the trumpet
Blow the trumpet in the new moon
It's time for change
Let it be now before the sun sets
Come join with us
Join with all the liberators
We're fighting for change
Blazing a trail around the world

The intention of the orchestral thematic material is that it reflects the perhaps overtly acquiescent appearance of Dido Belle but carries the layer of her personality that suggests that she is not as compliant as she might appear. A melodic line in the trumpet, that includes a prominent major 9th interval represents a clarion call and is picked up empathetically and individually by the other

²⁰ English Heritage pamphlet, sponsored by the Friends of Kenwood: *Slavery and Justice - Dido Belle and Lord Mansfield* (London: 2010)

brass and woodwind through the opening passage. The orchestration is created with the aim of producing a shimmering, ethereal atmosphere suggesting an undercurrent of subversion. This intention is created with held strings, high in register, employing open harmonic chords of fourth and fifth intervals. The tremolo timpani and intermittent wind chimes, add to the shimmering effect.

In contrast to preceding songs in the trilogy, the orchestral accompaniment is designed to be more homophonic and less polyphonic offering greater clarity to the vocal line and magnifying the air of innocence surrounding Dido Belle in the painting. The accompanying chord sequences are fairly consonant with a 3rd inversion G major configuration that moves to a questioning chord containing two perfect fourths:

Example 9: *Blow the Trumpet into the New Moon* – relatively homophonic orchestral accompaniment to the voice

The image shows a musical score for five instruments: Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Violin 2 (Vln. 2), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Db.). The score is written in 4/4 time and features a melodic line in the upper strings and a bass line in the lower strings. The dynamic marking is mezzo-forte (mf). The score is divided into two measures, with a 4/4 time signature in the first measure and a 5/4 time signature in the second measure. The melodic line consists of eighth and quarter notes, while the bass line consists of quarter and half notes. The overall texture is homophonic and clear.

The question is answered at the beginning of the chorus where an open-sounding harmonic 4th chord becomes pivotal to a fourth chord in G major. The intention with the diatonic harmonic language of the tuneful chorus is that it forms an inclusive, anti-slavery chant in which anyone is able to participate. The ABCBA structure of the song concludes with the reflective and anticipatory material reminiscent of the start of the piece with the aim of creating an atmosphere of expectation but equivocation about the possibility of the future anti-slavery movement.

The vocal line is purposefully sweet sounding, employing 3rd and 6th intervals in the melodic line to reflect what appears to be the sweet, unchallenging nature of Dido Belle. However, as stated in the lyrics, ‘It may appear/That I suit this veneer’, Dido conceals the depths to her persona. Although Dido Belle’s melodic line unfolds in a step-like way, compounding her appearance of

acquiescence, the rhythm is highly syncopated, suggesting the complexity and ideological subterfuge in her actions.

The composition process for *Spirit Songs* provided exploration into all the issues dealing with the orchestral song form pertaining to this submission as explained at the beginning of the chapter. It is considered that particularly strong advances have been made in the medium in several ways including: the creation of dramatic prose and libretto; imbuing heroic personas; developing musical subtext; interspersing spoken word improvisation; developing lyrical vocal lines with a post-modern and post-colonial approach; and creating diverse orchestral thematic material that works in partnership and not subservience to the vocal line.

LARGE INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLE

Odyssey

Concerto movement for viola and orchestra

Further to focus on the exploration of the vocal line and the dialectic tension with the instrumental ensemble, I decided to experiment with orchestral thematic material without the voice. The viola concerto movement, *Odyssey*, represents a paradigm example in this submission of the exploration in varying post-tonal melodic motifs. The work also explores syncopated rhythm within and across the bar-line and both these techniques in *Odyssey* are discussed earlier.

Providing a context to this work will illuminate the achievements made through the composition process. *Odyssey* was specially composed for a student studying viola performance as a first study, at a leading music conservatoire. The new work was required as part of a programme of two other contrasting, major, works in a final recital. It was suggested by the student that there is little choice of works that exhibit virtuoso skills in viola performance required for the final recital performance. In addition to the criteria expressed, the composition process of *Odyssey* explored the following issues:

- arpeggio effects in the solo viola line
- employing the upper register of the viola tessitura
- sustaining clarity of the solo viola through relatively dense orchestral polyphony

The post-tonal melodic motif that becomes the main thematic material for the solo viola line, requiring continual arpeggio bowing across the strings, was created through affecting the motion of being on a boat sailing over waves. The use of the motif may be considered idiomatic for the viola.

Example 10: *Odyssey* – idiomatic thematic material for the viola

The musical notation for Example 10 is written for a single viola part in bass clef. It consists of a single line of music with several measures. The first measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The second measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The third measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The fifth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The sixth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The seventh measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The eighth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The ninth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The tenth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The eleventh measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The twelfth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The thirteenth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The fourteenth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The fifteenth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The sixteenth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The notation includes various musical symbols such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings like 'mf'.

This motif is explored across the full range of the viola register, thereby exhibiting the bowing skills of the exponent and issues of intonation to what may be considered a high level of effectiveness.

Achieving clarity in the solo viola line, with what may be considered the mellow tessitura of the instrument, was a constant concern in the composition process. The aim of the orchestral thematic material is to evoke expansiveness of space and the unpredictable patterns of rippling waves. This was achieved by employing elements of the thematic motif from the solo viola line,

but by condensing the motif, so that it does not overpower the viola line (see Example 11). Shifting harmonic tonal centres in the opening of the work evokes an effect of ebbing waves.

Example 11: *Odyssey* – thematic orchestral material that supports the solo viola

14

Ob.

Cl.

Dr.

Hp.

Vla.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vc.

Db.

$E_b F_b G_b A_b$
 $B_b C_b D_b$

$E_b F_b G_b A_b$
 $B_b C_b D_b$

cresc.

cresc.

3 3 3 3 3 *cresc.* 3 3 3 3

3 3 3 3

Wildfire

for large instrumental ensemble

Wildfire is an exploration in extended chromaticism for the instrumental lines as well as in developing polyphony. These two techniques explored in the work are taken further in the orchestral song, *Sound the Abeng*, from the orchestral song cycle, *Spirit Songs* and subsequent compositions such as the opera, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*. The employment of chromaticism in the instrumental lines (and vocal lines with the songs) is a technique used in the compositional process to engender an atmosphere of anxiety, restlessness, agitation, anger etc in the instrumental or orchestral thematic material. In the work, *Wildfire*, chromaticism is a major component of the instrumental lines and begins with the creation of the main thematic motif in bars 1 – 3 of the flute line. The line is developed through variation when the oboe in bar 6, the clarinet in bar 13 and the bassoon in bar 20 adopts it.

Example 12: *Wildfire* – chromaticism in the instrumental lines

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), and Bassoon (Bsn.). The score is divided into three measures. In the first measure, the Clarinet (Cl.) plays a chromatic motif starting on a G#4, moving up stepwise to a B4. The Oboe (Ob.) has a rest. In the second measure, the Oboe (Ob.) plays a chromatic motif starting on a G4, moving up stepwise to a B4. The Clarinet (Cl.) has a rest. In the third measure, the Bassoon (Bsn.) plays a chromatic motif starting on a G3, moving up stepwise to a B3. The Oboe (Ob.) and Clarinet (Cl.) have rests. Dynamics include *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *f* (forte).

Through the layering of independent instrumental lines, polyphony employing three different motifs is created and comprises the thematic material for the work. The first chromatic motif begins in bar 1 in the flute line, as mentioned, and chromatic lines employing the motif between bars 1- 42 comprise the first of the passages of polyphony. A second and fragmented motif in bar 44 of the cello line is varied through the orchestral texture in independent lines to produce the second section of polyphony. An ascending chromatic motif in bar 87 with the double bass, cello, bassoon and clarinet is varied through the orchestral texture to produce the third section of polyphony which develops during the bars 87-95. Subsequent thematic material created through the work is based on one or other of the polyphonic passages outlined.

COMIC OPERA SONGS

Much Pride and Some Prejudices

Comic opera songs for solo voices and instrumental ensemble

In the comedy opera songs, *Much Pride and Some Prejudices*, approaches towards creating comedic thematic musical material are explored. The style of thematic material in the opera, *I Was Looking At the Ceiling and then I Saw the Sky* (1995), by John Adams, might assist in contextualising the musical stylistic approach to the work (although the ethos of the works is not comparable). The songs are conceived with the aim of creating a contemporary comedic operatic realisation of Jane Austen's classic novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. They explore several issues including:

- the assimilation of popular music song elements into vocal lines that are grounded in the conventions of the art song
- the juxtaposition of 'consonant' and 'dissonant' passages as discussed earlier
- the development of pulse-led thematic material primarily through the employment of the kit drum
- the emulation of electric bass-styled lines in the employment of the double bass and cello.

The aim with the musical thematic material is to create an atmosphere of light-heartedness, liveliness and inclusiveness of harmonic language to affect an atmosphere of metropolitan and cosmopolitan London. The aim with the vocal lines is to discover the effect of fusing elements of the art song with components from the genre of popular music. In the first scene of the song, *A Rejection*, the instrumental thematic material is through-composed in the convention of an art song, while rhythmically the vocal line develops in a style that may be considered neo soul in its employment of syncopation, as evidenced in the following example:

Example 13: *Much Pride and Some Prejudices - A Rejection* – neo soul vocal syncopation

DARCY

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line. It consists of two staves. The top staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The notes are: F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C#5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter). The lyrics are: f YOU KEEP TRYING ME 'YES' AND I'M TEL-LING. The bottom staff is also a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notes are: F#4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C#5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter). The lyrics are: YOU 'NO!'. There is a fermata over the final note of the second staff.

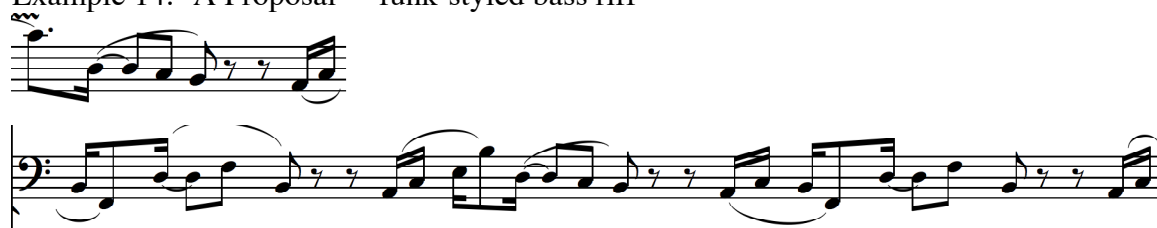
In *Jane's Song*, the vocal line may be compared to the song lines in a 'power ballad', with the declamation of an emotional narrative. The relatively slow tempo of the song begins quietly, creating the ambience of a passive, emotional state and then builds by ascending pitch in a step-wise manner to create a loud outpour of high emotion in the chorus section.

The affect of interspersing short ‘dissonant’ passages within predominantly ‘consonant’ thematic material is explored in the comedy opera songs for stylistic rather than atmospheric effect as it was in, *Wildfire*. In the song, *A Rejection*, the thematic material resides in the tonal centre C Sharp Major from bars 21-28. This is interrupted by a 2-bar ‘dissonant’, chromatic motif in bars 29-30 accompanied by a change of time signature, before returning to the ‘consonant’ tonal thematic material in bar 31-37. The ‘dissonant’, chromatic thematic material is again introduced in bars 38-39. This method of devising thematic material is used to add harmonic contrast to the overall ‘consonance’ of the thematic material and to add subtext, underlining the subversion in the narrative.

The drum kit is employed for pulse-led sections of the thematic material as well as for orchestral percussion effects required in the more abstract orchestral thematic material. Examples of employing the drum kit in these ways was explored firstly in the song, ‘A Rejection’, where the drum kit is employed as light orchestral percussion in bars 1-20 and from bar 21 where the pulse-led music is characterised by a motif in the drum kit that draws on the idiom of hip hop.

Instead of employing the electronic bass, bass lines that may be identified as having components from the idioms of funk, soul and reggae are tried with the cello doubling the double bass. In the song, ‘A Proposal’, a riff that characterises the instrumental thematic material is created and repeated in a style that would be identified in several idioms of popular song and can be seen in the following example:

Example 14: ‘A Proposal’ – funk-styled bass riff

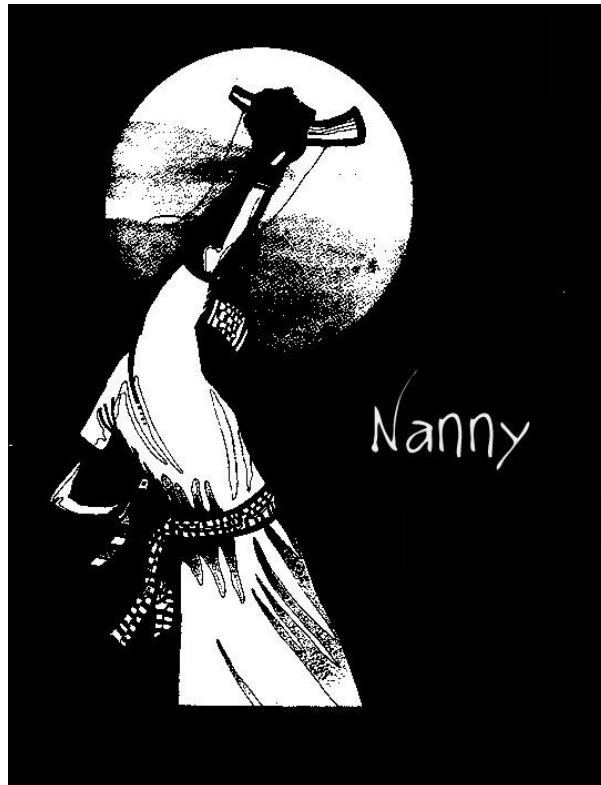


Similarly, in the song, ‘A Rejection’, a funk-styled riff in the cello and double bass in bar 20 is repeated to create a pulse-led thematic material, developing a bass line that might be considered idiomatic of a bass line in a popular music song, however the employment of irregular phrases and thematic variation signify the impact of classical music procedure.

OPERA IN ONE ACT

Queen Nanny of the Maroons

for female singer/narrator and large instrumental ensemble



QUEEN NANNY OF THE MAROONS

Discourse about the nature of contemporary chamber opera has been noted in various contexts including the chapter, *Opera: The 20th Century* (in *Grove Dictionary of Music*) by Arnold Whittall,²¹ and with the article in *Music and Letters: Recent Approaches to Experimental Music Theatre and Contemporary Opera* by Bjorn Heile.²² Definitions of small-scale contemporary opera that are employed interchangeably may include that of chamber opera, music theatre and musical theatre. In these categorisations I perceive *The Prodigal Son* (1966) by Benjamin Britten as chamber opera, *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969) by Peter Maxwell Davies to be music theatre, and *Les Miserables* (1980) by Claude-Michel Schoenberg as a work of musical theatre. Overall, I perceive the medium as a channel to express music-led drama with relatively small

²¹ A. Whittall, *Opera: The 20th Century*, *Grove Dictionary of Music* (London: 1998)

²² B. Heile, *Recent Approaches to Experimental Music Theatre and Contemporary Opera*, *Music and Letters*, Volume 87, Issue 1 (Oxford: 2003)

musical and dramatic forces and concur with the sentiment by Joseph Kerman that ‘...*music can reveal the “quality” of action and thus determine dramatic form in the most serious sense.*’²³

The exploration of the solo voice in a variety of orchestral configurations reaches its summation in this submission with *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*, the opera in one act. Issues examined in the earlier works are explored further with additional focus on the solo voice in an extended structure. Issues encountered with the creation of the opera include:

- the development of a synopsis and narrative for the solo voice
- the development of libretto for the solo voice
- developing an extensive solo vocal line
- representation of a single operatic character from a post-colonial perspective
- orchestral thematic material in dialectic tension with an extensive solo vocal line

Established works of solo chamber opera or music theatre are few, but they include *8 Songs for a Mad King* (1969), by Peter Maxwell Davies, *Monodrama* (1967) by Harrison Birtwistle and more recently, *Twice Through the Heart* (1997) by Mark Anthony Turnage. *8 Songs for a Mad King* was noted as an extended operatic work for solo voice that offered highly stylised musical-dramatic possibilities for a solo singer/actor. All the works for solo voice mentioned are based on the psychological exploration of a single character and this is a consideration of particular import to the process of composing, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*. After various incarnations of *Twice Through the Heart*, Mark Anthony Turnage chose to use the solo voice in the unfolding of the narrative as he felt this practice offered more dramatic treatment of the subject.²⁴

Creating a synopsis with cultural imperatives

The main issues explored in the compilation of the synopsis for the opera, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*, include: the development of a synopsis and libretto; representation of the protagonist; and sustaining the drama for a solo singer in a staged musical performance. The discovery of the *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* narrative occurred through my interest in unearthing little known or buried historical events, especially in the legacies of Africa and the Caribbean. Historical legacies of the region form a strong part in my notions of identity, a dual cultural heritage that is British and Jamaican. As such I consider many historical narratives of Africa and the Caribbean to be sometimes submerged and skewed in the Eurocentric documentation of taught history and I seek, whenever possible, to make a contribution in redressing the balance in this regard. The fascination of Greek mythology as the muse for several centuries of operatic composers may attest to the argument.

The method by which I excavate historical narratives may be compared to that of a documentary filmmaker unearthing fascinating stories and then creating visually exciting ways of representing the subject. In deciding upon the intention of the synopsis, the representation of protagonists by

²³ Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (London: 1989)

²⁴ P. Reed (ed.) programme notes for *From the House of the Dead* and *Twice Through the Heart* (London: 1997)

John Adams in the political/historical narratives of his operas *Nixon in China* (1977), *Death of Klinghoffer* (1991) and *Doctor Atomic* (2005) were considered. The decision was made to create a heroic representation of the protagonist in the opera, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*, and thereby render some pride for the revived historical vestige.

It is considered that many heroic acts distinguish Queen Nanny of the Maroons as a protagonist²⁵ and these are employed as components for the synopsis, forming its foundation. It was during research for the female characters depicted in the orchestral song cycle, *Spirit Songs*, that the Nanny of the Maroons narrative was discovered. The person referred to in historical documentation as Queen Nanny is credited as being ‘the most brilliant military strategist and general that the British militia was to encounter in late 17th century Jamaica’.²⁶ It is widely acknowledged that Nanny had supernatural powers and that with a handful of ill-equipped villagers, she defeated the British militia on many occasions.²⁷ It was the effectiveness of daring guerrilla warfare by Nanny that has, in recent post-colonial considerations, earned her a place in history that is considered to be of equal stature to Cleopatra and Queen Budicca by historians and cultural archivists revisiting the narrative today.²⁸

The synopsis was drawn from interviews with Jamaican Maroon Colonels, the present-day custodians of the Nanny of the Maroons aural archive and legacy, and through discovering the very few available historical texts about the figure. I acquired additional cultural material by visiting Moore Town (previously Nanny Town, where Nanny is thought to have lived) and the Moore Town Museum where Maroon artefacts are exhibited. Annual Maroon celebrations, where ancestral rituals are re-enacted exactly as they were performed centuries ago in the time of Queen Nanny, provided potential affects for the synopsis and libretto along with video recordings of the annual festivities viewed at The Institute of Jamaica.

Without additional characters, the synopsis for a solo performer presented constraints in the direction of the narrative. Dialogue, movement on stage and continuity from scene to scene were tempered by the focus on a single character acting out the drama of the opera. The opera, *Queen Nanny off the Maroons*, was structured through creating a plot and scene-by-scene synopsis as seen in Appendix 1.

Identity and Representation

In representing the character of Queen Nanny of the Maroons the weight of ideological expectation in drawing the persona as heroic, virtuous and idealistic, was high. Drawing the character with many human frailties was perhaps not a viable option for the composer carrying the responsibility for presenting audacious roles for persons of African Caribbean identities. Thereby I conceived Queen Nanny to be in contrast to the femme fatales and tragic heroines, the usual roles of women in the operatic repertoire. It may be considered that female protagonists in

²⁵ K. Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All* (New Jersey: 2003)

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

operatic styles have largely suffered tragic fates rather than heroic representation: Carmen is murdered in the opera by Bizet carrying the name (*Carmen*, 1845) of the protagonist; Tosca commits suicide in the opera by Puccini also carrying the name (*Tosca*, 1900) of the protagonist; Salome proclaims her love to the severed head of John the Baptist in the opera *Salome* (1905) by Richard Strauss; and more recently, Anna Nicole Smith dies of drug addiction and represents the shallow, celebrity-obsessed focus of our times in the opera, *Anna Nicole* (2011) by Mark Anthony Turnage. On the contrary, the aim with the protagonist Queen Nanny is to represent the persona as having strong moral fibre, spiritual depth and extraordinarily high military prowess. Queen Nanny is drawn, in the opera, as a person that could be referred to as a universal role model in many ways and for any generation.

The character of Queen Nanny was drawn from archive material, historical texts, and aural narratives held by the Windward Maroons in Jamaica. Nanny was found in these narratives and in visual representation to bear an iconic warrior image (see image above). The aim was to imbue this iconic image into the operatic character. Through the libretto and the music the aim is to represent the protagonist as a necessarily independent individual that confided in no one, but relied on God and the Ancestors for guidance. Taking her independence and slight detachment as a lead, the representation of Queen Nanny aims to show that as a consequence of her level of presumed responsibility she may have suffered loneliness and isolation without the assistance of local confidantes. Queen Nanny is known to have been a brave warrior, planning battle strategies and guerrilla warfare campaigns.²⁹ It is a commonly held view that she held no prisoners.³⁰ Shrouded in myths, it is believed that she was feared by the British soldiers through several mythological assertions including: the ability to catch bullets when shot at, the ability to create poisonous potions that made the soldiers lose consciousness with a sniff, and the ability to disappear at the drop of a hat.³¹

An emotional aspect to the character of Queen Nanny was explored in the narrative where a caring, protective, maternal figure, dealing with self-doubt in critical situations is painted. I develop a fun-loving side to the character of Queen Nanny, where the character is drawn to enjoy a good joke and a lively party.

[Libretto from *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 3]

QUEEN NANNY

Come on, let's dance now!

Put down your work

It's time to have some fun.

Let's all reel together,

We may be fighting for our lives tomorrow!

Throughout the opera Queen Nanny is primarily represented through her activities as a leader of guerrilla warfare where the protagonist is drawn to act strategically, forcefully but mercifully in

²⁹ Karla Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All* (New Jersey: 2003)

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

challenging military and emotional situations. Queen Nanny is thought to be a mature woman when she was running the guerrilla war campaigns against the British militia in 17th century Jamaica.³² With this in mind, the character was drawn to be protective of the inhabitants of her village, readily taking responsibility for their security and for their well-being. The character is drawn to assume this responsibility because in Maroon culture, a leader of this authority would be divinely ordained to have the level of power and wisdom ascribed.³³ A warm and emotional character is depicted who loses sleep through anxiety over the lack of food caused by a dry spell that prohibited the growth of fruit and vegetables, the staple diet of the Villagers.

[Libretto from *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 1]

QUEEN NANNY

Our next battle with the English is looming.

We're all so worn out!

We need to prepare our strategy

I don't know how much longer I can lead our men?

They're hungry, they're tired and

We only have stones to throw to help us

keep the soldiers at bay.

How can we fight without food in our bellies

and weapons in our arms?

Please, please send some rain!

Above all my intention has been to portray an inspirational woman and a near supernatural being who is sustained by her indelible faith in God and the spirit of her Ancestors.

[Libretto from *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 2]

QUEEN NANNY

But the forest is dense and the mosquitoes, vicious.

How will I ever make it through to the pumpkin seeds?

...I must have faith,

...I will be patient.

Creating the libretto

Joseph Kerman suggests that good composers of opera '*invest each of their important characters with emotional life that is private and distinct.*'³⁴ I decided to write the libretto after several considerations. The aim in the process of writing the libretto was to capture something of the fascinating spirit of Queen Nanny, and to discover a method for imbuing the libretto with authenticity, drama and suspense. Issues considered included: choosing a linguistic style for the

³² Karla Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All* (New Jersey: 2003)

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Joseph Kerman, *Opera As Drama* (London: 1989)

dialogue; styling the role of the Narrator; representing the Maroon culture in 17th century Jamaica; evoking the sense of a tropical climate and terrain; re-creating super natural incidents; and drawing the character of Queen Nanny with depth, breadth and fascination.

Infusing the libretto with words in a Jamaican dialect and thereby drawing on the skills of a writer with this background was considered. However, the proposal was not tried, as this effort would have required someone who was born and raised in Jamaica with skills in writing libretto, and thereby difficult to discover. With my own experience I was able to inject some local experience. For example in Scene 3 of the opera, Queen Nanny is in conversation with Ama at the celebration and they engage in a conversation about a pig, Fat Pig, being roasted. Here familiarity with the way that Jamaicans attribute nicknames to people, locations and many things in a literal way was employed. It was also useful to understand the rhythm and cadences of the dialect:

[Libretto from *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 3]

QUEEN NANNY

Come on, Ama, let's skip and jump high.
Do you remember
When we danced 'til dawn,
To Quao's new jig with the fiddle and fife.
That was the night we roasted Fat Pig,
With yellow roasted yams,
We stuffed ourselves until we couldn't walk.

I also considered developing a linguistic style from the historical period of late 17th century Jamaica. Remnants of a language described as Koromati, which is a fusion of the regional language of Twi in Ghana and English, was also considered. While it was not possible to gain substantial vestiges of Koromanti, the few words I discovered while speaking with Maroon Colonels (the chief custodians of the Maroon culture) are used in the libretto. The use of a contemporary spoken, perhaps southern English, style was deduced as the best vehicle for the libretto as it offered a universal medium for carrying the narrative.

Employment of potential styles of language for the Narrator was considered. The role of Queen Nanny doubles as the Narrator who reveals the narrative as if distanced but near enough to the action in the story, while keeping the audience engaged. She has the persona of one of the Villagers in Nanny Town and is a keen observer of activities in the village. The Narrator speaks directly to the audience in the manner of a contemporary spoken word artist. This linguistic style was decided upon as a way of experimenting with the infusion of neo soul into the texture to see the effect of the integration of the differing linguistic styles. The role of Narrator adds significantly to the demands on the singer who needs the versatility and ability to shift personas from the protagonist, singing in a spoken contemporary southern English style of a mature woman, to the observer relating in a contemporary urban style of perhaps a younger persona. A

comparison may be drawn here with the chamber opera, *Monodrama* by Harrison Birtwistle, which requires the solo mezzo-soprano to perform three separate roles.³⁵

To infuse a sense of Maroon culture of 17th Jamaica into the libretto, the interspersion of information about daily life is employed. I obtained knowledge about living conditions during the period after a special dispensation to visit Moore Town (previously Nanny Town) facilitated discussion with Maroon colonels who advised of various ritual practices including the preparation of food. Rites such as ‘the paying of respects to the ancestors’ were also demonstrated. Attendance to an annual Maroon celebration to commemorate the signing of a peace treaty between the Leeward Maroons of western Jamaica (Nanny led the Windward Maroons of eastern Jamaica) with the British also added to the selection of cultural artefacts that I infused into the libretto.

In creating the libretto it was of assistance to appreciate the climate and terrain of Jamaica. My experience of living there (for a month) through a very dry spell in the country when it did not rain for several months, added to the authenticity of the following section of the libretto:

[Libretto from *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 1]

QUEEN NANNY

‘Lord, not a drop of water from the sky today!
Looks like rain has surely forgotten to fall this way.
Mas’ Sun has just begun to rise
The dry earth trembles with his strong morning rays.
I’ll get some water,
That’ll cool me down.
...Oh no, there’s not a drop of water in the house!
I’ll have to walk to the river in this suffocating heat,
But I can hardly put one foot in front of the other.

I’m sure gravity’s taken a hold of me,
and is dragging my body
down to meet the ground.’

To imbue the libretto with resonances of life in a tropical climate, stories I heard while growing up were recalled and used in the text. Reminiscences of life in the countryside of Jamaica in days where inhabitants had the daily grind of catching water from the nearest river that could be several miles away were re-worked to find if they would be appropriate to the narrative. Recall of the experiences of seeing crops grow in a tropical habitat and walking in impenetrable hinterland of the Jamaican terrain was also employed for authenticity. Without frequent road signs in the towns and countryside, navigation is acquired idiosyncratically and the fashion of giving directions is created in the libretto as follows:

[Libretto from *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 2]

³⁵ Michael Hall, *English Music Theatre 1967 – 1974* (in press)

QUEEN NANNY

'Follow Ol Akima's dirt track', they said
'Pass by the Orange trees, and
Take a turn at Water Fall.
Then take another turn by the Black Mango tree.'
After that I should find plenty of seeds in the shady grove.
Joy, Oh Joy!

Without a physical demonstration in the proposed staging of the supernatural acts that Queen Nanny is deemed to have performed³⁶ it was necessary to discover a method of evoking a mystical ambience by the use of strong imagery employed in the libretto. In the following example the libretto aims to represent an incident where Queen Nanny is considered to have created food in abundance, for her village that had run out of food, by the greatly accelerated growth of pumpkins seeds.

[Libretto from *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 2]

NARRATOR/QUEEN NANNY

Nanny wakes excitedly from a dream with a vision. The Ancestors have given her instructions that may save her village from hunger.

QUEEN NANNY

My heart's beating fast,
I'm so excited.
The vision in my dream was clear and magical.
I saw pumpkins, sweet pumpkins,
Grown from seeds in just a few days!
My eyes danced with this welcome sight.
Fields of ripe pumpkins,
Luscious, in their dark, orange skins.

The use of strong imagery is similarly employed for the climactic battle scene when Queen Nanny is in amongst the fighting. Without recreating a battle scene on stage it was necessary for the libretto to be as vivid as possible, as in the following example:

[Libretto from *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 5]

QUEEN NANNY

Soldiers like red ants descend on us.
We're few in number but,
We must defeat them all.
I'm shivering with fear and worry but
I must conceal the relentless ache

³⁶ Karla Gottlieb, *The Mother of Us All* (New Jersey: 2003)

in the pit of my stomach.
If I show signs of weakness,
Our brave fighters will lose heart and melt away.

The Militia's still advancing.
That soldier's so close,
His eyes pierce through my body,
Like thorns, that could rip me apart.

The following extract from the battle scene is an illustration of the level of sensitivity imbued in the character of Nanny through the creation of the libretto.

[Libretto from *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 5]

QUEEN NANNY
The heat is suffocating,
Poisonous steam has stifled soldiers lying there.
Shrieks and harrowing cries fill the air.
The shots are deafening from desperate soldiers.

A brave soldier staggers ahead of the pack,
His eyes so red and cheeks so blue,
His face so thin and gaunt,
I'm sure he would kill for a crumb of bread.
Ditches are filling up,
Legs, arms, bodies everywhere.
The British push us to our limit.
Look at Kobena!
He limps, he lurches,
He stumbles forward to the end.

Creating a Vocal Line

In the one-act opera, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*, a method for sustaining drama in the solo vocal line was a major endeavour as well as resolving dialectic tension between the voice and the orchestra. In the orchestral songs, techniques such as creating a smooth line; employing chromaticism; assimilating the role of the spoken word artist; and balancing relatively consonant lines with relatively dissonant orchestral texture, are employed within the spatial dimension of relatively shorter works. In the opera, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*, these components are explored in an extended structure. A secondary concern was the infusion of popular music vocal idioms from neo soul and contemporary gospel to discover the effects of their integration into vocal material thematic grounded in modernist art song styles, of broadly speaking Britten, Copland, Ives and Berio. The generation of drama in the vocal line was

explored through the employment of several stylistic components including: chromaticism; rhythmic phrasing; mono tonal staccato; syncopation; and vocal range.

In the opening scenes of the opera, Queen Nanny paces backwards and forwards anxiously and the music aims to reflect her feeling of agitation and anxiety in her inability to provide food for the Nanny Town villagers, where a dry spell has stunted the growth of seasonal crops. Feelings of worry and inadequacy are invoked by adding chromatic notes to the melodic line as seen in the following example:

Example 15 – *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*, Scene 1 – chromaticism in the vocal line

NANNY PACES BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS AGITATEDLY

M.S. *mf* LORD, NOT A DROP OF WATER FROM THE SKY TO - DAY

Chromaticism is again employed in the vocal line when anticipation and anxiety about the ability of the villagers to resist the might of the British militia burdens the psyche of Nanny:

Example 16: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 4 – chromaticism in the vocal line

M.S. *mf* OH WHAT A FINE MORNING WHY OH WHY DO WE HAVE TO FIGHT!

Rhythmic phrases such as triplets in the vocal line are used in the line to affect heightened emphasis to the meaning of the text. In the following musical example repeated triplets reflect the agitation of the protagonist when it is realised that the British militia is ominously close to the village without the Villagers being prepared for potential confrontation:

Example 17: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 1 – using rhythm to emphasis meaning in the libretto

M.S. BATTLE WITH THE BRITISH LOO - MING *f* WE'RE ALL WORN OUT! WE NEED TO PREPARE OUR STRATEGY

Picc. *f* 3

Fl. *f* 3

Triplet rhythms in the vocal line of the protagonist create the feeling of dance and movement in the following music example:

Example 18: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* – Scene 3 – triplet rhythms evoking dance

M-S. LOOK AT KWA-KU HE'S FAL - LING DOWN

M-S. *mf* TOO MUCH RUM AND HE HITS THE GROUND

The image shows two vocal staves. The first staff has a triplet of eighth notes on the word 'KWA-KU' and another triplet on 'FAL - LING'. The second staff has a triplet of eighth notes on 'RUM' and another triplet on 'HITS'.

Ascending, florid semi quavers are employed to invoke the elation of the protagonist as she awakens from a dream that reveals the solution to the current food crisis in the village:

Example 19: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* – Scene 2 – vocal melisma to evoke excitement

M-S. **QUEEN NANNY IS EXCITED**

f WHAT A DREAM MY HEART IS BEATting FAST, A DREAM

The image shows a single vocal staff with a melisma. A box above the staff contains the text 'QUEEN NANNY IS EXCITED'. The melody features a series of ascending eighth notes with a fermata over the final note. There are also some sixteenth-note runs.

Strident, staccato repetitive notes are used to represent the protagonist in an assertive, ebullient mood when she directs the Villagers to celebrate the growth of vital crops of pumpkins that will save them all from hunger:

Example 20: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 3 – vocal staccato creating assertiveness

135 A CELEBRATION $\text{♩} = 74$ NANNY WATCHES THE FESTIVITIES

LA LA_ *f* IT'S TIME TO DANCE AND

140 REEL_ PUT DOWN YOUR WORK, IT'S

142 TIME TO SING AND SPIN

...

The image shows three vocal staves. The first staff has staccato notes for 'LA LA' and 'IT'S TIME TO DANCE AND'. The second staff has staccato notes for 'REEL' and 'PUT DOWN YOUR WORK, IT'S'. The third staff has staccato notes for 'TIME TO SING AND SPIN'.

Syncopation in the vocal line is employed to project a feeling of dizziness with the protagonist as she watches revellers dance and twirl around. The device is also used with the aim of building tension in the vocal thematic material, as can be seen in the following:

Example 21: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 3 – continuous syncopation engendering dizziness

M-S. 174 NANNY LOOKS ON AT THE REVELLERS
 mf OH___ HE'S BUMPED HIS HEAD___ HER___

M-S. 177
 ___ SKIRT'S FLY - ING HIGH___ mf CHIL -

176

Repeated, mono-tonal staccato quavers represent the determination and stubbornness of Queen Nanny in her resolve to keep strong and lead the Villagers through the eminent battle with the British:

Example 22: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* – Scene 3 – mono-tonal staccato quavers to represent determination

M-S. 194
 I HARD - LY E - VER SLEEP AT NIGHT f BUT I MUST BAT - TLE

M-S. 196
 ON BE - CAUSE THE FIGHT IS LONG ff GOD'S SPEED TO ALL OF

M-S. 198
 US

♩ = 78

Repeated mono-tonal staccato quavers are employed to evoke the protagonist in a commanding and assertive manner. Queen Nanny tries to ignite the Villagers into a combative mode before a battle:

Example 23: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 5 - mono-tonal staccato quavers to represent Assertiveness

M-S. 57
 f IT'S TIME TO GO TO

M-S. 60
 BAT - TLE PICK UP YOUR ARMS IT'S

M-S. 62
 TIME TO DE FEND OUR - LIVES___ SOL DIERS CO - MING IN THIER

Spectrums of the soprano vocal range are employed to evoke particular emotional states or attitudes of the protagonist. When the lower, and potentially softer, part of the vocal range is employed the aim is to suggest an element of covertness, as may be deduced in the following music example:

Example 24: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 4 - using the lower vocal register to suggest covertness

M.S.  WHEN YOU HIDE A-MONGST THE BUS - HES

M.S.  YOU WILL NE - VER BE IN THE WORLD HILYOUTROUSLY

Anxiety is expressed through rhythm as explained above and also in the use of the upper register. In the following example the protagonist contemplates the possible fate for herself and the Villagers should the British militia conquer them. Here the pitch rises to reflect her trepidation:

Example 25: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 1 - using the higher vocal register to suggest anxiety

M.S.  BAT-TLE WITH THE BRI TISH IS LOO - MING WHAT CAN WE DO?

The upper range of the voice is again employed to evoke apprehension. In the following example the protagonist fears that the food for the village might run out before Queen Nanny is able find a way of replenishing the storehouses:

Example 26: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* – Scene 1 - using the higher vocal register to suggest apprehension

M.S.  HOW MUCH LON-GER, HOW LONG WILL OUR STOCKS LAST? A-DU-A-NE

M.S.  A-DU-A-NE

The upper, and potentially brighter, part of the soprano vocal register is also employed to evoke excitement in the demeanour of the protagonist:

Example 27: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 3 - using the highest vocal register to create excitement

M.S. 159
 SUCH A BEAU - TY WITH HER HEAD OF CURLS

M.S. 160

A combination of emphatic rhythm and high register is employed to evoke the highly commanding mode of the protagonist. In the following example the protagonist urges the villagers to be strong in the face of resisting capture and slaughter by the British militia, with the odds stacked against them:

Example 28: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 4 – combined emphatic rhythm and high register to evoke commanding presence

M.S. GET UP NOW! STAND UP NOW

M.S. FIGHT FOR FREE - DOM!

While grounded in the canon of European operatic tradition, with more recent links to the idioms of composers such as Stravinsky, Britten and Adams, one of the aims with the vocal line is to seamlessly integrate elements from popular music styles such as contemporary gospel, neo soul and reggae. The main signifier of this integration is in the intentionally smooth, step-wise or contained consonant pitch progression of the lines as explicated in the section Vocal Expression. Although the vocal lines are through-composed in the mode of the art song and the operatic vocal writing of, for example, Britten in the opera, *Peter Grimes* (1945), the phrasing of the vocal line in *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* takes its lead from neo-soul and contemporary gospel, with continued syncopation and momentum towards the end of the musical phrase. However, the vocal lines do not employ repetitive elements such as rhythmic and melodic motifs and the chorus from these popular music styles, but it does include varied phrasing and relatively complex rhythm from the art song and the operatic tradition.

The role of Queen Nanny requires a powerful, dramatic vocalist with the ability to confidently double as Narrator and as well as to bring dramatic depth to the part through the realisation of the vocal line. As well as being technically accomplished in the operatic tradition of European

classical music, empathy for popular music idioms referenced is required to deliver the spirit of the vocal part.

Orchestral thematic material

The aim in creating the orchestral texture for the opera, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*, is to invoke an atmosphere of fantasy and the supernatural, as a foundation for the mystical narrative that partners it. The thematic orchestral components that are employed to achieve this include the use of post-tonal melodic and rhythmic thematic motifs; orchestral polyphony: instrumental effects; and the integration of popular and folk music elements. Generically the thematic material and orchestral texture aims to evoke the dense, humid, tropical atmosphere created in the novel, *In Time of Cholera*, by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, where the lead characters play their roles in a searing heat that forms the backdrop to the novel. Borrowing from the term, *magical realism*, ascribed to the novel, the intended orchestral thematic material may be ascribed *new magical realism*. A diverse stylistic approach to melodic and rhythmic material is explored with the integration of Jamaican folk (Koromanti), sacred music and dub step idioms assimilated into what might be described as a post-Britten style of composition.

Thematic motifs are created to evoke varied ambience. The semi-quaver, dotted syncopated quaver rhythmic idea in the lower brass and lower strings introduces an atmosphere of foreboding, and an ominous warning that there is trouble ahead for Nanny and the Villagers at the beginning of the opera:

Example 29: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* – Scene 1 – thematic material evoking atmosphere of foreboding

The image displays a musical score for six instruments: OBOE, BASSOON, HORN in F, TRUMPET in Bb, TROMBONE, and TUBA. The score is written in 2/4 time and features a common rhythmic motif of a semi-quaver, dotted syncopated quaver. The OBOE part begins with a melodic line marked *mp* and includes a trill. The BASSOON, HORN in F, TRUMPET in Bb, TROMBONE, and TUBA parts all play a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, also marked *mp*. The TRUMPET in Bb part includes a trill. The score is arranged in a system of six staves, with the OBOE and BASSOON staves at the top and the TUBA staff at the bottom.

In contrast to the atmosphere of foreboding that is intended in Scene 1 referenced above, a rhythmically jaunty, bell-sounding motif in the marimba recurs intermittently throughout the thematic material of the opera, offering respite and contrast to the forceful, long-sustained chords that predominate and a subtext indicating the resilient spirit of Queen Nanny and the Villagers.

Example 30: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* – Scene 1 – rhythmically jaunty thematic material

Motifs of full orchestral stabs are employed to punctuate parts of the text and with a technique typical of operatic writing from Monteverdi to the present day, in Scene 1 bar 29. The intention is for the orchestra (acting as the Villagers) to empathise with Nanny in a fit of exasperation: ‘What can we do?’

Polyphonic textures are developed with the aim of engendering a heavy, dense foreboding atmosphere and also acts to reinforce the vocal line. The slow building of polyphonic texture is employed to create dramatic tension to the narrative as evidenced at the end of scene 1:

Example 31: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 1 – building polyphonic orchestral texture

18

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. It includes vocal staves for Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.), and instrumental staves for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Trumpet (Tr.), Trombone (Tbn.), and Bassoon (Bsn.). The vocal lines are written in treble clef, and the instrumental parts are in various clefs. The score is marked with dynamics such as *mf*, *f*, and *ff*. The lyrics "PLEASE SEND US RAIN!" are written above the vocal staves. The score is numbered 18 at the top left.

At the beginning of Scene 2, *All in a Dream*, the orchestral texture is created to affect a dream-like ambience with a syncopated, triplet quaver motif in the flute, oboe and trumpet in the middle of their register, setting the scene for Queen Nanny awaking excitedly with a premonition:

Example 30: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 2 – musical thematic material affecting a dream-like ambience

ALL IN A DREAM

128

M-S.

Picc.

Fl.

Ob.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tpt.

Tbn.

Tba.

Timp.

Perc. TRIANGLE WIND CHIMES

Perc. Sus. Cym with brush

Mar. mp

Hp. mp

Vln. pizz. arco mp

Vla. pizz. arco mp

Vc. pizz. arco mp

Db. pizz. arco mp

A motif of rapidly ascending and descending chromatic flourishes in the woodwind lines project an atmosphere of foreboding, with the intention of creating greater tension in the music and leading to an intense climax when Ol' Akimba makes her devastating premonitions:

Example 31: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* – Scene 3 – musical thematic material building dramatic climax

Instrumentation is sometimes employed symbolically and the frequent use of the piccolo evokes a military presence in the atmosphere and represents the fife that would have been played in 17th Jamaica. In conjunction with the snare drums the combination provides an undercurrent reference to 17th and 18th century warfare. Establishing the piccolo in the orchestral scoring performs as a homage to the ‘fife and drum’ combination that is traditional in Jamaican Maroon music and as well as in folk and military European music of the period. Flutter-tonguing effects such as in Scene 1, at the opening of the opera are employed to evoke birdsong at dawn in the tropics.

Example 32: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 1 – flutter-tonguing to evoke birdsong

Expressively ♩ = 78
Sunrise Over Moore Town
Shirley J. Thompson

Sustained strings, quite high in the viola and cello register are employed to create an atmosphere of stillness in the tropical air, with an accompanying ‘shimmering’ effect in the orchestration that strives to represent the glistening natural light that is starkly different to the natural light in Europe. The ‘shimmering’ effect is enhanced with the suspended cymbal and soft mallets highlights as in the following example:

Example 33: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* – Scene 2 – musical thematic material to evoke shimmering effect

The musical score for Example 33 is arranged in a multi-staff format. At the top, the Percussion part includes a 'WIND CHIMES' section marked *mf* and a 'Sus. Cym with brush' section marked *mp*. Below this is the Maracas part, also marked *mp*, featuring a melodic line with trills. The Harp part is marked *mp* and consists of sustained chords. The string section includes Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Db.), all marked *mp*. The Viola and Double Bass parts feature sustained notes in the higher register, with the Double Bass part marked *p* at the end of the phrase.

In Scene 3 the intention is to create raucous dance music, to which the Villagers can dance with abandon. The thematic material created in Scene 3 - *A Celebration*, also serves to engender a battle, in Scene 5. Below the surface of the celebratory flavour of the music in *A Celebration*, is a feeling of ominous apprehension, engendered by dissonant harmony and angular melodic phrases. A driving, pulsating rhythm in the bass congo drums, borrowed from Jamaican Koromanti rhythms, and a chromatic descending riff, moderately high in the registers of the woodwind instruments is employed to set a frenzied, raucous ambience. Timpani tremolos ignite

the riffs in the woodwind to produce an ‘explosive’ effect (see example 34). The question by the riff in the woodwind section is answered by an ascending, spiccato semi quaver passage in the upper strings, accentuated by the marimba. A variety of accentuations in the woodwind instruments, along with note clusters of syncopated chords in the strings, add to the angularity of phrasing and edginess of the atmosphere:

Example 34: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* – Scene 3 - thematic motivic material creating ‘explosive’ effect

The musical score for Example 34 is a page from a score for *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*, Scene 3. It features a tempo of quarter note = 74. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes parts for M.S. (Music Supervisor), Piccolo (Picc.), Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Horn (Hn.), Trumpet (Tpt.), Trombone (Tbn.), Tuba (Tba.), and Timpani (Timp.). The second system includes Percussion (Perc.) parts for Bass Congo and Cym with mallet. The lyrics 'COME ON, LET'S_ DANCE NOW!' are written under the Piccolo part. The score is marked with 'FIERY' and 'ASSERTIVELY' above the M.S. part, and 'f' (forte) throughout. The woodwind parts feature complex rhythmic patterns and syncopated chords, while the percussion parts provide a driving, explosive accompaniment.

A polyphonic texture of french horns, trombones and bassoons with a thematic line that intends to emulate the powerful sound of a battery of abengs (a wood wind instrument indigenous to the Caribbean) heralds the beginning of combat between the Maroon and British militia combatants:

Example 35: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 5 – woodwind thematic material emulating battery of Abengs

As mentioned in the introduction to the section on orchestral thematic material, popular music elements are introduced and in the context of the opera, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*, the aim in employing contemporary references such as dub step rhythm in particular is to draw a link between the Koromanti dance of music of the pre-colonial Jamaican experience, and the feeling of dance in post-colonial diaspora Caribbean communities.

Example 36: *Queen Nanny of the Maroons* - Scene 3 – dub step rhythm

Koromanti rhythms are conversely employed high in register, to signify the ultimate encounter between the disadvantaged Maroons and the highly equipped British militia. Soaring chromatic motifs in the woodwind and marimba, first seen in Scene 3 to undermine the joviality of the celebration, now represent the distress of the Villagers in combat in bars 426 - 427. The dub step motif is reintroduced as a reminder of intergenerational links between 17th century Jamaica and 21st century Caribbean diasporas and to bolster the climax of the combat. This time the motif is scored low in the registers of the trombone and tuba, in a way that is typical of the electric bass

guitar in a dub step mix (in Scene 5, bar 449). The explosive riffs that are first seen at the beginning of Scene 3, round off the meagre, but ultimately Maroon victory (bars 508 – 510).

Orchestral performers are indicated to assume the role of Maroon Villagers and thereby assume a dramatic role in a potential production of the opera, *Queen Nanny of the Maroons*. Blurring the lines between the stage and the orchestral pit is reminiscent of an approach of staging I experienced with a production of the play, *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1977) by Tom Stoppard and Andre Previn, where several of the orchestral performers double as actor/dancers.

CONCLUSION

Through the reflective practice required in compiling this thesis I have made significant discoveries about my compositional process as well as creating several new works that may be described as bearing a 'new aesthetic' and thereby adding to the repertoire for instrumental ensemble and vocal works. I have focused on composition for a range of instrumental ensembles with varied scoring and then added vocal expression to find the effect of the voice in the instrumental mix as well as for its potential to carry narrative components. The results have been effective and have clarified technical and aesthetic issues that will impact on future work.

Composition technique that is fundamental to my composition process in this thesis has been identified, explored and honed. For recall, these techniques include: thematic working; polyphonic functionality; assimilating a self-prescribed balance of harmonic 'consonance' and 'dissonance'; harmonic stasis; regular time signatures and extensive syncopation; infusing popular music idioms; and creating narrative-led structures. The components described have been central to the development of the works and on several occasions the exploration of them has opened a level of consciousness about my composition process that I was previously acting on intuitively without reflecting on their source or impact. I found it effective to begin work with small instrumental combinations and then to progress to larger mediums once isolated techniques were examined and their potential considered. Exploration of the voice in conjunction with the instrumental ensemble has unearthed, what may be considered, fascinating ways of expressing submerged narratives. Through the process, techniques for resolving dialectic tension between the voice and the orchestra have been gained. The orchestral songs, song cycles and then the opera in one act are the works I consider to be the most distinct contribution to the field.

It may be argued that the exploration of contextual issues underpinning some of the works has been equally fascinating. Subjects chosen for examination in the vocal works have compelled me to take excursions into the realms of post-modern critical theory. Here I have taken a cursory look at a range of post-structural ideas, feminist issues and post-colonial concerns. Issues of identity and representation emerged prominently. Through the process of exploring these issues I have acquired some of the language of criticism styled for post-colonial authors of literature and borrowed from their mode of critical expression to articulate my own practice in this area of composition.

I was not expecting to write the synopsis and libretto for the opera in one act, but found the challenge rewarding. I assumed that once the appropriate documentation and materials had been gathered it would be possible to handover the research to a writer more versed in the art of writing libretto. However, after some consideration, I became concerned about the intangible information that may be lost in a potential transfer to another writer who had not experienced significant parts of the research process. By intangible information, I mean the spirit and ethos of the subjects acquired through personal discourse with the contributors that were kind enough to offer vital information. The experience of being in the location of the protagonists was equally important, as I was sometimes fortunate enough to witness ritual practices that I later fed into the narrative.

At the beginning of the thesis one of my main aims was to explore the ways in which a more inclusive and direct musical expression could be articulated for a mass-mediated, post-modern listener. In their time, it may be argued that, composers such as Aaron Copland, George Gershwin and more recently, John Adams have demonstrated comparable sensibilities. By drawing on a diverse range of musical and narrative components as well as retaining the Western European ethos of instrumental ensemble and vocal art music as a base, it may be considered that, I have created a significant platform for further exploration in the field.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Lyrics and Libretto

TAPESTRY

Song cycle for female singer and piano

Tapestry

The long of blood
and family ties
An African countenance here
A European countenance
An American cast of cheek
An Asiatic turn of eye
And the tongue's salty accommodation

The Tapestry is mine

All the bloodstained prints
The scatter-links
The grafting strand of crinkled hair
The black persistent blooming

The Tapestry is mine

Words by Grace Nicholls

Epilogue

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
from the root of the old one
a new one has sprung

Words by Grace Nicholls

New Day

Oh! Good morning world
Winter's cold breath approaches
Yes, yes I'm alive

Bare-armed tress tussle
November wind chills
The sky applauds watching

Oh, good morning world!
Yesterday's karma relived
I lie awake dreaming

Words by Olushola Oyeleye

The Woman Who Refused to Dance

for female singer, speaker and instrumental ensemble

Give Me the Sky
I want to Fly
Away to Find My Destiny ...

Improvised spoken words

No, I won't Dance!
No, there's no chance of that!
I must return
To my Maker
With my dignity
With my Spirit ...

Words by Shirley J. Thompson

Voice of Change

For solo singers, speaker, instrumental ensemble

Chorus

We all need to believe in the power
When we unite with one another
Let us all work together
In this short time
We share together on the earth

Speaker

'It is an ancient rule; a simple rule; but also one of the most challenging.
For it asks each of us to take some measure of responsibility for the
well-being of people we may not know or agree with on every issue.
Sometimes, it asks us to reconcile with bitter enemies or resolve ancient hatreds.
And that requires a living, breathing, active faith.
It requires us not only to believe, but to do – to give something of ourselves
for the benefit of others and for the betterment of our world.
In this way, the particular faith that motivated each of us
can promote a greater good for all'.

Chorus

We all need to believe in the power
When we unite and help each other
Let us give thanks for the choice we have in our hands
The spirit beckons us to move on.

We all need to believe in the impossible
The need to change can take us where we need to be
Let us give thanks for the choice we have in our hands
The spirit beckons us to move on.

Speaker

No matter what we choose to believe,
let us remember that there is no religious whose central tenet is hate.
There is no god who condones taking the life of an innocent human being.
This much I know.
We know too that whatever our differences, there is one law that binds all of us together.

It is, of course the Golden Rule –
The call to love one another; to understand one another; to treat with dignity
And respect those with whom we share a brief moment on this Earth.

Chorus

We all need to believe in the power
When we unite and help each other
Let us all work together
In this short time
We share together on the earth!

This much we know, we don't need faith to divide us.
Wars have been waged and many innocents slaughtered.
This much we know, there's one rule that binds us.
This much we know, we must believe the truth!

Voices of Change.

Sung words by Shirley J. Thompson

Spoken words from President Barack Obama's
Speech at National Prayer Breakfast
5 February 2009

SPIRIT SONGS
for solo female singers and orchestra

Sound the Abeng

Come Sound the Abeng
Let the drums roll
Our time for freedom has begun
Let us go forward with strength

Have Mercy Oh Creator
Oh guide us all!

Over hills and gullies,
Through wind and rain,
We must fight hard and long
To make our gains

Have Mercy Oh Creator
Oh guide us all!

The Woman Who Refused to Dance

Give Me the Sky
I want to Fly
Away to Find My Destiny ...

No, I won't Dance!
No, there's no chance of that!
I must return
To my Maker
With my dignity
With my Spirit ...

Blow the Trumpet into the New Moon

It may appear
That I suit this veneer
I stand apart
And sometimes
Laugh at myself

Chorus

Blow the trumpet
Blow the trumpet in the new moon
It's time for change
Let it be now before the sun sets
Come join with us
Join with all the liberators
We're fighting for change
Blazing a trail around the world

It won't be long
Before I will see some changes.
There's been a start
I've played my part in this process.

Chorus

Blow the trumpet
Blow the trumpet in the new moon
It's time for change
Let it be now before the sun sets
Come join with us
Join with all the liberators
We're fighting for change
Blazing a trail around the world

Words by Shirley J. Thompson

MUCH PRIDE AND SOME PREJUDICES

Comedy opera songs
for solo singers and instrumental ensemble

It's a crowded London night-club.

Bingley urges Darcey to approach Lizzie after he links up with her sister, Jane

1- A Rejection

You keep telling me 'yes'
And I keep telling you to go.
You keep telling me 'yes'
And I keep telling you 'no!'

These ladies may be your type
But they're not for me.
I'll just wait around for better pedigree!

2- A Proposal

Darcy changes his mind about Lizzie and makes her an irresistible offer...

Girls like you sometimes come my way
I love them and leave them the very next day.
But you can weave a spell like some mediaeval witch
Is it only 'cause I'm titled and I'm filthy rich?

Can't get you out of my mind

Your family is a nightmare and your house is just the same;
Perhaps one day I could get over the shame
My friends will be hysteric, my parents apoplectic,
So please don't be too shocked if I'm ecstatic.....not.

Of course this is too hasty and maybe I am a fool
But the power of these emotions completely blows away my cool
Better judgement and misgivings I'm prepared to cast aside
At least they can't deny you'll make a beautiful bride

So I dropped by my lawyer, who then wrote up
A very sensible and fair pre-nup
I'm sure you won't expect me to drop down on one knee
But for the record please confirm that you will marry me.....

Can't get you out of my mind

3. Jane's Song

Jane ponders her love for Bingley

All though my childhood
All through my teens
All I knew of love
Was from books and magazines

Then came my twenties
Encountered the reality
Losers, leavers, fakes and cheats -
A crash course in futility

So a young cynic came to London
Expecting nothing more
But in that club she saw one face
And was shaken to the core

Chorus

I know that this may be pure madness
Followed soon by pain and sadness
Am I placing far too much trust in what he seems?
I know that this may be pure madness
Followed soon by pain and sadness
Will this prove just the fleeting cruelty of a dream?

Something passed between us
I saw it in his eyes
A wavelength that was built for two
And money cannot buy
I have no other option
This is no passing whim

If he wants to take it
I will pledge my life to him

Chorus

I know that this may be pure madness
Followed soon by pain and sadness
Am I placing far too much trust in what he seems?
I know that this may be pure madness
Followed soon by pain and sadness
Will this prove just the fleeting cruelty of a dream?

Lizzie's Response

Lizzie does not mince her words when she responds to Darcy

Though I started out on the wrong side of the tracks
It seems attraction compensates for what my breeding lacks,
So what if I attended a comprehensive school?
I got taught to make sure I was nobody's fool

You are a stuck-up, patronising, pompous prat
Arrogant with it, a self-seeking rat
No shred of charm, or even of wit
You treated Wickham with pure contempt
Terribly, with no shame about it

You can take your pre-nup and strike a match
I'm patently no kind of catch
So keep your ring, it's of no use to me
Please leave this house immediately

(Darcy withdraws, appalled and embarrassed)

Words by John McLaren

QUEEN NANNY OF THE MAROONS

for Female Singer / Narrator and Orchestra

SCENE 1 – SUNRISE OVER NANNY TOWN

(NARRATOR SPEAKS SOFTLY AS IF SHE DOESN'T WANT TO BE NOTICED BY THE CHARACTERS IN THE DRAMA)

NARRATOR

We're here in Nanny Town and things are looking desperate. Food's running out and the villagers are tired and war worn. It's been a long dry spell and the crops have not grown. Nanny is anxious. She's pacing backwards and forwards outside her house. She prays to the ancestors for guidance.

(NARRATOR MOVES POSITION ON STAGE TO BECOME NANNY)

NANNY SINGS

Lord, not a drop of water from the sky today!
Looks like rain has surely forgotten to fall this way.
Mas' Sun has just begun to rise,
I feel so hot.
The dry earth trembles with his strong morning rays.
I feel so hot, so hot and miserable.
Beads of sweat pour from me.
I need to find some shade,
(She fans herself with a large leaf)

I'm sure gravity's taken a hold of me,
and is dragging my body
down to meet the ground.
I will get some water,

That might cool me down.
.....Oh no, there's not a drop of water in the house!
I'll have to walk to the river in this suffocating heat,
But I can hardly put one foot in front of the other.

Still, I'll have to go.
How else will I taste a drop of
that cool, clear water from Wildcane River
between my parched lips.
Quao's away for goodness knows how long.
I wonder if one of those lazy boys will drag
themselves from their sweet sleep to
collect some water for their one and only Aunt?

The sun's shining through the mango leaves
and the heat hasn't stopped the Humming Birds
from singing their sweet song.
But provisions are low in the village,
No yams have grown.
What will we eat tomorrow?

Our next battle with the English is looming.
We're all so worn out!
We need to prepare our strategy
I don't know how much longer I can lead our men?
They're hungry, they're tired and
We only have stones to throw to help us
keep the soldiers at bay.
How can we fight without food in our bellies
and weapons in our arms?
Please, please send some rain!

Scene 2 – VISIONS IN DREAM

NANNY TURNS AROUND AND BECOMES THE NARRATOR
SPEAKS

Nanny wakes excitedly from a dream with a vision. The Ancestors have given her instructions that may save her village from hunger

NARRATOR BECOMES NANNY AND SINGS

What a dream!
My heart's beating fast,
I'm so excited.
The vision in my dream was clear and magical.
I saw pumpkins, sweet pumpkins,
Grown from seeds in just a few days!
My eyes danced with this welcome sight.
Fields of ripe pumpkins,
Luscious in their dark, orange skins.

'Follow Ol Akima's dirt track', they said
Pass by the orange trees, and
Take a turn at Water Fall.
Then take another turn by the black mango tree."
After that I should find plenty of seeds in the shady grove.
La la-la la-la la-la la-la la-la

The Ancestors seemed so close to me last night,
I could feel them watching over me while I slept.
I'm so relieved,
They've saved us from certain starvation.

(Suddenly doubtful)
I wonder if I'll manage to find the pumpkin seeds?
Moreover, pumpkins take weeks to grow.

We can't wait a moment longer for food.
We need the pumpkins now!

What a dream, what a vision, a perfect solution.
A wonderful gift for us!
Some pumpkin seeds that will grow in a few days.
I can feed ev'ryone
What salvation!

But the forest is dense and the mosquitoes, vicious.
How will I ever make it through to the pumpkin seeds?
...I must have faith,
...I will be patient.
I need to set off before the midday sun, burns me to
A tree's bark and
Find those precious seeds right now!

Scene 3 – A CELEBRATION

NARRATOR/NANNY

There is a dance celebration to give thanks for the pumpkin seeds and to perform the rituals that will help them grow. Nanny and the villagers are very happy and dance with abandon. However, in the midst of the celebrations Akima, a wise elder, spins into a trance and foretells of great misfortunes.

NANNY SINGS & DANCES. (Dancers emerge from the side wings)

Come on, let's dance now!
Put down your work
It's time to have some fun.
Let's all reel together,
We may be fighting for our lives tomorrow!

Come on, Ama, let's skip and jump high.
Do you remember
When we danced 'til dawn,
To Quao's new jig with the fiddle and fife.
That was the night we roasted Fat Pig,
With yellow roasted yams,
We stuffed ourselves until we couldn't walk.

Keep beating those drums Mas' drummers,
The rhythm is taking me over.
Sweet music lifts my spirit into the night sky.
My heart beats stronger and stronger.
I can feel the blood pulsing through my veins.
...Our time on earth is so fleeting.
Let's celebrate and have some fun.

Look at drunken Kwaku, toppling down.
Too much white rum and he staggers and swerves.
Young Adua's so graceful as she twists and twirls,
Such a beauty with her head of tight curls.

ADUSAFOO, OBOA
(Relatives and gentlemen)
OBARIMA, ABOFRA
(Women and children)
Come on, let's dance now!
Put down your work
It's time to reel and jig.

Look at Tao, he's bumped his head.....
Ama's pretty skirt flies up too high.....
Lots of children ev'rywhere,
Jumping and skipping without any cares.

(Spoken)

What was that, what did Ol' Akima say?

'We have a viper among us and

It's someone we hold dear?

We must watch our backs

We can't be caught out."

(Sung)

Just ignore her, leave her alone.

She's filled with evil spirits,

Which possess her day and night.

She should know better, she should be wise,

But she's spends her time spreading malicious lies.

I don't know how much more I can take,

I hardly ever sleep at night.

But we must battle on,

Although the fight is long.

God's speed to all of us!

SCENE 4 – CAMOUFLAGE

NARRATOR/NANNY SPEAKS

The Abengs sound warning messages. The British are a few miles from the foothills of the mountain. They will be in the Nanny Town in about six hours. There is much to do in preparation for battle

NANNY SINGS

The Abengs sound urgent warnings.

They tell us it's just hours before the soldiers get here.

There's plenty of work before us

Come on everyone, get yourselves together,

Be ready to fight for your freedom.
We must stand tall
We're standing on the backs
of those who came before us.

What do we first?
We need to dig the ditches and
Fill them with cactus leaves.
...Remember, the orange tree leaves
Must cover your entire body.
So that when you hide amongst the bushes
You will be invisible.

(Jokingly)
Remember the time a soldier
Left his hat upon what he thought was a tree?
The 'tree' came to life and captured him!
What a good trap!

By the way,
Quoa sent word that some Escapees
From Sugar Cane Plantation
Have defied their captors and may head our way
We must be ready to receive them,
Make them welcome in Nanny Town.

Don't forget the ditches,
Dig them deep.
Practice your breathing, circular breathing.
You may need to stand as still as stone.
Don't forget to wear your masks.

We must keep strong,
We're made of strongest metal.
We must save our lives.
Oh, this beautiful land that we love.
Why do we stain it with blood and gore!
We just want to live in peace.

SCENE 5

NARRATOR NANNY SPEAKS- AN INTENSE BATTLE AND MUCH BETRAYAL

The Abengs sound warning messages; the British militia are making their way up the mountain path. Nanny's traps are in place to waylay them, but something's going wrong, they're still coming! However, the villagers are miraculously saved by the timely arrival of Maroon Escapees.

NANNY SINGS

Soldiers like red ants descend on us.
We're few in number but,
We must defeat them all.
I'm shivering with fear and worry but
I must conceal the relentless ache
in the pit of my stomach.
If I show signs of weakness,
Our brave fighters will lose heart and melt away.

The Militia's still advancing,
That soldier's so close,
his eyes pierce through my body,
Like thorns that could rip me apart.

(Whispers, frantically)

The traps don't seem to be holding the soldiers back.

Why, the hell aren't they working!

...It seems as if the soldiers know about them.

Who could have betrayed our most treasured secrets?

Who has thrown us to the enemy!?

O! Akima spoke the truth.

Why didn't we believe her!

(SHOUTS)

THERE WILL BE NOWHERE FOR THE POISONOUS TRAITOR TO HIDE.

NOWHERE ON EARTH!

(SINGS)

The heat is suffocating,

Poisonous steam has stifled soldiers lying there.

Shrieks and harrowing cries fill the air.

The shots are deafening from desperate soldiers.

A brave soldier staggers ahead of the pack,

His eyes so red and cheeks so blue,

His face so thin and gaunt,

I'm sure he would kill for a crumb of bread.

Ditches are filling up,

Legs, arms, bodies everywhere.

The British push us to our limit.

Look at Kobena!

He limps, he lurches,

He stumbles forward to the end.

(Shout)

The ancestors say,
You must be willing to die in order to live.
Now is the time to believe in the province of the mind.
What one believes to be true can become the truth.
Freedom to us all!

(SINGS)

The heat, the steam,
The lunging swords.
Bullets flying like swarms of mosquitoes.
I move faster than the blink of an eye
I catch bullets that the soldiers let fly!

Oh, Kwaku has hit the ground!
Oh my favourite brother, my dearest friend!
His beautiful wife and children....
Stay with us dear one,
Stay with us!
Quickly bind those wounds Kwesi!
We must not let infection set in.

Brave villagers falling one by one
Like a pack of cards
Their lives so disposable
Gone in a flash.
Enough dear God, enough!
My poor heart can not take any more.

(PAUSE – NANNY’S FACE BRIGHTENS)

Can it be real..?
Are my eyes deceiving me..?
Countless Escapees steam towards us.

They're strong, they're fierce, they're armed with weapons.
God's grace has sent reinforcements at this precious time!

In our darkest hour
The ultimate Power
Has saved us from the precipice of sure death.
So we will battle on
Although the night is long
God's grace to all of us!

Concept, synopsis and words
By Shirley J. Thompson

Appendix 2: Dido Elizabeth Belle

Dido Elizabeth Belle is daughter to an African slave woman and an English naval captain. The brother of her father is the Earl of Mansfield and as the niece of the Earl of Mansfield, Dido Belle lived a gentrified life at Kenwood House in 18th Century London. However as the daughter of an enslaved African woman, it is considered that she was not beyond discrimination, especially as Dido was not allowed the same rights as her cousins. A measure of discrimination revealed in her disallowance from dining with the family. She is, however, attributed with the reason for her uncle, the Earl of Mansfield and Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales making several critical anti-slavery judgements, which may have sped the advancement of the Act of Parliament to abolish the British slave trade in 1807.