

Registration

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Organisation

The conference is organised by Lena van der Hoven, professor for Music Theatre at the Institute of Musicology at the University of Bern.

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Conference THE “AFRICAN OPERATIC VOICE” – Opera and Music Theatre in Africa and the African Diaspora

8/9/23 - 10/9/23

Programme

Friday, 8th of September 2023

Constructions of National Identities and Nation Building

09.00 **Britta Sweers & Lena van der Hoven, University of Bern (Switzerland):**

Welcome and Introduction

09.30 *Political Entanglements of National Opera Houses*

Moderation: Donato Somma

Flora Willson, King's College London (UK):

Aida's Afterlives: Italian Opera in Cairo After 1871

Melissa Gerber, University of Johannesburg (South Africa):

“A parade of mind-blowing visual opulence”:

The inauguration of the Pretoria State Theatre (1981)

and the staging of Afrikaner nationalism

10.30 Coffee break

10.45 *Staging Children and Heroines in African Opera*

Moderation: Lena van der Hoven & Melissa Gerber

Ubah Ali Farah & Dorcy Rugamba (Belgium & Rwanda):

Future: The First Opera Project in Rwanda

Allison Smith, Boston University (USA):

Operatic Pasts and Futures:

The Role of Children in South African Opera

12.00 **Donato Somma, University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa):**

Shifting Representations of Female Protagonists in South African Opera

Wayne Muller, Stellenbosch University (South Africa):

Traumatizing or Transformative: Dissecting the operatic portrayal of the “Hottentot Venus” in Hendrik Hofmeyr’s Sara Baartman

13.00 Lunch break

14.30 **Workshop-Discussion:**

Notions of African Operatic Voices

15.30 *Change of Perspective on National Identity*

Moderation: Allison Smith

Hilde Roos, Stellenbosch University (South Africa):

Chief Hijangua, a German-Namibian attempt

at building conciliatory transnational relationships through opera

Jessie Cox, Columbia University (USA):

Black Swiss and Opera

- 16.30 Coffee break
- 16.45 **Roundtable** Black Tell in Switzerland with Charles Uzor and Thomas Gartmann
- 17.30 **Apéro** with musical interludes from Adeolu Ogunsanya and Adeolu Abe: Scenes from Nigerian music theatre compositions
- 19.30 End

Saturday, 9th of September 2023

Notions of Genre and Opera Institutions in Africa and its Diaspora

- 09.00 *Historical Examples of African Operatic Voice*
Moderation: Bode Omojola
- Sam Kasule, University of Derby (UK):**
Ugandan Operas by Henry Wassanyi Sserukenya
- Jane Plastow, University of Leeds (UK):**
Somali Musical Theatre, 1954-1990: A peoples' political and cultural powerhouse
- Adeolu Abe, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo (Nigeria):**
Historical Development of Opera in Nigeria
- 10.30 Coffee break

- 10.45 *Institutional and Aesthetical Processes of Opera Production*
Moderation: Shirley Apthorp
- Oluwatosin J. Ibitoye, Kwara State University (Nigeria):**
Directing and producing an opera in Nigerian Educational Theatre. Theatricalities and Technicalities in Perspective
- Lena van der Hoven, University of Bern (Switzerland):**
Models of Production Processes of Opera in South Africa after 1994
- 11.50 **Workshop-Discussion:** Working Conditions in the operatic landscape in Africa
- 13.00 Lunch break
- 14.30 *Tradition of Yoruba Opera*
Moderation: Lena van der Hoven
- Adeolu O. Ogunsanya, University of Ibadan (Nigeria):**
Incidence of musical motifs' aesthetics in Yoruba Folk Opera
- Bode Omojola, Mount Holyoke College & The Five Colleges (USA):**
Pitch Organization and Narratology in Post-Colonial African Opera: Composing the Music of Activism in *Funmilayo*

15.30 *West Africa and the Global South*

Moderation: Donato Somma

Henry Stoll, University of Michigan (USA):

Reconsidering, and Reconstructing, Haiti's First Opera

Joshua Tolulope David, University of Toronto (Canada):

Exploring Opera Staging at The Musical Society of Nigeria:
Intersections of Culture, Representation, and Performativity

16.30 Coffee break

16.45 **Roundtable** with African composers and artistic voices on
production conditions outside of Africa

17.30 End

19.00 Conference Dinner at "Restaurant Rosengarten"

Sunday, 10th of September 2023

The African Operatic Voice in/and with other Media

Moderation: Wayne Muller

09.00 **Neo Muyanga, University of Cape Town (South Africa):**

Cyborgs with Voices – glitches as strategy for electric opera

Mkhululi Z. Mabija and Paul Castles (South Africa):

Dance in African Music Theatre

10.30 Coffee break

10.45 *Cinematic Adaptions*

Moderation: Sid Wolters-Tiedge

Jelena Novak, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa (Portugal):

Opera beyond West: The Case of *Bintou Wéré, a Sahel Opera*

**Moses Nii-Dortey and Kwame Crentsil, University of Ghana
(Ghana):**

Cinematic Adaptation of *Lost Fishermen*

11.45 Coffee break

12.00 **Film:** Adaptation of *Lost Fishermen*

12.30 Final remarks of the conference

13.15 End

Abstracts

Flora Willson, King's College (UK):

Aida's Afterlives: Italian Opera in Cairo After 1871

The world premiere of Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* at Cairo's new Khedivial Opera House in December 1871 is now a familiar episode in opera studies. From Khedive Isma'il's commission for a new work from Europe's most famous living composer, to the remediation of Egypt's past for operatic purposes by the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette and Verdi's own refusal to travel to Cairo to supervise preparations for the first performance, *Aida's* birth presents a paradigmatic instance of operatic colonialism in action. Edward Said's powerful 1993 critique that *Aida* was part of Cairo's "European façade"—and that it was "not so much about but of imperial domination"—has inevitably (and rightly) informed much subsequent scholarship about the opera's African context. Yet other, messier aspects of *Aida's* early history have often been overlooked. Moreover, the question of what happened next at the Khedivial Opera House, after the attention of Europe's cultural elites shifted with *Aida* itself back to the artform's European centres, remains to be told.

In this paper I therefore return to *Aida's* Cairean premiere as a starting point for investigating its early afterlives—and the continued presence of Italian opera more generally—in the Egyptian capital. Drawing on historical sources including newspaper reports, diaries, letters and travelogues in Arabic, English, French and Italian, I attempt to uncover traces of late-19th-century Cairo's elusive operatic life. In dialogue with recent historical and theoretical writing by Adam Mestyan, Carmen Gitre and Ziad Fahmy among others, my paper examines what opera meant to

its producers and consumers in the context of Egypt's complex, shifting political status at the turn of the century and ultimately ponders the local hybrid cultural forms forged in response to Egypt's entanglement in the long colonial history of opera.

Melissa Gerber, University of Johannesburg (South Africa):

"A parade of mind-blowing visual opulence": The inauguration of the Pretoria State Theatre (1981) and the staging of Afrikaner nationalism

On 23 May 1981, following 18 years of construction and millions of South African rands in taxpayer money, the grandest apartheid-era performance venue, the State Theatre, was finally inaugurated. Its completion saw the realisation of a dream for the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT)(1962–1998), one of four government-subsidised arts bodies tasked with generating cultural capital for the apartheid regime. The inauguration of the State Theatre signalled not only the dawn of a new era of artistic production in South Africa but also the opportunity to showcase Afrikaner nationalism. Situated in the city of Pretoria, the heart of the National Party's administration, the inauguration formed part of the Republic Festival celebrating twenty years of Afrikaner independence. The State Theatre's day-long inaugural showcase was marked by ceremony and pageantry, culminating in the performance of *Applause*, a potpourri production featuring contributions by each of PACT's four departments (ballet, music, drama, and opera). The highlight was the Triumphal Scene from Verdi's *Aida*, where the Atteridgeville Choir (Black), playing the role of enslaved Nubians, shared the stage with extras from the South African Defence Force (White), clearly suggesting a theatrical re-enactment of apartheid reality. However, the Black cast's refusal to sing the Afrikaans

national anthem to close the performance indicates points of fissure within this spectacle.

Drawing on Pistorius and Roos (2021), this paper considers the inauguration of the State Theatre. Using photographs, newspaper articles, reviews, and a communiqué from the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal/South African State Theatre (PACT/SAST) Collection, I interpret the event, in all its parts, as a flaunting display of Afrikaner nationalism. Shifting the focus from the Cape (Pistorius and Roos, 2021) to Pretoria, I illuminate a place and chapter in South African opera neglected in scholarship. By considering the subtleties of the State Theatre's inauguration, my research points towards the enmeshment of apartheid politics and opera performance.

Ubah Ali Farah & Dorcy Rugamba (Belgium & Rwanda):

Future: The First Opera Project in Rwanda

Two video statements from librettist Ubah Ali Farah and stage director Dorcy Rugamba on their opera project *Future*, followed by a discussion on the project led by Lena van der Hoven.

Allison Smith, Boston University (USA):

Operatic Pasts and Futures: The Role of Children in South African Opera

South African choral communities, particularly those in Black townships, play an important yet often overlooked role in the opera world. Many of these choral communities, based in local churches and schools, begin teaching children select opera repertoire, harmonization, and ear-training from a young age. They primarily learn by tonic solfège, which is often supplemented with imitations of professional recordings. Many of these children grow up to sing opera. This essay will focus on the crucial role that

Black children play in South African opera, as participants, creators, and audience members. It will argue that children have played a crucial role in South Africa's opera industry, and their continued involvement is crucial to its future. This essay will draw from scholarship at the intersections of opera studies with Black studies (Naomi André, 2018) and Indigenous studies (Pamela Karantonis and Dylan Robinson, 2011; Robinson 2020). This essay will focus on one work and a collection of works of an opera collective. South African composer, Sipumzo Lucwaba, cast children in his 2019 opera, *Imivumba Yamaqhawe (Scars of our Heroes)*, commissioned by the Cape Town Opera. Lucwaba used a popular South African song form, igwijo (plural: amagwijo), as a familiar tool with which to teach the children to sing harmony. Drawing from our conversations, I will demonstrate how Lucwaba's work provided both musical education and an arena in which Black children could see their epistemologies and phenomenologies reflected. Such reflection encourages Black children to construct their own futures by looking to the past and reaffirming Black epistemologies and phenomenology through shared Black musical and linguistic vocabulary. Cape Town-based opera collective, Umculo, also involves children, teenagers, and young adults in their works, though they often amend canonic works with situations and histories that intersect with the realities of these young people. I will demonstrate how Umculo's body of work both challenges and facilitates the racialized status quo of the South African opera industry; an industry still deeply mired in a white supremacist hierarchy.

Donato Somma, University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa):

Shifting Representations of Female Protagonists in South African Opera

This paper considers choices in protagonist and subject matter for opera in the post-apartheid era. I will take a comparative look across a small selection of operas in various languages (Xhosa, Zulu, English and Afrikaans). The choice of heroine in South African post-apartheid operas has presented audiences with the changing mythology of the "New South Africa". I will demonstrate that these often historically-based protagonists receive new and sometimes innovative readings in operatic treatment. I will discuss in this paper how the genre of opera, as it was perceived in South Africa, offered particular epic modes within which the images of these women would be remade, reinforced or subverted and show the consequences of shifts in their representations. The opera to be discussed include *Winnie: The Opera* (2011) by composer Bongani Ndodana-Breen and librettists Mfundu Vundla and Warren Wilensky portraying Winnie Madikizela Mandela, *Princess Magogo kaDinizulu* (2002) composed by Mzilikazi Khumalo and librettist Themba Msimang portraying the Zulu princess Magogo as well as the Afrikaans chamber opera *Poskantoor* (2014) composed by Braam du Toit.

Wayne Muller, Stellenbosch University (South Africa):

Traumatising or Transformative: Dissecting the operatic portrayal of the "Hottentot Venus" in Hendrik Hofmeyr's *Sara Baartman*

In *Post-Conflict Hauntings: Transforming Memories of Historical Trauma* (2020), Wale, Gobodo-Madikizela and Prager write that "artistic and creative modes of remembering violence represent sites through which the haunting nature of historical trauma may be reproduced but they can

also serve as powerful agents of transformation". Therefore, artistic expressions of historical trauma can either reproduce its effects years later, or aid in resolving that trauma through its transformative nature. Post-apartheid South African opera has indeed been a site of the latter. It has foregrounded unacknowledged black and women's histories by reinterpreting the documented history from other perspectives as a means of restitution. In the reception of post-apartheid South African operas, it is evidenced that these works have played a role in the socio-political transformation of the country, thereby becoming politically useful in fostering a new South African nationhood. Hendrik Hofmeyr's latest opera *Sara Baartman*, performed in Cape Town in September 2022, explores the life of the so-called "Hottentot Venus". Her narrative in contemporary South Africa is that of a Khoen woman who represents the (sexual) violence and trauma caused by colonialism. But, as poet Diana Ferrus has written: "I have come to take you home / where I will sing for you, / for you have brought me peace, / for you have brought us peace", Baartman is seen as a "mother of the nation" and a figure of peace. Hofmeyr's opera, however, seems to portray her as "perfectly happy with her circumstances" (as stated in his programme notes). In reviewing this opera's performance for the daily newspaper *Die Burger*, I opined that it left me with discomfort because the country continues to deal with the historical trauma of racism and sexual violence perpetrated during colonialism and apartheid. This paper explores that discomfort from the perspective of historical trauma and aesthetic responses thereto. With its focus on Baartman's portrayal in the opera's libretto, music, mise-en-scène and reception, this paper reflects on whether Hofmeyr's opera reproduces historical trauma or whether it, as many other post-apartheid South African operas, serves as an agent of transformation.

Hilde Roos, Stellenbosch University (South Africa):

Chief Hijangua, a German-Namibian attempt at building conciliatory transnational relationships through opera

On 9 and 10 September 2022, Namibians were able to see the country's first 'indigenous' opera *Chief Hijangua*, premièred at the National Theatre of Namibia in Windhoek. Staged by the Namibian opera company (www.operanamibia.com), this transnational production was funded by among others the Goethe Institute, the Siemens Arts Programme, and the Bank of Namibia.

The company is explicit about its reconciliatory vision, stating that 'Artists from Namibia and Germany want to work through their common history and thus gain a new, open, and positive attitude towards one another'. Created with this vision in mind, the plot of the opera tells the story of Hijangua who, 'through the manipulation of colonialist forces, destroys his own existence and the livelihood of his people'. Although the genocide of the Herero and Nama people in the early twentieth century by the German military is not directly present in the opera, it does form the backdrop to the storyline. The company also states that it casts roles independent of skin colour. The libretto is in Otjiherero and German, and singers, dancers, musicians, and stagecraft artists were recruited from Namibia, Germany, and South Africa.

This paper will probe how the intentions of the creators played out in the production. *Chief Hijangua* is not the first opera on the African continent to deal with a traumatic past, bridging diverse cultural spheres and combining more than one musical and spoken language in an opera. Critical questions will be asked regarding the balance of power in this transnationally created and funded opera production and the delicate nature of dealing with trauma through opera.

Jessie Cox, Columbia University (USA):

Black Swiss and Opera

Kira Thurman elaborates brilliantly on the ways in which Black bodies are othered in opera in the service of discourses of nationality. One example is Gloria Davis, who has lived half of her life in Switzerland, and who she only mentions briefly in relation to a performance in Germany (Thurman 2012). As Naomi André suggests, listening to Black opera singers, such as Gloria Davy, breaks through the limits of any account that does not engage black lives beyond the critique of antiblackness and such is crucial in Switzerland a country where not to talk about blackness is the proliferation of antiblackness through marking the national space as not (André 2018, 20, Cretton 2018). Davy wanted to sing these old works as she adamantly states in an interview for the *Journal de Genève*. Thus, rather than reading blackness simply as something done by civil society, which fits neatly into the unmarking that whiteness requires, a listening to Black lives as and from German spaces shifts our discourse, a crucial step in spaces where colorblindness is a dominant modality of antiblack racism. The opera *Black Tell* shall serve as an incipit to begin refiguring Black Swissness from Black lived experiences in Switzerland. Charles Uzor, a Black Swiss composer, writes the interludes between acts that perform a story of a Black refugee becoming Swiss throughout the course of the work. While the main narrative is one that erases antiblackness as well as reperforms whiteness as proper belonging (gained through blood relation) in its narrative of emancipation, Uzor's music highlights another set of directions of narration. Most importantly Uzor doubles down on the refused properness of Black life, which is also the celebration of Black lives alternate kinship formations beyond women's blood as marker for belonging (see Spillers 1987).

Sam Kasule, University of Derby (UK):

Ugandan Operas by Henry Wassanyi Sserukenya

Musical theatre is rooted in the critically important Ugandan traditions of music, dance and song. Two musical theatre/operatic works, *Oluyimba Iwa Wankoko* (1970) and *Makula ga Kulabako* (1968) by the preeminent creators of musical theatre in Uganda – Henry Wassanyi Sserukenya and Byron Kawadwa, will serve as paradigms of performance. These express the way in which the creative imagination articulates in the face of a variety of political and social processes thrown forward by, in my view, some of the manifestations of (post)colonialism and post-independence. I explore how musical theatre or opera has been continuously built on those same orature techniques during the post-colonial and post-independence period, and how Ugandan theatre today continues that tradition. Reflecting their own life and that of their Ugandan audience, the artists shape the musical into a form that illustrates their concerns and promotes their values.

This presentation seeks to pursue some of the meanings identified above in four sections. The first part discusses the notions of performance in Buganda, *okuzanya* (to play) and *okuyimba* (to sing), *okukuba ebivuga eby'ekinnansi*, (playing instruments); the second conceptualises opera or musical plays, *oluyimba/enyimba* (song or libretti), *omuzanyo* (play), and *ebitontome* (recitations), *amazina* (dance); the third conceptualises transformational performance discourses; and the fourth examines some of the ways in which Ugandan theatre and performance and the creative imagination have expressed some of the ideas.

The process of writing, composing, and producing a musical play is a complex endeavour. Nonetheless artists choose to work with musical theatre, since it embraces the intersecting elements of music, text,

performance and storytelling, and it allows them to explore the experience of denigration of common humanity, affirm ethnic (national) identities, and revise the conscious violence sanctioned by institutionalised oppression. Both productions gave me an insight into processes and practices of composition. So, examining song, dance and music in these musical plays allows me to highlight the survival of African orature and music ensembles as a significant move to transform theatre performance and resistance to colonial theatrical forms.

Since the musical plays that are a focus of this discussion are created by people from a specific ethnic group, a more complex question to ask would be: What do the construction of these musical plays, which that are of the "Kiganda" or Baganda culture, and the situations of its composition and performance communicate to us about how the Ugandan composers are observed and interpreted? What transpires in a musical play/opera in which storytelling is written and performed in one indigenous language without any translation? What new meaning is created in developing a Ugandan/African indigenous musical play/opera?

Jane Plastow, University of Leeds (UK):

Somali Musical Theatre, 1954-1990: A peoples' political and cultural powerhouse

This paper will discuss how, from the mid-1950s, revered Somali poetic traditions were developed by innovative youth, introducing ideas of both drama and musical theatre, to create a form that by the late 1960s would sweep across Somali speaking populations in Somalia, Somaliland, Djibouti, southern Ethiopia and Yemen; inspiring intense nationalism and providing a focus for socio-political debate.

The conditions which led to this blossoming of a unique performance form, and the reasons why it was able to speak so deeply to diverse Somali populations will be discussed, alongside explanation of how the form worked in performance terms. Examples will be given of key productions and their impact on Somali culture which reverberate to the present day.

Adeolu Abe, Adeyemi College of Education (Nigeria):

Historical Development of Opera in Nigeria

Dramatic performance through singing had some expressions in certain traditional settings among the Yoruba people in Nigeria. However, the generic art form called opera with elaborate music and theatre as found in modern Nigeria today evolved with Western influence. This Western form of art subsequently developed the Nigerian variants with significant advancements in modern Nigerian performing arts. Nine decades after its presence in Nigeria and about seven decades after Nigeria established her initial form of opera, comprehensive knowledge seems inadequate in charting the historical development of the Nigerian opera cutting across the pre-colonial to the post-colonial. Narration and analysis of the Nigerian folk opera (earliest form) has been explored by scholars, but post-independent Nigerian opera seems unattended to. A chronological view of the Nigerian opera is therefore the focus of this present study. Data from primary and secondary sources were collected, collated and analysed through critical discourse analysis (CDA). Findings show that modern Nigerian opera borrowed from four sources; African traditional performance styles, Church musical tradition, Western educational influence and modern social entertainments. Findings further categorise Nigerian opera into two types, these are the unscored opera and the scored opera. The study therefore concludes that the establishment of the

Nigerian opera is phenomenal having grown through about seven decades and has been improved in the hands of professionals through formal compositions and performances within the academia. Subsequently, the study recommends deeper scholastic study of Nigeria operas for cultural, educational, scientific, socio-economic and socio-political development, much more as artistic contribution for global development.

Oluwatosin J. Ibitoye, Kwara State University (Nigeria):

Directing and producing an opera in Nigerian Educational Theatre:
Theatricalities and Technicalities in Perspective

Directing an opera performance is a professional and creative art. This art conglomerates skills and experience of different facets of theatre production through the director who coordinates and pulls artistic and technical elements together. Stage opera performances which emerged in the South-Western Nigeria in 1944 under the direction of Hubert Ogunde heralded the rise of modern professional theatre in Nigeria. However, little has been said about the processes and challenges of producing an opera in Nigeria. This paper identifies the artistic process, theatrical aesthetics, technicalities (challenges, problems and prospects) of directing and producing an opera performance in Nigerian educational theatres. Through the descriptive method and participant-observation of stage productions of Sunnie Ododo's *To Return from the Void* and Taiye Adeola's *The Gods have Spoken* operas at the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria and Department of Performing Arts, Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria, respectively, this study identifies the socio-cultural and economic factors limiting opera performances in Nigeria. This study concludes that directing an opera production in a Nigerian institution is not without its attendant technicalities such as

acoustic considerations, lack of opera theatres or opera houses, and it also encompasses the artistic and theatrical intricacies of a typical Nigerian/African theatre. It is our recommendation that professional opera theatres and houses which are technically suitable for opera productions are built in Nigeria and that Directors possess the requisite musical, artistic and managerial skills for a successful opera performance.

Lena van der Hoven, University of Bern (Switzerland):

Models of Production Processes of Opera in South Africa after 1994

In my research project, I identified 31 South African opera companies that have been operating in South Africa since 1994. In this paper, I discuss the different models of production processes for opera productions by these ensembles and their aesthetic implications for the post-1994 South African opera landscape. These models include full in-house productions, various forms of national and international collaborations, applied theatre, national outreach projects and international education projects. By mapping these different models in time and space, I will identify shifts in production processes both nationally and regionally and discuss them in their socio-political contexts.

Adeolu O. Ogunsanya, University of Ibadan (Nigeria):

Incidence of musical motifs' aesthetics in Yoruba Folk

In the Yoruba traditional worldview, music is a tripartite performative concept that is made up of the combination of song, dance, and drumming (*t'orin, t'ijo, t'ilu*). These principal elements of music are frequently integrated with costume, poetry and miming in Yoruba traditional ceremonies (secular or sacred). Consequently, it is these principal elements

of Yoruba performing arts that are herein referred to as musical motifs, the incidence of which translates such event(s) into music drama. They also form the bases of the Yoruba music theatre as conceived and performed by the masque dramaturges as part of both ritual and non-ritual observances. Review of literature has revealed that before western opera was introduced into Nigeria during the colonial period, there had been established masque dramaturge practitioners, especially among the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria. They were known as the '*alarinjo*' and they specialized in folk music theatre which deployed the musical motifs to entertain the populace. However, studies also have revealed that these same musical motifs are still being used by the Yoruba folk opera composers, such as Hubert Ogunde (1916-1990) and others like him, to project the creation and resolution of the contextual make-belief conflicts in their music theatres or operas. While using Rice's Ethnomusicological theory (2010) as framework, and also adopting qualitative research methodology, the paper delves into the analyses of the underlying principles which determine the application and essence of musical motifs in Yoruba opera in retaining and projecting the playwright's dramatic intentions to an audience.

Bode Omojola, Mount Holykoe College (USA):

Pitch Organization and Narratology in Post-Colonial African Opera:
Composing the Music of Activism in *Funmilayo*

Operatic practices predated colonial rule in Africa. Performance contexts were, of course, different, and musical traditions were unique. But the use of music as a crucial component of storytelling, dramatic narratives, and presentational performances represents an important antecedent for new African operas. My paper focuses on my most recent opera, *Funmilayo*, as

an exemplar of the experimental and evolving styles of post-colonial African opera. Based on the political activism of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (1900-1978) during the colonial era, the opera tells the story of a courageous nationalist who led a successful revolt against the imposition of heavy taxation on the women of Abeokuta in Western Nigeria. In accounting for the organization of melodic and harmonic material in the opera, the paper discusses the dialogue between variable pitch systems and the pivotal role of the Yoruba Wòrú folklore in defining and generating the opera's music-dramatic narrative.

Henry Stoll, University of Michigan (USA):

Reconsidering, and Reconstructing, Haiti's First Opera

With the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), the people of Haiti expelled their French oppressors, becoming the first independent nation in Latin America, the first to permanently abolish slavery, and the only to be established by a slave rebellion. Seeking to make Haiti a nation worthy of the world's approbation, its first leaders set about building palaces, schools, fortresses, theaters, and, as I will show, commissioning opera and song for the glorification of their country.

This paper will consider the challenges inherent in reconstructing and staging opera from the African diaspora, using as a case study the earliest Haitian opera, *L'Entrée du Roi, en sa capitale* ("The Entrance of the King in His Capital"), written in 1818 for King Henry I of Haiti. This opera, I reveal, was one of three written from 1804 to 1820, from the declaration of Haitian independence to the end of a civil war; and is most remarkable for its opening scene—a dialogue between two Kreyòl-speaking lovers, Marguerite and Valentin. This transliteration of Haitian Kreyòl dates

among the earliest writings in the language and is doubly notable for its verisimilitude and latter-day legibility.

I ask: Why is theater—particularly opera and musical theater—so valuable to the study of Afro-diasporic language and intercultural encounter? How, and why, might we look “beyond” Western music notation in our search for historical African and Afro-diasporic opera? How might we handle multilingual libretti and historical forms of languages which (in this case, Haitian Kreyòl) did not yet possess a standard orthography? And finally, what are some of the ambivalences at play when composing opera, a historically European and colonialist genre, in an African or Afro-diasporic context? Recordings of my reconstructions will be heard.

Joshua Tolulope David, University of Toronto (Canada):

Exploring Opera Staging at The Musical Society of Nigeria: Intersections of Culture, Representation, and Performativity.

The transnational discourse of opera has engaged this genre as a medium laden with culture-specific underpinnings that are subject to varied interpretations regarding modernity, cultural signification, and representations. Within a pan-African context, this paper analyses opera productions by The Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON) and against the backdrop of the evolving scholarship that explores (re)presentation of opera in/ to African communities (Euba 1989; Olorunyomi & Duro-Lapido 2008; André et al. 2012; Nii-Dorthei 2015; Mhlambi 2016; André 2018; Roos 2018; Pistorius 2019; Matzke et al. 2020). This study expands the cultural reductions of opera productions to racial imaginations, subversion, and indigenization experiments. It attempts to find intersections of experiences, and blur representational limits and contradistinctions,

thereby arguing for a melting point of *modernities* in performance between the cultural text, the spectacle, and its beholder.

This paper zooms in on the staging of operas in Lagos, in the last decade by The Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON) with an attempt at an analysis that moves from *representationalism to performativity* (Piekut 2011), and considers the pathway of musical works that carry deep cultural meanings and can be mapped on the experiences of the performers, institutional and cultural politics of production contexts that may or may not have been influenced by Western ideologies. I put Peggy Phelan's (1993) redefinition of the ontology of performance, in conversation with Kene Igweonu's description of the performative tendencies of performance in Africa as Inter-Actions informed by performativity, to analyze some productions by the MUSON ensemble.

Fundamentally, I question how the local context of mostly Nigerian-trained musicians funded by local institutions affect the staging of operas in the postcolonial Lagos, Nigeria. I argue for a discourse that resists the interpretation of opera performance in African contexts either as forced conceptions of Blackness or acts of restatement in Whiteness and looks towards the idea of *mutuality* and *sociality* in performance (Phelan 1993). In other words, my study privileges the extent to which personal, sociocultural, and institutional frameworks are entwined with opera performance in the Lagos context.

Neo Muyanga, University of Cape Town (South Africa):

Cyborgs with Voices – glitches as strategy for elektrik opera

In his book, *The Tools of Empire*, historian, Daniel R. Headrick writes, *Among the many important events of the nineteenth century,*

two were of momentous consequence for the entire world.

One was the progress and power of industrial technology; the other was the domination and exploitation of Africa and much of Asia by Europeans. Historians have carefully described and analyzed these two phenomena, but separately, as though they had little bearing on each other. (1981:3)

Headrick's remarks appear straightforward for the period in which they were published – the era of the 1980s represents a time of new advances, globally, in technology and systems of domination such as would, arguably, culminate in what Francis Fukuyama assumed (perhaps incorrectly) to be 'The end of history and the last man' (1991).

However, as I will attempt to argue during my presentation, Headrick's words also proffer a nuanced rubric through which to investigate how relations between technology and coloniality have since reverberated into the 21st century. Relying on arguments put forward by black diaspora tech theorists such as Chude-Sokei, Ruha Benjamin and others who have suggested robots/ machines as a stand-in for formerly enslaved and/or colonised persons, my presentation represents an attempt to think through a set of experimental performative examples that may be said to elucidate how the relations highlighted by Headrick hold deep resonance with how classical singers, who self identify as black, may experience reception by their various publics.

Mkhululi Z. Mabija and Paul Castles (South Africa):

Dance in African Music Theatre

The Road Between the Desert and the Ocean is a new work of music theatre by librettist Mkhululi Mabija of South Africa and composer Paul Castles of Australia. Set in the Skeleton Coast of Namibia, it seeks to translate the political reality of the region into the ethereal through a lens of operatic imagination. The emotional resonance of the land and its complex history are portrayed through the expressionistic impulses of text, music, and dance, the latter of which is elevated to a role of equality in the formal construction. Dance becomes the primary means of narrative expression by which the story is conveyed to the audience, as explored through fellowships at the Centre for Ballet and the Arts of NYU and the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study.

The role of dance as an integrative part of musico-theatrical storytelling has shifted over time, from *Tannhäuser* to *Salome* to *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, yet often it has come apart from the dramatic construct and been reduced to “steps” rather than choreography. We are interested in the renewed interdependence of dance within music theatre and look to models such as Karmina Silec’s musiktheater-based meta-compositional “choregie” or Ben Krywosz’s formulation of the goal of music theatre as the central point within the triangle of text, sound, and visuals.

We approach this in the context of our international collaboration as artists from two perceived Southern extremities, and our interrelationships between distance, geography, history, and identity. Our frame of reference includes dance-integrative African operatic works such as *Princess Magogo*, but our work becomes centred on contemporary rather than traditional forms of movement. We are particularly interested in contemporary dance as the natural parallel to contemporary music

theatre and how the two can be reconciled within the context of music theatre as a natural and essential partner of all other disciplines.

Jelena Novak, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa (Portugal):

Opera beyond West: The Case of *Bintou Wéré, a Sahel Opera*

In relation to his “Europas 1 & 2” John Cage allegedly announced: “For two hundred years the Europeans have been sending us their operas. Now I’m sending them back”. That way he limited his focus on binary position regarding historical development of opera between European and North American continent. However, the opera world develops beyond this binary axis while opera studies only recently started to engage with more passion and visibility with operatic ‘side-histories’ and developments.

After briefly mapping the context of ‘Opera beyond West’ I will discuss in more detail the African opera *Bintou Wéré, a Sahel Opera* (2007, premiered in Bamako, Mali) whose authors are Wasis Diop, Koulsy Lamko (libretto) and Ze Manel (music). It is a story of a young pregnant woman who wants to emigrate in order to provide better future for herself and for her unborn child. Conceived as postcolonial project initiated by late prince Claus of Holland, this opera continues its life through the film “An Opera of the World” (2017) by Manthia Diawara. Diawara asserts that the opera serves as a mirror to build an aesthetic and reflexive story, through song and dance, about the current and yet timeless drama of emigration, and refugee crises. *An Opera of the World* is a collage of past and present archival footages of migrations, classic European arias and interviews with European and African intellectuals, artists and social activists.

I will discuss questions such as: For whom is this opera made? What are the intentions of its authors? What is an African operatic voice? How does the media transition from the Sahel Opera to a film about the universal topic

of migration reinvents the opera itself? How does the film “An Opera of the World” use the context of African opera? I will illuminate those perspectives while contextualizing both the opera and its cinematographic successor beyond the binary horizon of the Western opera world, in an attempt to better understand the opera world of Africa.

Moses Nii-Dortey and Kwame Crentsil, University of Ghana (Ghana):

Cinematic Adaptation of *Lost Fishermen*

How may we salvage an operatic tradition that is threatened with extinction due to factors such as breaks in intergenerational transmission of the art form; pace and direction of changes in ideological settings, music/theatre practices and tastes; and inadequate response to mass communication and media technology? (Grant 2014, Nii-Dortey 2021). The issues raised in these questions sum up the underlying factors of Saka Acquaye’s (1923-2007) operas’ endangerment in Ghana. When his popular folk opera *The Lost Fishermen* was staged in 2007 and 2011, it was the first time in over 20 years, and the last. The art form, and others by the same composer, are, in effect, extinct according to Grant’s (2014) five year Framework for Measuring Music Vitality and Endangerment (MVEF). This paper proposes technification through cinematic adaptation as a more permanent safeguard for “*The Lost Fishermen*” folk opera. Mascelli’s (2005) canonical six ‘C’s of cinematography- camera angles, continuity, cutting, close-up, composition, and ‘cheating’- will provide the basis for the re-creative/adaptive choices and procedures for script, music and drama. The production processes will be structured in the form of pre-production, production and post-production. Even though the proposed cinematic medium may undermine the folk opera’s core elements including fidelity of story, liveness, immediacy and interaction, the new and obviously more

accessible version would safeguard the endangered art by increasing interest in and drawing attention to the original work.

About “*The Lost Fishermen*”

Title: *The Lost Fishermen*

Executive Producer: Dr. Moses Nii-Dortey

Producer: Selima Awudu

Director: Kwame Crentsil

Screenplay: Aseye Tamakloe, Kwame Crentsil

This is a gripping short cinematic adaptation of the acclaimed folk opera by Saka Aquaye which was first staged in 1965. The legend of “*The Lost Fishermen*” is set in a 19th century fishing community in Accra, Ghana. Kotey, the oldest son of a chief fisherman, Ataa Amasa, finds himself torn between tradition and personal conviction.

Against the warnings of his father and the strict fishing rules of the village, Kotey takes charge and leads a group of defiant fishermen to sea on a tabooed day. Ashie, the youngest son of Ataa Amasa seeking to prove himself to his older brother Kotey, unexpectedly joins the expedition. The gods punish them for their defiance and they get lost at sea. To find their way home, the gods must be appeased, a sacrifice must be made. The clock is ticking for a decision to save the fishermen so they can return home.

“*The Lost Fishermen*” explores themes of tradition, sacrifice, family bonds, and the struggle to reconcile personal ambition with societal expectations. Through stunning visuals, captivating musical compositions, and poignant performances, this short musical promises to captivate audiences with its emotional depth and gripping narrative. This film is a litmus test that cinematic adaptations are possible ways of safeguarding endangered Ghanaian folk operas.