No Joy in the Brilliance of Sunshine

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Introduction

This research is focused on the creative development of an artistic stage performance, combining operatic music by Handel with contemporary performance art. Through this I will explored how I can combine my duality as a performer: the early music singer and the contemporary performer and creator. This project and its connected research are a part of my artistic development as a musician, creator and performer, and the urge to explore this music and the questions that has arisen has grown out of previous projects and ideas.

The goal of this research is to help me to explore this field with my own artistic identity and gather experience and specific knowledge that can lead to new projects, collaborations and further develop the outreach of my artistic work.

Research question

I see this research as a tool to guide the development of the project. I want it to inform my choices and strengthen the reflection on the artistic idea, process and product. For this reason, I have chosen the following research question:

How can I create a stage performance combining and connecting my two sound worlds/style identities as a performer?

Through using operatic music by Handel with thematic inspiration from the book 'Heart of Darkness' by Joseph Conrad, I seek to answer this question.

Method for the project

Already from the beginning of my studies, I have been interested in exploring repertoire by setting it in new situations through arrangements and use of other instruments. The questions and discussions raised by crossover (combination of styles) projects have always intrigued and inspired me. In the final year of my bachelor's degree, I had the chance to explore this in a stage performance setting. It was an opportunity to experiment with the combination of different stage styles. I wanted to see how I could approach the music drama, or simply the performance of classical vocal music, as a performance art piece.

The process began with an idea and then focused it on a theme. Different images were shaped to scenes, the ideas were developed to clearer scenes with

"movement" and the overall action in the scenes: from where to where, sketched out. A simple narrative was then formulated and described.

The different scenes were then experimented with on the floor, thus shaping the ideas more clearly, like continuing to shape clay into a more concrete form.

This process of trying out raw ideas, thinking, reshaping and slowly building the piece was highly satisfactory and gave me total control over the process and outcome. It kept the creative process flexible and improvisational as well as focused and decisive.

Visitance from the Garden (2018): https://youtu.be/jKYb_mzj3DI

I therefore chose to approach my master project in a similar manner, using the experience from the drama project as a guide and inspiration. I decided to start with two explorations: one with a selection of music by Handel, and one with the book Heart of Darkness, keeping them separate in the beginning. The plan was to start by extracting themes from the two: describing the main themes in the story and choosing the ones I find most interesting or intriguing and making a selection of Handel arias by connecting them to different emotions and affects, i.e., anger, remorse, sadness, determination, different levels of energy.

By doing this I will gather a pool of elements, ideas and music that do not necessarily fit together. These will work as raw material and create a frame wherein my creative journey can start.

The next step would be to experiment with different combinations of the material to build different scenes, bigger building blocks that would shape parts of the performance. Other media like lighting and sound design will also be considered at this stage, introducing them to the work and bringing in different ways of connecting the already existing material. In planning to work in the same way I had done with my stage performance piece in my bachelor's, I am aware that a major part of the process will be going back and forth between the "drawing board", where the ideas were shaped and trying out the ideas on the floor. In this way, I believe that I will be able to shape and adjust the creative process in whatever way I want while creating the performance.

I constructed several performance-focused tasks that will allow me to approach my questions from different angles. These include practical assignments 'on the floor' testing dramaturgical movement and interaction with objects while performing the music, as well as reflecting on the possible interpretations of and themes in the musical material. I will also explore how I can use electronic tools for sound production. Some tasks will be focused on how to reimagine the music through electronics and bring them into the stage situation to create new colours and spaces for the different scenes to happen. After each task is undertaken, I will write a reflection on the process and the outcome. The alternation between creative tasks and the reflection in writing will be at the heart of this research. Through this, I will collect tools and develop reflection processes on how I will build my performance, and how I can reimagine and reconstruct Handel's music in a contemporary context.

Previous projects

In the past few years, I have been experimenting with arrangements and the use of electronics in my repertoire. This has grown into several projects and other collaborations with composers and contemporary musicians. It has become a tool for exploring repertoire in an inspiring and personal way. I have developed a style and a competence that informs my work.

The project that has contributed the most to this development is the ongoing "The John Download Project", in collaboration with composer, producer and sound designer Harald Jordal. The project explores the music of the great British songwriter and lutenist John Dowland (1563-1626) through a contemporary art-pop expression. It takes the shape of a full-length pop-music album, with eleven tracks that together create an entity through their variation in expression, theme, arrangement and intensity. Each song explores different styles and moods. Some use contrast as a comical and surprising element, while others try to find artistic honesty through the arrangement and performance.

This musical journey started with the question: What would a different stylistic wrapping and exploration do to the communication of the songs and lyrics of Dowland?

As I started the creative experimenting, several possible outcomes and versions presented themselves: would the music "survive", in the way it is traditionally performed and what it normally communicates within classical performance practice? Would it die, in the meaning of being degraded or reduced to something lacking its original meaning and aesthetics, and only serve as a fragile frame for some wacky synth-pop arrangements? Or could it be reborn, through discovering new layers of meaning and different ways of communicating through alternative performance practices? The project seeks to explore and discover all of these outcomes.

My experiences and reflections from this project played an important part in the development of the idea for my master project (se chapter Reflection on idea). Several of the tools I use were developed in "The John Download Project". Many of the questions I reflect upon are relevant for both projects, and they have therefore also informed each other. The main difference between these projects is that the master project is staged and live. This is a vital element that brings the questions that I explored in the earlier projects into a completely new context. I now also have a visual element to work with and take responsibility for.

Why Heart of Darkness

We often seek something raw and real in art and through performing. By reading *Heart of Darkness*, I realised there is a dark side to this, a dark side of the moon if you like. I was wondering if I could create the same feeling or experience I had had while reading the book in a stage performance, luring the audience towards some sort of window and to make them realise things, unsaid things, about themselves and about the art they were witnessing. For me this encompasses many things, but mainly the brutality of human nature, the brutality of nature in general, the unbalance in society, the entitlement to power and position, our history and its relationship to the modern world. I wish to use my inspiration and the connection I found from this book as a starting point to create something of my own in a stage setting that explores the same feelings and the same confrontational effects. The themes and the content are open to interpretation.

The first thought that led to the idea for this project was the wish to explore how I could use the book *Heart of Darkness* as a source of inspiration. The text and story left a very strong impression on me, and a feeling that I had been shown some profound deep darkness in human nature, an abyss of despair that was frightening and compelling but also thrilling. I was led to a window through which I became a secret witness to some horrible truth. Through this window I became the silent participant of the real darkness; a darkness where all colour and shade of light is sucked inn only to become more of that same darkness.

Because my research is focused on combining the two sides of me as a performer, the early music singer with the contemporary performer, I wish to reflect and argue for the use of the book as inspiration, as it will inform both my creative and reflective process. There are several points with this piece of literature that makes it relevant for me.

The main thing is the narrative structure. Everything is narrated and described but in two layers. We are first placed in a situation where a story is told, or about to be told. We are told about a ship sailing up the Thames towards London, and that the old sailor Marlow is reminded of a trip he made several years ago when he was sent up the Congo River commanding a steamboat. We are then told this story by Marlow, and gradually forget the first situation of narration we were presented for. We are reminded of this outer structure of the narrative only twice, when something

interrupts Marlow's story. The narrative technique of focusing on the narrator is in a way inherited from the long tradition of storytelling found in the epic poems, originating in ancient Greece. This genre in literature was originally a performative artform, oral before it transformed into a literate art form. Heart of Darkness borrows some elements from epic poems: there is the travel, the quest in search for something, in this case the man Kurts. The journey takes us also into the unknown, the jungle in a foreign land, and the cornerstone of the story is the main character's struggle with the mission and the path he must follow.

Part One

Opera and stage art

As a young singer, I was never really interested in opera as an artform. I remember when I was a teenager visiting the Royal Scottish Conservatoire in Glasgow saying this to a teacher from the vocal department. He strongly advised me not to close off from this style of music, since a significant amount of the repertoire for a countertenor comes from this genre. At the time, I did not feel comfortable with acting or portraying a role. I also had had a limited experience with opera. I never really understood what it was. It seemed big and old-fashioned to me, conservative and rigid.

Through my years of studying singing, I gained experience and confidence in acting and stage presence. Portraying something or someone on stage became an interest and a skill I could develop.

In the book *Storytelling in Opera and Musical Theater,* the author Nina Penner suggests the following requirements for Opera: "In contrast to songs, operas present stories by means of singers enacting characters. Unlike nonoperatic performances of other genres of vocal music in which character enactment is possible, operas are audio-visual fictions. Content is determined not only by what we hear but also by what we see."[1]

According to this definition, opera is distinguished from other vocal art forms by its audio-visual characteristics: both the audio and visual elements determine the fiction and story we are presented. Both aural and visual information and impressions are crucial for the construction of the drama.

The author points out how the genre has always had a strong focus on narrative and storytelling, even when other art forms found new ground by abandoning narrative structures and ideals through the last century. She points out that non-narrative operas do exist but that these are seen as the exception that confirms the rule by "[…] their denial of our expectation for storytelling"[2]

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[1] Nina Penner, *Storytelling in Opera and Musical Theater* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2020), p. 36.

[2] Op. cit., p. 25.

In her argumentation towards her definition, Penner refers to Plato's *mimesis* (enacting or showing) and *diegesis* (telling). This way she shows the main difference between opera and other vocal music genres that tell stories: in songs the singer usually describes or recalls what is happening and how the characters have acted or are acting. It is the narrator telling us a story. In opera on the other hand, the singers show what is happening through enacting: "[…] singers' utterances represent characters' utterances, and singers' actions represent characters' actions."[3]

The last part of Penner's definition points to another important feature of opera: "Finally, opera may be differentiated from non-musical theatre and film by the fact that singing is one of [the] main ways opera characters communicate."[4] Meaning that in opera the main tool of communication for the characters is singing. The genre establishes a world and story where singing is the natural and preferred way to address the audience and the other characters. Whether or not the characters actually hear the singing or the music is a question much debated within opera studies. Penner points out that if the audience's main reason to see opera is to experience stories, they would benefit from viewing the characters as hearing their and other's singing. She argues that this strengthens the plot of many operas because it makes it easier to believe the characters and their motivation to sing. Not everything in the plot is believable through the libretto alone. Some actions are only explainable through the emotional colour the music and the character's singing characteristics give them.

In this regard, an important ingredient in opera is accepting the fiction it creates. In order to understand the story we are presented with, we must accept the fiction it is told within.

Because we know we are watching an opera, we expect the singing and the world it creates. Who or what is telling the story can shift: a character, a narrator outside of the story, the orchestra (as in the overture) or in the music itself (*leitmotif*). I see that there is a potential for abstract expression in this art form, since so much of the communication of the narrative relies on the combination of the different elements: the combination of visual and audio. So what happens if we focus on these abstract qualities in the genre and remove the story it is telling? Can we take away the

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[3] Op. cit., p. 26.

[4] Op. cit., p. 36.

narrative and only present the fiction? Would there still be a fraction of opera? Does it still tell a story?

In the lecture "Aesthetics of Absence: Questioning Basic Assumptions in Performing Arts" by the German stage director Heiner Goebbels from 2010, he reflects on how theatre and opera largely depend on the "[…] classic concept of the artistic experience in terms of direct presence and personal intensity"[5]. Meaning the idea that we need a strong protagonist personified on stage to tell something. This, he says, is built around the secure actor performing its role. He calls this the expressive protagonist. This can be any kind of performer embodying the role on stage; an actor, singer, dancer or musician.
He continues by making the following observation:

> *Theatre and opera refuse to consider their classic assumptions.*
> *Occasionally they will change the text of a play, sometimes they change*
> *the sound of an opera, but never more than this. And speaking as someone*
> *who knows the gravity of educational institutions for actors and directors, I*
> *can reassure you this will go on for a while …[6]*

He suggests that there is an unwillingness in the established classical theatre and opera world to break with these norms. He also reflects on how the strong protagonist is a traditionally important ingredient: *"In traditional theatre, which is based on literature, and in opera subjects in the audience recognize themselves in the actor or singer or dancer on stage; they identify themselves with the performers and mirror themselves in them."[7]* In Goebbels search for absence in his pieces he manages to do the opposite, by either reducing or removing the actor or role on stage. This way he manages to free himself from the classical paradigm of the artform. He breaks with the audience's expectations of what theatre should or could be and forces the audience to perceive it in a new light.

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[5] Heiner Goebbels, "Aesthetics of Absence: Questioning Basic Assumptions in Performing Arts" (Cornell Lecture on Contemporary Aesthetics, Cornell University, March 9th 2010), p. 3.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

Goebbels reflects on this in the framework of his own works. In some pieces he creates contrasts that break with the norms of the narrative, creating *" […] blank spaces for the spectator's imagination."* He explains, through citing Friedrich Hölderlin, how these blank spaces, or distances between the different material, manage to keep together through *poetic logic*.

Because Geobbel's pieces are built by combining different elements, presented either after or on top of each other, they do not follow a traditional linear narrative. Instead, they rely on the audience to interpret the connection between them and fill in these blank spaces with their imagination. They are therefore combined through what he refers to as poetic logic. In contrast to philosophical or analytical logic, the poetic logic *"lays claim to many of our perceptive abilities."*[8] It is something that creates logic or meaning through the way it is understood by different senses. Through the combination of these senses a logic is built and interpreted by the spectator. About his own style of work Goebbels comments:

> *In such theatre the spectator is involved in a drama of experience rather than looking at drama in which psychologically motivated relationships are represented by figures on stage. This is a drama of perception, a drama of one's senses, as in those quite powerful confrontations of all the elements - stage, light, music, words - in which the actor has to survive, not to act. So the drama of the "media" is actually a double drama here: a drama for the actor as well as a drama for the perception of the audience.*[9]

These ideas greatly inspire me as they offer a different way to look at opera and stage art. It suggests another way of building a concept and performance. One that offers flexibility and gives space for intuition and play, making this possible by not being fixed to a set narrative or story. Instead, the combination of theatrical elements; lights, stage, performance, sound, song, text, are creating a drama of their own. There can be a friction between the audience, the work and the performer(s), and this friction can create another idea of fiction.

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[8] Op. cit., p. 4.

[9] Op. cit., p. 5.

However, this requires a different starting point and method. Without a finished work, like a theatre play or an opera, I will have to create a different framework for my process of building a performance.

Nina Penner offers different ways of looking and talking about interpretations of operatic works. They can also provide another view of the process and creation of performance. She points out how scholars and directors have a growing interest in talking about how to stay true or not to the *"Werktreue"* (fidelity to the work).[10] As an answer to the many approaches and examples of artistic interpretations, she offers the following main paradigms for contemporary opera: *work-performances* and *performance-works.* This is relevant to my work as it offers a structure to understand my own project in relation to the opera genre.

Work-performances follow what Penner calls *The Classical Paradigm.* These are works that are examples of the piece they are based upon. An instance of that work. As Penner describes it: *"[A]n instance [of a work] provides audiences with an experience of the work by making manifest if not all of the properties that have bearing on the work's appreciation, then at least a good many of them."*[11] It requires a portion of fidelity to the work it is based upon. Penner points out that this does not mean fidelity strictly to the text of the work, the music and libretto, but can also mean staying true to other aspects of the original work: This can be portraying the narrative in the same manner, delivering the same moral conclusion to the plot, recreating historical or social backgrounds or situations that accompanied the original performance of the work. It can also mean making a specific historical aspect understandable for a modern-day audience by translating it into a modern-day equivalent.

Penner sums it up with the following: "Work-performances not only must be faithful to the work's point but also must convey that point through a moderately faithful performance of the work's plot and score"[12]

Performance-works, on the other hand, follow what Penner refers to as *The Ingredients Model.* This is a term she has borrowed from theatre theorists, among

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[10] Penner, 2020, p. 161.

[11] Op. cit., p. 176.

[12] Op. cit., p. 177.

them James Hamilton. She describes it as "[i]nstead of regarding theatre performances as mere executions of pre-existing works, the production is regarded as a work in its own right, one that may or may not employ pre-existing works as ingredients"[13] With the focus on ingredients, the different parts the performance is built with, this resembles the way Goebbels talks about his own work. Instead of basing it on an already made work, the performance is constructed with several already existing parts. This allows the creator to be freer with the balance between hers/his own original material and pre-existing material. The elements can then be brought together with the spaces Goebbels calls *poetic logic.*

Penner argues that this is a model of understanding that we can adopt to opera productions. There are several examples of these types of works in the opera world. Penner points to the practice of cutting and substituting in operas in the 1800s. She also argues that contemporary opera productions like Neuenfels's *Fledermaus*, Konwitschny's *Meistersinger* and Sellars's *Indian Queen* are easier to regard as performance-works. Both due to the amount of deviation from the original score and plot, and because of the director's intention of creating something new, with a different point or message.[14]

Performance art

This is an art form that today can mean many things. The term has its roots in the conceptual art movement from the 1960-70s where the emphasis was on the development of the artistic idea rather than the art product as a commodity. As a reactionary form of artistic action Performance art was described as being a new form of art; something that took art out and away from the galleries, the collectors and the museums and gave the artist the freedom to become the artworks themselves, through action. Throughout the 1970´s, performance art became so popular that several art institutions embraced this new art form and opportunities like performance festivals, happenings and shows were established in both small galleries and larger museums. Soon it became a term and form of artistic expression recognised on the same level as other fine arts. However, the history of performative art is much longer and older than the term and genre coined in the 1960s. In many

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[13] Op. cit., p. 171.

[14] Penner, 2020, pp. 172-74.

ways this type of expression is as old as human expression, because in its core is the act of expression.[15]

In the book *Performance art from futurism to the present* by RoseLee Goldberg, the author signifies the start of the history of performance art as being at the beginning of the 20th century with the Futurists in Italy. This movement, with its many manifestos, called for an art that was action based. The artist, or specifically the painter at that time should participate in the action of art, which should be provocative and violent. This evolved into theatrical pieces where the goal was to provoke the audience and bring down the classical paradigms of art.[16]

In many respects, the futurist theatres built on traditional theatre had links to opera through their mutual ancestor: Commedia dell'arte. With its stylized characters and plots, this Italian theatre tradition has inspired both comic and serious opera.[17] What one can argue was new with the futurists was their desire to break with tradition and style, to create new art for the new world.[18]

Another art movement that explored performative practices was the Dada movement. Inspired by the Italian Futurists, the term Dada emerged with a growing avant-garde cabaret scene in Zurich. Inspired by the genre, which was highly popular in Germany in the first decades of the 20th century, the café-cabaret event Cabaret Voltaire was founded by Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings in 1916. Their shows would consist of live poetry, music and dance, and collected a group of experimental artists and poets, who each defined the Dada expression in their own way. Among them: Jean Arp, Tristan Tzara and Hans Richter.[19] Similarly, the surrealist movement started with events and live art in Paris around the same time, and later merging with Dada artists, this way of exploring artistic expression through

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[15] RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance art from futurism to the present* (London: Thames and Hudson, World of Art series, 1988, originally published in large format as Performance: Live art 1909 to the present, 1979), p. 7.

[16] Op. cit., pp. 11-30.

[17] Anne MacNeil, "Commedia dell'arte." Grove Music Online, 2001; Accessed 4 Feb. 2022. https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000006188.

[18] Goldberg, 1988, p. 30.

[19] Op. cit., pp. 55-74.

action and performative artforms like theatre, dance and music spread through Europe and the Western World.[20]

A further course was set in the 1920s when the German art school Bauhaus incorporated stage work in their education. Through their holistic view on interdisciplinary art's potential, a redefinition of what performative art could be was made possible. The early works, developed through Bauhaus' many festivals, were seeking to combine several artforms through their playful way of creating stage works. With the use of experimental costumes, dance and movement, and by challenging the paradigms of traditional theatre, the student and teachers of Bauhaus explored not only one but several artistic domains. Inspired by the Dadaists, these works would also often use parody and satire. Based on the interdisciplinary ideas at Bauhaus, they started to explore the performance space as an architectural space. This led to a geometrical and gestural exploration of movement and dance.[21]

In the decades after the Second World War, performance art had developed into a myriad of directions and expressions. In the context of this research, I will only point to a few important names that worked on the borderline between performance and music and are relevant to this work.

John Cage became an important composer from the 1950s and onwards through his redefinition of music. He said that any sound could be music and introduced the notion that the noise we hear in our everyday life is music and therefore equal to the music composed by any composer. This led him to explore these sounds in his own compositions and challenge the way we listen and interpret music. This led him also to interdisciplinary and performative work where the actions of the performers themselves played an equally important role as to the music they performed in his pieces.[22]

Another New York based composer and artist that became important from the 1960s onward is Meredith Monk. Inspired by the form of happenings that had developed in the US, she explored how many performers could perform in different locations and with different material at the same time, creating multi-layered and interdisciplinary

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[20] Op. cit., pp. 75-96.

[21] Op. cit., pp. 97-106.

[22] Op. cit., pp. 125-26.

work.[23] Monk is known for her exploration of the voice and its extended technique, challenging this through her compositions.[24]

Robert Wilson is an American artist and stage director that has worked with stylized performative theatre and opera. Working within the traditional forms of theatre and stage, Wilson has introduced approaches to develop and create pieces for stage. His *Einstein on the Beach* from 1976 was a collaboration with American composer Phillip Glass and dancer Lucinda Childs, and was a huge international success, challenging the paradigms of opera.[25]

American artist and musician Laurie Anderson became an important voice in the field of music and performance art. Music and the act of performing sound was from the outset a central part of her work.[26] In 1982, she presented her eight-hour multimedia performance piece *United States.* Some parts of this performance became iconic songs, where she used a vocoder (voice processed synthesizer). This and later performances were constructed with smaller pieces gathered as a sequence of scenes or songs.[27]

By presenting a brief overview of the development of performance art and some central names within the genre, I wish to place my project and research within this historic context. I take with me several concepts and ideas from this tradition into my artistic work to challenge how I think about and perform my repertoire. This will help me explore other sides to Handel's music as well as historical and stylistic aspects.

Handel and the opera

The shaping of Handel's dramatical music through the staging of one of his operas or oratorios seems to spark debate and create a division of opinions. Questions of authenticity and modernization seem to be the first aspects on the agenda when staging is discussed and has been since the first revivals of operas in the last

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[23] Op. cit., pp. 143-44.

[24] Biography from Meredith Monk's website (Meredith Monk/The House Foundation for the Arts). Accessed 6 February 2022. https://www.meredithmonk.org/about/biography/

[25] Goldberg, 1988, pp. 188-89.

[26] Op. cit., p. 172.

[27] Op. cit., pp. 190-91.

century.[28] A recurring feature is productions where the music is focused on historical accuracy, while the staging and production is embossed with modern styles and contemporary themes. These practices arise debate about how historically informed performance should be treated in a staged production. Andrew V. Jones points out this tendency in his article 'Staging a Handel opera' in the following manner:

> *The combination of a historically aware musical performance with a production style which— whether consciously or not—ignores the composer's instructions and the conventions of his day is now such a common feature of Handel opera performances that it has almost become the norm. Certainly, it is seen as a selling-point [...]*[29]

Jones continues by pointing out the challenge with time and history: there are several social structures and norms that are no longer present in our time. This is of course one of the big challenges with working with historical artefacts and brings us to the questions of historical presentation and contextualization.

In Winton Dean's and John Merrill Knapp's *Handel's Operas 1704-1726,* we can find a similar sense of disappointment in the treatment of Handel's operas in modern day performance as the one Andrew Jones portrays. In their first chapter Dean and Knapp spend some time on commenting on the lack of historical and stylistic knowledge due to ignorance, they argue. They point to the changes of fashion throughout the history of opera, and that because the artform has changed so much over the decades they argue that we should seek to fully understand the historic context in which it was created.[30] Andrew V. Jones argues for the same in his article from 2006, calling for a more detailed knowledge and exploration of the historical aspects of Handel's operas, not only the music but also the acting and staging of the piece. Jones points to the early music movement stating that we have established a style of performing the music that is expected and familiar to the audience. Orchestras play with period instruments and singers are expected to understand and perform in the correct style. Jones proposes that the reason this is not expected of

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[28] Winton Dean, *Handel's dramatic oratorios and masques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 102.

[29] Andrew V. Jones, "Staging a Handel opera" *Early Music*, vol. 34 (2006), pp. 277-287, p. 277.

[30] Winton Dean and John Merrill Knapp, *Handel's operas 1704-1726* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 1-21.

acting and staging is that it is neglected as something the audience are not familiar with, something alienating.[31]

The history of Handel's operas is an interesting one. It shows how the genre *opera seria* (Italian, meaning serious opera)[32] developed through the 18th century and how Handel drew inspiration from different styles and national opera traditions. He was born in Germany and started his working career in Hamburg, where the opera house was dominated by a mix of traditions and styles.[33] While the French opera had developed into an independent style from the Italian, the genre had not manifested the same independence in England and Germany. In these countries the opera houses drew inspiration from Italy and the Italian style, mixed with some local fashions.

At Handel's time, Italian operas were written for specific theatres, singers and audiences. If the opera was revived somewhere els, it would be heavily altered to fit the other theatre's cast and situation. The pasticcio, a show where arias from existing operas from different composers was put together based on some pre-existing libretto, were also very popular at this time. This gives us a hint of how the genre was seen and treated at the time. The music in an opera was not a fixed entity or bound by its original form. Handel also revived his operas in the same manner. If the opera was revived some years after its first run, he might have a different cast and would have to adapt the music to these other singers. This often resulted in rewriting or transposing some arias or whole characters. Dean Winton and John Merrill Knapp argue that two of his operas, Tolomeo and Il pastor fido, became in fact pasticcios by the way they were reassembled with other material both by himself and other composers in their revivals in 1730 and 1734. Arias would travel from opera to opera, or from character to character. There are also examples where Handel took more time to rewrite a whole role, as when he rewrote Sesto in Giulio

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[31] Jones (2006), p. 280.

[32] Marita P McClymonds and Daniel Heartz, "Opera seria." *Grove Music Online.* 2001. (Accessed 9 Nov. 2021), https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000020385.

[33] Winton and Knapp (1987), pp. 39-41.

Cesare in 1725 from a soprano to a tenor role "[…] creating a radically different character."[34]

Winton Dean and John Merrill Knapp continue by arguing that the aspect of the revivals and pasticcios are best ignored, as Handel shows great artistic integrity and effort in the creation of new operas and because the revivals "[…] suggests all too faithfully the stereotype that has brought the whole of *opera seria* into contempt."[35] However, the fact that the operas were not treated as sacred objects of some true art, implies that they had another view on the work itself. The opera was a work that served a purpose and could be cut and altered according to both the practical and artistic framework of the situation in which it was to be performed. I would argue that this idea does not undermine the qualities that Handel's opera possesses as it seems Dean and Knapp are afraid of.

At the turn of the 17th to the 18th century, the dominant form within the *opera seria* style was the aria. The recitative had been detached from the aria and they now served clear purposes: the recitative should drive the story and the aria should display the emotion.[36] To bring further structure to the scenes the da capo (Italian for 'from the head' or 'from the beginning')[37] aria was developed, building up the scene to the aria's climax and the singers exit from the stage.

In this way the entrance and exits of characters were managed by the form of the scenes.[38] This led to longer arias and a more static form where the focus was turned towards the singer and the vocal performance. Dean and Knapp point to this as the reason for the bad reputation this style of opera incurred:

> *The apparent ossification of the extended and formalized da capo aria is responsible for received opinion that the opera seria of Handel's day could not possibly be a viable dramatic form. We are told that even in its own time it was regarded less as a living art than as a species of circus*

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[34] Op. cit., p. 6.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Op. cit., p. 4.

[37] Jack Westrup, "Da capo." Grove Music Online. 2001; (Accessed 10 Nov. 2021), https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000007043.

[38] Sarah McCleave, *Dance in Handel's London Operas* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), p. 3.

entertainment for a public that came to applaud the singer and perhaps the aria but took no interest in the opera as a dramatic unity.[39]

Handel adopted and developed the form, taking great care to drive the story through the expressive build-up of each scene. The arias would express the different sides to a character and guide the audience through the character's emotional journey and development in the opera. The da capo aria with its A and B sections gave the possibility to explore the emotions. To keep the drama going, the B section would contrast or confirm the A section giving new energy and clarity to the repeated A section (*da capo*).[40] In this way Handel managed to create deeper characters that both show a distinct identity and different emotional colours and contrasts.

Equally interesting to the parts and arias where Handel follows the form of the da capo aria, are the ones where he does not. In the earlier operas we find that Handel wouldn't completely stick to the alternation of recitative and aria, instead having "[…] set pieces merge into one another to create dramatic climaxes […]."[41] In other later operas we find choruses and ballets, and several arias without a da capo (e.g. *Serse*).[42]

Throughout the operas he would work with contrasts and surprises, building up expectancies for something only to surprise by introducing a different emotion or dramatic turn. The surprises could happen subtly in the music, be a clear change of emotion and intention or take the form of a complete change in the story and the drama. In this way the style of *opera seria* is constantly commented, contrasted or followed in Handel's music.

This music was written for the advanced baroque theatre, where scenic effects played an important part. The music was only one of several important elements. The scene changes would happen in clear view. The curtain would go up after the overture and only go down after the last scene. The music was therefore not interrupted by scene changes but continued through them. The changes would be

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[39] Dean and Knapp (1987), p. 4.

[40] Op. cit., p. 9.

[41] Op. cit., p. 8.

[42] Ibid.

written into the music. Switches of tonality would emphasize important changes and propel the drama forward into the next scene.[43]

The singers were required to perform the arias with the according passion or *Affekt* (from *Affektlehre*) and the acting had to follow. This was a stylised way of portraying emotion with the goal of heightening the expression of the passion that was communicated. This was a theatrical way of delivering the story and should not be a realistic representation of the characters actions.[44] Andrew V. Jones points out that similarly as to how the style of the music was explored for expressive effect through breaking with the expected norms, the acting could also challenge or play with the norms of the style:

> *If the great majority of da capo arias begin with an orchestral ritornello, one that opens with a phrase for unaccompanied voice will have a striking impact; if most arm movements are restricted to the space between the level of the shoulders and that of the waist, a clenched fist held high above the head will be positively shocking.[45]*

Most of the characters in these operas were also royal or of high social or military rank. This reflected the aristocracy and royalty of the audience and was therefore expected. The costumes were usually quite contemporary. The women would wear ballroom dresses of the latest fashion. The men, however, would have more stylised attire inspired by classical Roman style. This would be tunics, breast plates, helmets and long cloaks. They would wear swords on stage, like the men in the audience also would.[46]

Dance in Handel's operas

Dance in operas at Handel's time came from a variety of traditions and inspirations. In Italy dance had played a part in the earlier operas in the 17th century emphasising comical or supernatural characters. How this was applied varied from theatre to theatre and city to city. In Venice, which was a natural source of inspiration for Handel during his London years, dance was not directly connected to the plot. It served more as a comment on the theme of the opera, and would be used for

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[43] Op. cit., p. 14.

[44] Op. cit., p. 26.

[45] Jones (2006), p. 284.

[46] Dean and Knapp (1987), p. 27.

wedding scenes, ballroom scenes or military games like gladiators. By the time the *opera seria* had established its more fixed form, the dances were not needed for scene changes and variation so much.[47]

In Hamburg, at the time Handel worked there, though they adopted the Italian style of opera, they did not follow the same norms when it came to dance. This might be explained by the comic nature of some of the operas at the time, but a clearer influence came from the French opera tradition. In France the court dance *La belle danse* had become a strong tradition and established an important position in French opera. There the dances had specific functions in the scenes, between solos or duets and usually finished by a chorus. The French way of integrating dance with the singing fuelled inspiration for the Hamburg opera. Some choreographers from the Paris opera were also hired at the Hamburg opera. There are examples in later operas by Handel that show that this inspiration from French opera dance was something he brought with him to London.[48]

In London dance was a natural ingredient in many theatrical genres. Masques and dramatic plays had long relied on dance to recreate and emphasize both comical, supernatural and dramatic spectacles on stage. However, they had no norms for how they would be added to the music. There was no tradition, like in France, that could guide them in the same way.[49]

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[47] McCleave (2013), p. 3.

[48] Op. cit., p. 9.

[49] Op. cit., pp. 5-7.

Part Two

Reflection on idea

As I described in the Introduction, the idea for my master project grew out of a series of earlier works and projects. For my artistic development and identity, the idea of creating a project for stage felt like a necessary step towards my goals as performer and creator.

The first idea came from the question: what happens if I place music by Handel in a different thematic context? This led me to the book *Heart of Darkness*, and its thematic content and mood (see chapter on 'why *Heart of Darkness*'). It soon became clear to me that in order to explore the styles and artistic ideas I wished to follow, I had to depart from the story and narrative of Heart of Darkness. Instead, I would use it as a source of thematic inspiration. This way I stood much freer to use and interpret it in the way I wanted and needed for the creation of my project. As mentioned in the chapter on the book, it was not the story that drew me in and inspired me, it was the mood, the images and the darkness that did.

I wanted to explore different medias and combinations of these. Through other projects (as described in the Introduction) I had worked on rearranging and reimagining early music in modern music styles and with electronics and sound production. The same type of work would be central to this project as well; but I had experience of how I could and liked working in this way, and this helped shape my ideas. A central project to draw inspiration and experience from was *The John Download Project*, that I had worked on prior and during this project. Because of their closeness in time, these heavily influenced each other and served my artistic development in similar manners. As mentioned, the main difference from *The John Download Project* to this master's project is that it's a live piece for stage. I had to expand my way of working and thinking to also incorporate visual and physical elements.

For operatic music, this is not such a strange idea, as the music is originally written for the stage. As a singer, working and reflecting on stage presence and the physical delivery of the music and its story, is far from an alien concept. This is because we often work with operatic music, and we therefore must reflect on the development of a character and the portrayal of the drama. But the bigger tasks of imagining and

constructing a concept and style for the staged performance, is something handled by directors, usually in collaboration with a scenographer.

For Handel's operas there is the challenge of historical performance. As highlighted in the chapter about Handel's music, there is a challenge with the form of the operas for modern audiences. They are long, and the stories boarder on absurd in their simplicity. They are written for a specific time, when they served a distinct purpose in society, and are constructed to serve these demands. But I discovered that I could turn this around, using it as a source of inspiration. I would let the style of the music and the purpose it served in its original setting inform my artistic choices: either by contrasting, commenting or translating what it could represent. This way I could use the historical aspects of the music and its style to inform and inspire my work.

It became clear to me quite early that I could not use any of the material from the narratives presented in the libretto. It would get in the way of the artistic ideas I wished to explore, but I didn't want to give up on Handel. I needed a completely different starting point, and I needed to do this in order to stand completely free in my expressive choices. I chose therefore to approach the live stage situation in the same manner as I had done with rearranging the music: by experimenting with the combination of styles. This way I could explore how the music worked in a completely different context, both musically and performatively.

As presented in the chapter on opera and performance art, there are several ways to create operatic works. I decided I could be as free as I wanted with the music and the material. I would create a piece in the manner Nina Penner would refer to as *The Ingredients-model*: a work in itself, which was not based on a single pre-existing work. Instead, I could use my choices of music by Handel as building blocks. I could treat these arias and recitatives as elements consisting of music, text, emotion and character. I could then decide how true I wanted to stay to these smaller parts or change them completely. I could discover new sides to the material by putting an aria in a completely different context. How would the emotion change? What happens if I change the text? What qualities in the music could be enhanced and explored through the way it is arranged and performed?

In the same way I had explored the material through re-arrangements in The John Download Project, I could now extend the process to the stage by experimenting with light, sound, movement, song and music.

Inspired by director Heiner Goebbels' idea of reducing the protagonist's role on stage and departure from narrative driven stage art, I would create a work without a role or story. It would be much more of a collage of stage elements. The different parts would be sewed delicately together by my newly discovered expression *poetic logic* (see chapter about opera and performance art).

Performance art is something I have been interested in for some time. It is an artform that has inspired me both as a singer and creator. The stylistic elements I wished to explore were closer to this artform, than traditional theatre and opera. It became clear that I should follow this interest and draw more inspiration and reference from this artform and style.

I had now broken it down to some basic elements: I wanted to explore the music by rearranging it and creating a performance piece or situation around it on stage. I also wanted to explore how I could combine styles and references. This way I had focused the work on how I could combine my two sides as a performer: the early music singer with the contemporary performance creator.

Reflection on process

In the drama 4 project (described in the Introduction), and through earlier performance art projects, I had grown to like working not from a fixed narrative but building the piece with different collages and experiments. This process requires in my experience, a strong trust in creative intuition. This is because the process takes time and will not immediately produce fruits. It is a way of looking at the relation between the process and the product, letting the one guide the other. Going on the floor, trying something out, adjusting, reshaping, continuing or starting over. I work this way in most of my projects, but also in other collaborative projects with composers and directors. It's a style of working that bridges performance art and theatre. For me, this is a preferred way of working within several performative artforms. Regarding music, it may be a bit fresher as this art form has traditionally been focused on the product and not the process. Through the last century we have seen a move from focusing on the piece, the written music (product), to the act of performing the piece (process). As Nicholas Cook points out in his article "Between

process and product: Music and/as Performance"[50] there has been a shift from product focus to process focus in musicology in the last decades. As a reaction to the traditional view of the composer as the artist, the written piece of music as the work and the performer as merely the messenger; we see a growth of musicologists challenging this by incorporating other factors around the creation of music in their writing. Like social and economic structures, and what the events of music production and performance can signify. This is something I have embraced in my process.

Stille Amare

As described in the Introduction about method, I started by gathering material in different ways. I started with selecting arias by Handel, both from oratorios, cantatas and operas, with features that intrigued me. These were structural elements, such as short or long recitatives and *accompagnatos*, or emotional characteristics in the arias. As mentioned, I would treat these as building blocks consisting of music, text, emotion, character and expression.

The first piece I started working with was Tolomeo's aria *Stille Amare* from Handel's opera *Tolomeo, re d'Egitto* (1728), and the preceding recitativo accompagnato *Innomano Fratel.*

In the John Download project, I had worked within a pop-record format. A major part of the arrangements had been shaped by the style of production. This way I had been able to explore different styles of pop-music and instrument combinations, creating different moods and sound worlds for each song. From this I had gathered valuable experience and a feel for how I wanted to shape my arrangements. I had developed my own production style in a way and been inspired to further this work. I started therefore to arrange the aria and accompagnato in a similar way.

My departure point was somewhere between a sound/mood idea and an idea for the instrumentation. I was directly inspired by the song *Go Slowly* by the band Radiohead. It has a layering of instruments with different timbres, some electronic and some acoustic, that change from doubling each other and going against each other, creating a special backdrop on which the song can move. I wanted to colour

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[50] Nicholas Cook, "Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance", *Society of Music Theory,* Volume 7/Number 2, (2001), pp. 3-5.

the Handel aria in a similar way. I experimented with finding a similar way to combine electronic and acoustic instruments but with an early music touch. The acoustic instruments I used were therefore baroque guitar and a spinet. I then combined these with both analogue and software synths, creating just the sound world I was seeking. For the recitativo accompagnato I regrouped the instruments, using them in different ways to create variation and highlight the dramaturgical changes in the different parts. To get the phrasing and tempo right, I made a guide-track recording with just harpsichord and voice. This way I had something to build the arrangement around and avoid the fixed tempo and click in the software's sequencer.

Since I was inspired by the mood in the text in Heart of Darkness and wanted to explore this in my project, I decided to use specific parts of the text and explore how these could work performed over a soundscape. I picked a passage that complimented the aria: the description of Kurts's (one of the main characters) death. This mirrored the aria perfectly since it is sung right before Tolomeo (the character) "dies", after thinking he has drunk poison. In the opera it turns out that it was not poison and Tolomeo wakes up confused.[51] By marrying this with Kurts' death I wanted to add a different depth to the music and performance. To compliment the text, I created an unrestful soundtrack with evermoving, half concealed sounds.

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[51] Winton Dean, *Handel's operas 1726-1741* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 110.

To experiment with movement and performative elements, I did a series of improvisations in front of a camera. I wanted to explore video elements more and started to edit and arrange the footages to the soundtrack I had created. I cut out specific actions and parts from the video and composed it around the dramatic curve of the text and the soundtrack.

For the aria I gave myself a short amount of time in a room to experiment with different ideas for the performance of the piece. I filmed it working on the recitativo and the aria separate. In the end I had a video version of me performing the piece while performing movements based on the elements I had experimented with for the earlier soundtrack part. By combining the two parts, the soundtrack with the text and the recitativo and aria with movements, I had a ten-minute video piece that included all the elements I wished to explore. This was a great milestone for my creative process as it gave me something concrete that could help me dictate the further developments. Here I had ten minutes of performance that could be further explored, contrasted and commented. Technically I had developed a method, which was a continuation of the method used in The John Download project. I felt confident that this method would work as a template for the rest of the project.

Master one exam concert

My next milestone was to make a longer part, consisting of several arias or pieces, that I could present on my Master 1 exam concert. I decided to make approximately half the concert (which had to be 50 minutes of music in total) a showcase for my project. Ten minutes of this would be my version of *Stille Amare*, now developed from video to live stage. For this I decided to keep some of the video material during the aria as an element commenting and mirroring what would happen live on stage.

I had chosen the following material by Handel for my first version of the project: *O sacred oracles of truth* (aria), *Rejoice my countrymen* (recitative) and *Thus saith the Lord* (arioso) from the oratorio *Belshazzar* (1744), and *Fammi combattere* (aria) from the opera *Orlando* (1733). I arranged these using the same method as with *Stille Amare:* first creating a guide track, then building the arrangement by compiling different instrument combinations. The original character and structure of the piece would inform and inspire my ideas and choices:

In *O sacred oracles of truth* (aria) the full string accompaniment was substituted with vocoder choir, creating the same full and floating character but with an otherworldly robotic sound. For this I rearranged the text so the vocoder accompaniment could follow the main vocal line. In the intro, before the vocal line starts, I used a passage from *Heart of Darkness* that added another more eery colour to the expression.

For *Rejoice my countrymen* (recitative) and *Thus saith the Lord* (arioso) I based my arrangement on my newly built electric baroque guitar (see page 33) to try and emphasise the explosiveness of the music. I wanted to highlight the sudden changes, the different parts and the powerful preaching character.

For these three pieces I assembled a video of seeds growing. This was inspired by the role plants and jungle have in *Heart of Darkness*. In the book, nature is something weird, threatening and impenetrable. It has a maddening effect on the European colonizers and represents something unknown and mythical throughout the book. I kept my video in black and white to mirror the eery quality in my arrangements, inspired by the description of the jungle in the book.

I decided to place *Fammi combattere* last in my miniature. I wanted to challenge myself by approaching this aria in a slightly different way. Instead of building an arrangement by creating a pre-recorded track, I decided to base it on me accompanying myself on the electric baroque guitar. I then created an experimental drum track to work with the guitar playing. I wanted to explore how I could involve the video in another way: by filming myself "performing" the aria and having the live playing and singing as an accompaniment to the video. I started experimenting in front of the camera and soon found out that I wanted to go for a more abstract and emotional expression. Though the aria expresses agitation and power, I interpreted that there is also an inner conflict going on. The character Orlando is convincing himself of the decision to go back to being a knight by saying: "prepare me for battle." I wanted to bring his sense of doubt with me, letting my interpretation

become more and more confident through the aria. I searched to create this by making a video that showed both doubt and fear as well as anger and conviction. This contrast would be emphasised by the contrast between the subtle expression in the video and the explosive live performance of the aria with guitar.

After the exam concert I was left with several interesting questions, both from my own experience and through the feedback from my teachers and others. I was happy with the overall concept, my ideas and the style in which I presented it. The videos and soundtracks all worked well, except *Fammi Combattere* which seemed fresh and under developed. There were things here that didn't work so well with the balance between the track and the guitar. As the track only consisted of a scratchy rhythmical synth sound plus some bass, the guitar (played live) seemed rather alone and had to carry the whole harmonic structure of the piece. I would have to add something.

In the first half of my exam concert, I had presented the music in a more traditional way: in a normal concert setting with early music instruments. Without really having thought about it this created an interesting contrast between the two parts. By doing this I managed to highlight how my master project contrasts and differs from a more normal way of presenting early music. There was also a clear contrast in instrumentation: live acoustic wooden period instruments versus pre-recorded electric synths and processed instruments. Because of the way the whole of the concert worked, the idea that became emphasised in my master project part was this contrast and how this worked as a comment to the early music field in general. I felt that this part of my project was now taking too much space. It was becoming the main topic or point to my work. So how could I then incorporate this idea better in my project without it taking too much space?

Tineke Steenbrink, my teacher and coach, suggested bringing these two worlds together somehow. She pointed out how I now presented them as opposites, but that they didn't necessarily have to exist beside each other. They could be combined so that they show both the contrasts, maybe in an even clearer way, and the similarities at the same time. This was a very interesting idea that I decided I had to experiment with. I had done something similar in my arrangement of *Stille Amare*. Here I had recorded some baroque guitar and harpsichord, but it was still part of the processed and pre-recorded world. I would need to invite the instruments into a live situation.

Another vital reflection after my exam concert was how my live performing related to the video. Now that I had established the form of singer performing in front of a video

as a backdrop or commenting colour, it was time to break it. How could I explore this further? I had tried to change this around in *Fammi Combattere* by trying to make the video the performer and the live singer the accompanist, but it was not clear enough. I needed to go further and explore more options. By introducing more instruments live I thought this would bring in other possibilities and balance between the pre-recorded elements (video and soundtrack) and live performing elements (instruments, singer and movements). My movements in relation to the video was also a field that was not explored to the fullest. Especially the parts in *Stille Amare* where I mirrored myself with the video showed potential for further exploration. These reflections became vital for how I continued the development of my concept.

Link to documentation of the master project at the master one exam concert: https://youtu.be/DDmxaUT8krM

Electric Baroque Guitar

An electric guitar modelled on a baroque guitar:
Five-course guitar, some double and some single strings; 3/4 size of a modern electric guitar.

The idea was to create an instrument that I could use for realising the John Download project live, but it evolved into becoming a sort of physical manifestation of my master research: the combination of modern/electronic and Baroque.

The guitar needed special pickups since it doesn't have the same string setup as a modern guitar (six strings).

Designing the ornaments for the moustache.
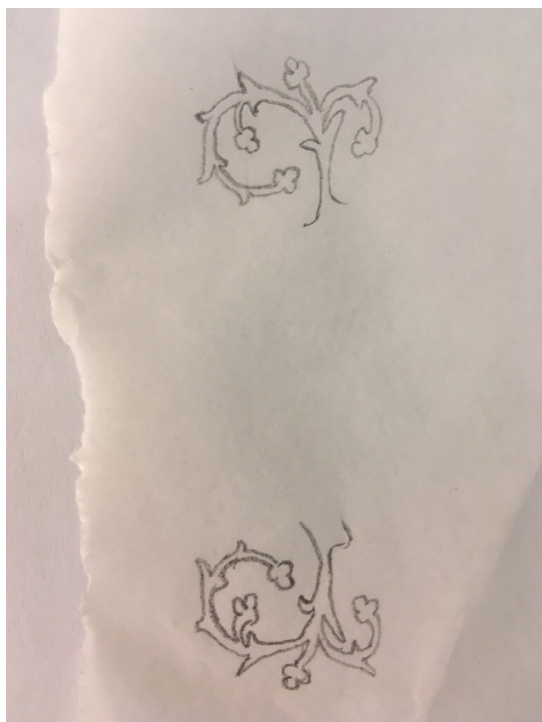
The ornaments were then 3D printed with PLA with wood fibres and glued onto the body of the guitar.

Extra tuning pegs were installed for the two extra strings.

The nut had to be redesigned for even distribution of the strings.

The electric-baroque guitar

- One single coil neck pickup
- One humbucker bridge pickup with added switch for split function
- Body treated with wood oil
- Elements from a 12-string electric guitar added to the bridge for the double strings
- Custom made nut for the even distribution of the strings

The electric-baroque guitar has the following string setup:

e - single

B - double

G - double

D/d - double in octave

A - single, one octave down in comparison with a baroque guitar.

Høstutstillingen 2021

In October 2021 I was selected to be part of Høstutstillingen: the Norwegian state's annual exhibition. I had submitted my version of Stille Amare as a performance piece and it was selected. Doing this as a standalone performance was very inspiring. It was possible to work on the placement of the video in relation to the stage, and work with lighting which enhanced the qualities in the video. The room was completely dark in the first part, giving all the focus to the video. This created a strong mood and gave new quality to the material. The experience left me with a great trust in the project. I was convinced that the main elements of this part should be the focus of the whole project: these were the basic components performer/singer, soundtrack and video.

I got feedback and comments about certain parts of the combination of these elements that resonated with what I originally wanted to explore. The duality of the video and performer was a clear strong point and something I had to further explore. Especially the parts where the video mirrored the actions live. Some commented how this made the video come alive in a special way, making it present in the same way the live performance is present. I found this interesting, understanding that this was something I had to explore further. I experienced that the soundtrack and video worked really well together and created the mood I wished to explore. Looking back on my Master one exam I felt that the other pieces didn't hold this same mood. There was some drama and feel previously missing that I had managed to catch in the Stille Amare part. The relation between the text from Heart of Darkness and the music by Handel seemed to create something other. This connected well with my original idea for the project. The other songs had other conflicting ideas and might have to be focused in another way.

The idea to bring in live instruments that I got after my Master one exam presented by my coach Tineke, felt now like another performance. After doing Stille Amare again, I found it was crucial that I focus my elements and ideas, so that I could create a good framework.

Another important comment I received after the performance was that through the piece, I managed to convince the audience of the music and its operatic style. This was an interesting point as the audience in this performance was mainly a visual art audience that had come to see the exhibition. I experienced that an audience like

this would find operatic singing and the almost melodramatic style of the music very different and almost comical. However, through the combination of the visual and audio elements I managed to create a world where this fiction was accepted. To me, this was a central strong point. My goal for the continuation of the work became to make all the parts of this performance just as strong.

Video documentation of the performance:
https://youtu.be/_5JrMnELgy4

Questions on text

For the performance of Stille Amare I had deliberately not presented what the text meant. In the presentation text I had mentioned how I wanted to leave the original Italian text unexplained or commented as a poetic element that is left unanswered. They would hear a song in a language that they not necessarily would understand, and the questions that this arises in the audience becomes a part of the experience. This left a sense of mystery to the piece, especially in relation to the English text that is presented on the loudspeakers in the beginning.

After the performance I received several questions about the text; what it meant, what the story behind it was and how it related to the piece. I felt that some of these questions came from the curiosity that I wanted to inspire in the audience, but it also drew my attention to how strong a text can be in a piece like this.

The other text on the track has an important role in setting the atmosphere and is the main carrier of the piece in some parts. This was also my idea, but it also shows the potential in the material: the relation between the spoken (pre-recorded) and the sung text (live) could be explored further. What I presented in Stille Amare was one relation. It was also one relation between Handel and Heart of Darkness as material. However, there could be other connections between them.

This led me to the idea to rewrite the text for some of the arias that I was working with. This could be done by writing a new text, reshaping parts from Heart of Darkness to fit a song or translating the Italian libretto to English (same language as Heart of Darkness).

Shaping the final piece

I continued by collecting more repertoire to explore. I was searching for contrasts, moods and characters that could compliment the material I had already developed. My goal was to find material for a c. 50-60 minute performance. With the pieces I had used for the Master one miniature, I had the following list of pieces:

> *Eternal source of light divine* from *Ode for the birthday of queen Anne*
>
> *Già lo stringo*, aria from *Orlando*
>
> *Orri de Larve,* accompagnato from *Admeto re di Tessaglia*
>
> Chiudetevi, aria from *Admeto re di Tessaglia*
>
> *Fammi Combattere*, aria from *Orlando*
>
> *Vuò dar pace*, aria from *Tamerlano*
>
> *O sacred oracles of truth*, arioso from *Belshazzar*
>
> *Rejoice my countrymen*, accompagnato from *Belshazzar*
>
> *Inumano fratel*, accompagnato from *Tolomeo, re d'Egitto*
>
> *Stille Amare*, aria from *Tolomeo, re d'Egitto*

I approached the tracks for the new pieces in the same manner as I had done earlier: creating a guide track and building the arrangement around that. I used some of the same instruments and sounds that I had used to make it easier to connect them and further explore the sonic possibilities that these instruments and sounds offered. Within this frame and method, I looked at possibilities for development, contrasts and change. Inspired by the way Handel worked as a composer, I wanted to look at how I could play with my "style" to create differences and surprises. I wanted to do this by both focusing my work on the elements in use and on how to balance the combinations of these elements.

I also applied this process to the development of the performative elements. Using my ten-minute performance Stille Amare, I looked at the central movements and relations between the different elements. Writing down the key features I started drawing ideas for "scenes". This helped visualise the different ideas and think about how to explore the scenic space on stage.

Scene 1 — Eternal source of light divine / — Guitar / — Ring that controls midi tremolo response

NO VIDEO

Frame 1: A-D-E-F#-G-A
Frame 2: E-A-G#-F#
Frame 3: A-B-G-F#
Frame 4: F#-G-A
Frame 5: A-D-C#-D-G
— F#-E-D

What can be concealed with this from Board of Darkness?
— the seeker, the researcher
— exploring
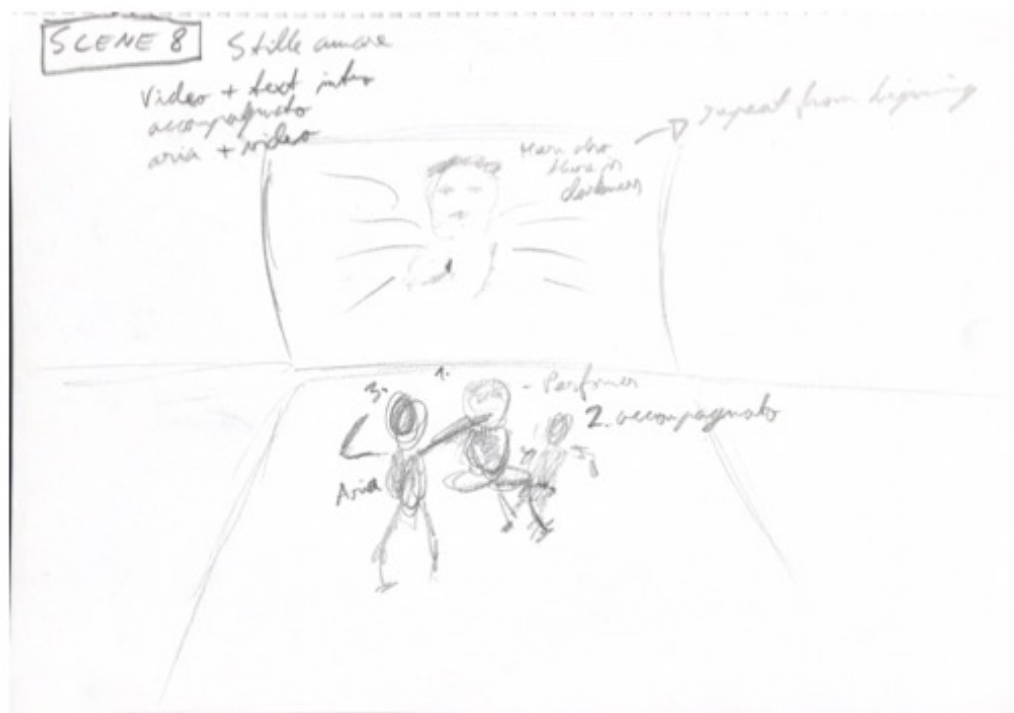— looking into and outwards
— — into and out from the darkness

Scene 2

Video have elements of lightglows to program?
Oracle'd oracle? A-part

Tracing back my work with the video in Stille Amare, I observed that the main visual element I worked with was the contrast between light and dark. I sketched out different parts that represented either light or dark, creating keywords that I could focus on. The light and the dark could mean different things, but it was the contrasts I was interested in. Both the contrasts between elements and their symbolic potential.

<table>
<tr><td>Light</td><td>Darkness</td></tr>
</table>

(handwritten notes)

By drawing the scenes, I could focus each aria or section on one overall idea, giving each part a specific treatment and idea to explore. This way I had different scenes I could use as building blocks in the creation of the show.

Dance

The opening accompagnato and aria from the opera Admeto is preceded by a dance of spirits with bloody knives, as stated in the libretto (and score). It is not sure what this dance could have been,[52] but it left me with a vivid imagination as to which effect this must have had being the opening scene after the overture. This inspired me to explore how I could develop a dance part that borrowed steps and movement from baroque dance, merging it with my own performative language of movement. This seemed to be great material to explore the movements I had developed in Stille Amare.

In the book *Dance in Handel's London Operas,* Sarah McCleave discusses who could have performed the dance of the spirits, pointing out that because of its theme it most likely was in the style of the grotesque dance, which had its tradition from Italian Commedia dell'arte.[53] Inspired by this I got in contact with Teun van

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[52] Sarah McCleave, *Dance in Handel's London Operas* (668 Mt. Hope Avenue, Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2013), pp. 55-57.

[53] Ob. cit., p. 66.

Roosmalen, a classically trained dancer, who could assist me in building this dance using the following principle: use the concept of the grotesque dance as an inspiration and departure point for creating my dance.

Acting

As I was exploring ideas for performative elements to explore with the repertoire that I had chosen, I reflected that I now had drawn inspiration from both the historic aspects of the music and dance in Handel's operas but had done nothing about the acting and the performative aspect of the arias. This led me to adopt the idea I had had for inspiration for dance to the acting. I contacted João Paixão, a researcher in historical acting, presenting my idea and asking for guidance on how to explore it. He advised me to limit my idea by focusing on only some clear concepts in historical acting. By choosing certain dogmas from the tradition, I could then translate this to my own movement language. This way I could more easily connect it visually to the other performative elements I was exploring, and refrain from doing some half-studied attempt at performing historical gestures since it requires time to learn this style fully. This made complete sense to me because it aligned with the way I worked with the arrangements of the music.

The main concept we decided to focus on was the following:

1. The gaze – what direction the eyes go in connection with the emotional expression in the text and music.
2. Gesture – gestures emphasising specific words in the text.
3. Exploring performing the text by speaking it in my counter register.

I now had material for a performance of my desired length, and ideas and concepts for each part or scene. The last part of my work would be to finetune the ideas and work on the development of the whole piece.

Conclusion

In this research I have explored the creative development of a stage performance. As mentioned earlier in the text, this idea came while reflecting on my previous works and presented itself as a necessary next step in my artistic development. The need to challenge myself artistically by making a longer solo performance gave me the urge and motivation to do this. With this performance, I wanted to research how to combine the duality I inhabited as a performer: the early music singer and the contemporary performer and creator. The combination of these two worlds is something I had worked on in earlier projects, but for this work I wanted to use the research to explore this further.

As I started with the research, I decided that I would use it as a means to inform my artistic work. In this way I wanted to challenge how I thought about my work and how I made choices. This led me to formulate the following research question:

How can I create a stage performance combining and connecting my two sound worlds/style identities as a performer?

I stated that I would do this by exploring music by G. F. Handel and the book 'Heart of Darkness' by Joseph Conrad. These counterpoints served as the framework for my artistic idea. From these two I gathered material, inspiration and themes that formed the building blocks of my performance piece. Through the steps described in the reflection section of this research, I explored how I wanted to create my work. This turned into a highly fruitful and enjoyable process.

Answer research question

Since this part of my degree is to be finished before I present the final project in my Master's exam concert, I have chosen to focus the conclusion of this research on the answers the reflection has given me so far. I am positive that this process is far from over and that my reflection on this work will continue also after I have presented my final project. Because the research question was focused on the process, I was able to gather a lot of experience and grow as an artist through the reflective process. I have created and developed my project through following a consequential progression of documented artistic choices, and through this space that has unfolded I have come to find an essential identity of myself as a performer and creator. By being honest towards myself through the critical reflection, I have been able to

investigate my process, my preferences, inspirations and my distinct personal style. Through this, I have been able to strengthen my artistic identity and the artistic tools I use, bringing forth a more complete performer.

By defining two different sound identities or styles within myself I have been able to explore both within a historical and individual context.

By focusing on the creation of a stage performance I was able to explore ideas connected to both identities and therefore connect them. By focusing on combining my two style identities I was able to develop a stage performance that explored my artistic ideas.

As stated in the Introduction, the goal of this research was to help me to explore this project with my own artistic identity and gather experience and specific knowledge that can lead to new projects, collaborations and further develop the outreach of my artistic work. I feel I have reached this goal in many ways. I now think differently about how I create and perform, and what my skills are and can be. I have experienced that this approach has been inspiring and has helped me strengthen the tools I need to use for developing and creating.

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