

# **Opera production in the Western Cape: strategies in search of indigenization**

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## **Declaration**

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## Summary

During the past few decades fascinating opera productions have been staged by South African opera companies, using strong local casts and strikingly indigenous interpretations of standard works from the canon. It appears that opera in South Africa has survived the tumultuous recent history of this country and is invigorated by the creative possibilities unleashed by its contexts. This dissertation explores whether and how opera production in the Western Cape has reacted to societal influences specific to South Africa. It launches an exploration of if and how the genre has ‘indigenized’ to become what it is today. The following themes present themselves during the course of this dissertation: the process through which opera has rooted itself in the country historically, the forms in and through which opera manifested itself in the Western Cape, how the art form has developed, to what extent local culture has influenced the art form and if, how and why opera production in the Western Cape has diverged from original Western operatic ideals.

This dissertation is comprised of two sections representing, broadly, the past and the present. Chapters 1 and 2 are historical studies, whilst Chapters 3 and 4 discuss contemporary perspectives. Chapter 1 is an attempt to construct a history of opera in South Africa and serves as a background or frame for the ensuing chapters. This chapter will show that indigenization in its most subtle form can be traced in local opera productions long before the issue of the reflection of indigenous cultures in opera became relevant. Chapter 2 is a first attempt to account for the history of the Eoan Group, a so-called Coloured opera company who performed during South Africa’s Apartheid years. It investigates the far-reaching implications of the drive to ‘Europeanize’ indigenous culture, as exemplified in the opera productions of this group. Chapter 3 discusses a new opera composition, Hans Huysen’s *Masque* (composed in 2005), focusing on the use of voice as it engages with the indigenization of the aesthetic model of voice production. Chapter 4 is an investigation into the functioning of Cape Town Opera. It investigates how a local opera company – an institution promoting opera as a Western form of art – negotiates its way through the tumultuous changes of post-Apartheid South Africa.

## Opsomming

Operageselskappe in Suid-Afrika het gedurende die afgelope dekades verskeie fassinerende produksies op die planke gebring, produksies wat aansienlik deur inheemse interpretasies beïnvloed is en dikwels van inheemse sangers gebruik maak. Dit wil voorkom of opera in Suid-Afrika nie slegs die politieke omwenteling van die onlangse verlede te bowe gekom het nie, maar ook produktief put uit impulse wat uit plaaslike omstandighede voortvloei. Die gedagte wat in hierdie proefskrif ondersoek word, is of en hoe opera produksie in die Weskaap op spesifiek Suid-Afrikaanse omstandighede gereageer het. Die bestudering van opera in die Weskaap deur die lens van verinheemsing fokus op die manier waarop opera in die land wortel geskiet het, die wyses waarop dit in die verlede en in die hede tot uiting gekom het, hoe produksie van die genre ontwikkel het, tot watter mate inheemse kulture operaproduksie en komposisie beïnvloed het en hoe en waarom operaproduksie in die Weskaap afgewyk het van oorspronklike Westerse ideale.

Hierdie proefskrif bestaan uit twee dele wat die verlede en die hede verteenwoordig. Hoofstukke 1 en 2 behandel historiese gevallestudies en Hoofstukke 3 en 4 kontemporêre operapraktyke. Hoofstuk 1 onderneem om 'n geskiedenis van opera in Suid-Afrika te skets en dien as 'n vertrekpunt of konteks vir die daaropvolgende hoofstukke. Die hoofstuk dui aan dat verinheemsing reeds in subtiele vorm plaasgevind het in operaproduksie lank voor die vraagstuk oor die weerspieëling van inheemse kulture in opera relevant geword het. Hoofstuk 2 is 'n eerste poging om die geskiedenis van die Eoan Groep, 'n sogenaamde Kleurling operageselskap wat gedurende die Apartheidsjare in Suid-Afrika opera geproduseer het, neer te pen. Die hoofstuk ondersoek die verreikende implikasies van die veldtog om inheemse kulture in Suid-Afrika te verwesters. Hoofstuk 3 bespreek 'n nuwe operakomposisie, Hans Huysen se *Masque* (gekomponeer in 2005) en fokus op die gebruik van stem en die kwessie van die verinheemsing van die estetiese model van stemproduksie. Hoofstuk 4 het as onderwerp die plaaslike operageselskap, Kaapstad Opera, en ondersoek hoe hierdie organisasie wat opera as 'n Westerste kunsvorm beoefen en bevorder, sy weg vind deur die ingrypende veranderinge wat post-Apartheid Suid-Afrika kenmerk.

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## Introduction

The dissemination of Western culture during and after colonization exposed opera to a number of external influences in countries where European settlers established themselves in substantial numbers and where the genre of opera continues to be practiced to this day. These influences include the aesthetics and traditions of local musical practices, as well as the social and ideological configurations indigenous to former colonized countries. In South Africa, the exposure of opera to local cultures (not to raise here the issue of the exposure of local cultures to opera) has in time resulted in some opera productions that have departed from Western aesthetic norms and prompted innovations to the genre. These innovations can be traced in newly created operas (this is done in Chapter 3 of this dissertation) as well as in the production of a number of operas from the standard canon that have been radically adapted to local contexts and social realities.

Various factors have contributed to these processes of what will here be called 'indigenization'. Departing from variously theorized critical views on music and/in context,<sup>1</sup> music is not heard or created in isolation and implies a production and reception connected to and influenced by society. In order to understand why South African opera production has increasingly been characterized by the appropriation of African culture, it is important to take the political context of the country into consideration. In addition to the gradual acculturation and osmoses due to the co-existence of diverging musical practices in the country over a long period of time, South African composers and musicians active in the field of Western art music have during the past two decades been subject to increasing structural pressures to reflect the indigenous cultures of their environment in their work. Since the dawn of the new political dispensation in 1994, opera production in South Africa has experienced structural and institutional pressures that have encouraged strategies of indigenization. The last Chapter in this dissertation considers this structural and institutional response to political exigencies like demonstrable demographic representation in productions and audiences. It does so under the rubric of indigenization.

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance the writings of Adorno (1967), Parker and Groos (1988), Said (1993), Goehr (1994) and Abbate (1996 and 2003).



The initiative taken by artistic directors who adapt and change opera to express (or reflect) local cultural experiences, has had notable successes. For example, an ‘all-black opera production’ of Giacomo Puccini’s *La Bohème* was created in 1998. Set in the Soweto of 1976, the libretto was translated into South African English and the opera was renamed *La Bohème: Noir*.<sup>2</sup> In 2001 an ‘Africanized’ version of Giuseppe Verdi’s *Macbeth* was set in a guerilla war in Sierra Leone. Although sung in Italian, the opera was substantially shortened with the specific goal of highlighting a post-colonial message. Sections of Verdi’s music were also transcribed for alto saxophone, marimba and djembe and stage props included, amongst others, that ubiquitous symbol of post-colonial Africa, the AK47.<sup>3</sup> In recent years two strongly indigenized operas, Georges Bizet’s *Carmen* (translated into *uCarmen eKhayelitsha*) and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* by the Cape-based opera company Dimpho Di Kopane,<sup>4</sup> received prestigious international accolades such as the Golden Bear Award at the Berlin Film Festival in February 2005 and the Laurence Olivier Award in London in March 2008. In both productions ‘Africanization’ was achieved by drastic alterations to text, instrumentation and setting.

This prompts the question: is Africanization synonymous with indigenization? Can these sometimes violent ‘transpositions’ of the African context into opera be subsumed and accommodated under the term ‘indigenization’? The idea of the indigenization of opera in South Africa seems an entirely reasonable one. Cultural exchange, appropriation, mutation, influence, acculturation and a myriad of variously labeled processes describing cultural change pertaining to traditionally European cultural forms, both serious and popular, seems entirely natural when people cohabit. The same can be said of Western influences found in traditional African cultural expressions. Today, in a ‘global village’, the notion of ‘cultural trade’ is even less surprising.<sup>5</sup> We experience and accept cultural flow and diversity where appropriation of cultural artifacts of one culture by another is commonplace, not only in terms of African and European culture in South Africa, but also

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<sup>2</sup> Marianne Thamm, ‘Boost for Opera’, *Mail and Guardian*, October 1998. <http://www.chico.mweb.co.za/mg/art/reviews/97oct/16oc-boheme.html>, accessed 8 April 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Herman Wasserman, ‘Opera ’n onredbaar Eurosentriese kunsvorm?’ No date. <http://www.oulitnet.co.za/klank/09opera.asp>, accessed 8 April 2008.

<sup>4</sup> This company is currently trading as Isango Portobello.

<sup>5</sup> Arjun Appadurai, ‘Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy’, *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial theory*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Harvester, 1993, p. 324.

internationally. Culture has become a free-for-all, depending on one's particular interest. Although the colonial age was arguably the onset of cultural traffic – or at least the traffic jam – the technological age of the past decades ensured global cultural exchange previously not deemed possible.<sup>6</sup> However, in South Africa, especially after the political revolution of 1994, indigenization has also become a political imperative exercising more pressure than terms like 'process' or 'exchange' imply.

### *Theoretical considerations*

Although the term 'indigenization' has rarely been used in musicological writings, studies exploring Western classical music's interest in the use of music of other cultures are commonplace. Alterity has interested the West for centuries and an extensive literature exists describing these occurrences in classical music. In the field of opera studies, Timothy Taylor, for example, discusses European conceptions of Turkish culture and the use of Turkish music in Rameau's opéra-ballet *Les Indes galantes* (composed 1735) as well as Mozart's opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (composed 1782).<sup>7</sup> The considerable bibliography of Taylor's article alone is indicative of Western classical music's fascination with music of other cultures. Noteworthy examples on opera are Paul Robinson's article scrutinizing 'orientalism' in Verdi's *Aïda*<sup>8</sup> and Ralph Locke's article 'Constructing the Oriental "Other": Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Delila*'.<sup>9</sup>

However, in academic studies where the concept of 'indigenization' have been used (for example in ethnomusicology, missiology and economics – each of these will be discussed shortly), it is clear that the context of usage does not pertain particularly to Western composers who make use of music from variously constructed 'others'. As the following discussion will illustrate, when the concept of indigenization is used in existing literature, it tends to suggest exactly the opposite process, pointing towards something other than a mere interest in the exotic or an exploration of 'other musics' in the music of the 'self'.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Timothy Taylor. 'Peopling the Stage: Opera, Otherness and New Musical Representation in the Eighteenth Century', *Cultural Critique*, 1997, (36) pp. 55-88. This article has been incorporated in slightly altered form in Taylor's 2007 publication *Beyond Exoticism*, pp. 43-72.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 213.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Whilst exoticism seems a luxury afforded to a composer that he/she can employ at his/her leisure, indigenization seems to happen when the social and political relevance or the survival of a cultural format is under pressure.

In ethnomusicology the concept of 'indigenization' has been used in writings by Carol Babiracki<sup>10</sup> and Amy Stillman.<sup>11</sup> Both writers trace the indigenization of religious music that was introduced by missionaries from the West to Christian converts originating from tribal groups in east-central India and Polynesia respectively. Their work is instructive towards this thesis as both writers analyze the premises for indigenization and describe the process as well as the outcome of indigenization on the level of the music itself. Stillman's work, for instance, provides a tool through which indigenization can be measured and her theory can be used critically to investigate new opera composition as well as the production of opera from the standard canon. Although this dissertation does not primarily investigate indigenization on the level of musical *works* but considers different *strategies* of indigenization, Babiracki and Stillman's ideas offer insights from which valuable conclusions are drawn at the end of this dissertation.

Stillman sets the 'coexistence and absorption' of two different musical practices as the premises on which indigenization can take place, both of which can be traced in local opera production. Based on the findings of her fieldwork, she proceeds to set out the process of indigenization in five stages and convincingly analyzes the indigenization of Polynesian Protestant hymnody through these stages:

... first, the survival and resurgence of indigenous performance traditions [...]; second, the coexistence of indigenous and introduced repertory and practices; third, the appropriation of materials, structures and processes between indigenous and introduced systems; fourth, the emergence of new musical idioms; and fifth, the absorption of old and new idioms into indigenous conceptual frameworks of musical repertory and practice.<sup>12</sup>

Stillman's model suggests that indigenization follows a trajectory which has a beginning and an end, and that the opposites in binaries such as 'Polynesian-European' or 'self-other' can be dissolved in new manifestations of music through indigenization. Babiracki's

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<sup>10</sup> Carol Babiracki. 1985. 'Indigenizers', in *The Western Impact on World Music, Change, Adaptation and Survival*, ed. Bruno Nettl, Schirmer Books, pp. 96-100.

<sup>11</sup> Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman. 1993. 'Prelude to a Comparative Investigation of Protestant Hymnody in Polynesia', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Volume 25, pp. 89-99.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

statement that indigenization is ‘a matter of recovering, relearning and recomposing native music in a mixture of Western and native traditions’,<sup>13</sup> provides a slightly different angle from which new opera composition as well as opera production in South Africa can productively be discussed.

Indigenization is furthermore explored in writings on missiology where it appears in academic writing since the 1950s and in current writing the term is used alongside terms such as ‘enculturation’, ‘metamorphosis’ and ‘contextualization’. The Korean Protestant scholar, Sung Jong Shin, points out that the use of the term indigenization in missiology is fraught because it can relate to the adaption (or adulteration) of the ‘pure’ Christian message:

The term is derived from the Latin word indigenous meaning ‘of a people’ or ‘stock’. It designates a conscious effort to put down roots in the native soil in order to communicate the gospel to the people in a particular land. But such indigenization ... is an ambiguous expression because it can mean either to adapt the message to the native culture and treat the values of that culture as the norm, or to adapt the norm of the presentation of the message without change of its essence.<sup>14</sup>

This passage is rich with evocative (and potentially useful) metaphors of growth and habitat. Replacing ‘gospel’ with ‘opera’ in the same passage is instructive:

It designates a conscious effort to put down roots in the native soil in order to communicate [opera] to the people in a particular land. But such indigenization ... is an ambiguous expression because it can mean either to adapt [opera] to the native culture and treat the values of that culture as the norm, or to adapt the norm of the presentation of [opera] without change of its essence.

This description of indigenization implies two kinds of processes: one leading to radical changes in opera as the local cultural context dominates the exchange taking place; the other implying presentational adaptations to the genre without essential change taking place. In the political context of South Africa, where indigenous cultures and values were marginalized and looked down upon over centuries, one would expect the latter process to govern processes of indigenization of opera. One critical historical perspective explored in this dissertation, the history of the Eoan Opera Group (Chapter 2), speaks to this

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<sup>13</sup> Babiracki, p. 98.

<sup>14</sup> Sung Jong Shin, *Paul’s missionary method and the indigenization of the Korean Church*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Temple University, 1974, p. 64.

expectation in a surprising way. As will be seen, the manner in which this marginalized local cultural community practiced Italian opera in ‘tradition Italian style’ has profound implications for how one reads local strategies of musical indigenization.

Drawing on similar metaphors as those used by Jong Shin, the Zimbabwean scholar, A.R. Mutumburanzou, explains that indigenization is ‘like transplanting a plant from Europe to Africa where one cannot also transplant the soil and the climate but just the plant to a different environment’.<sup>15</sup> The writer does not further elaborate on how this European plant (the gospel in his case) is expected to behave in African soil, although it is assumed the goal is that it should survive and grow. This metaphor is limited in its application as it presupposes that the product (in Mutumburanzou’s case the plant and in the case of this study, opera) does not change in appearance or the fruits it bears as a result of its move to a new context.

In the case of opera, indigenization is therefore best understood as a process, a technique or an action whereby A is gradually transformed into B, but with the understanding that A can always be recognized in B (its altered state). The term implies that A is an entity of ‘pure’ substance that somehow is changed by the place, space, time and people that surround it. However, opera has long had the connotation of an ‘unpure’ genre with a long history of hybridity that complicates matters of definition. In this dissertation opera is viewed as a Western musical form where performance is based on what is written in a score, the latter being a musical text composed by a composer in addition to a libretto written by a librettist. This study will therefore depart from the premise that opera is a Western genre, the existence of which in countries like South Africa enables changes to take place. In this study these changes will be considered under the rubric of indigenization.

In economics ‘indigenization’ takes on yet more meanings. In his book *Indigenization of African Economies*, Nigerian editor Adebayo Adede writes:

Unlike nationalization, indigenization in fact encourages, develops and strengthens indigenous private enterprise at the expense of expatriate-controlled enterprise. Four types of indigenization can be identified. First, there is the indigenization of ownership, which aims at giving the indigenes of a country, either individually or collectively, ownership

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<sup>15</sup> A.R. Mutumburanzou, *Indigenization in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe, 1975 – 1994*. Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1995.

stake in the economic establishments in their country. There is, second, the indigenization of control, whose objective is to enable the indigenes of a country to exercise control. Third, there is manpower indigenization, known as Africanization, aimed at developing indigenous competence in modern industrial and commercial operations and management. Finally there is the indigenization of technology.<sup>16</sup>

Although the parallels with musicology are less pronounced here, indigenization in economics focuses on material ownership, control, manpower and the means needed to achieve them. Significantly these factors play an important role in the indigenization of opera production, as shall be illustrated in more detail in Chapter 4 of this study. Motivated by government subsidies, opera management structures – past and present – have made certain decisions to enforce a specific demographic representation in their productions as well as the audiences who attend performances. In terms of indigenization the issues of ownership, human resources and control in opera production are indeed points of contention. Thus it is not only the concepts of economic indigenization that ring true when speaking of opera in South Africa, but also the political activism inherent in the application of these concepts.

It is important to note that the concept of indigenization is also present in other disciplines where similar practices are appellated differently. In translation studies, for example, the tendency of adapting a text for readers of a different language is called ‘domestication’. Translating an English text into French, translator Pierre le Tourneur articulates his intention ‘to distill from the English [...] a French [text] to be read with pleasure and interest by French readers who would not have to ask themselves whether the book they were reading was a copy or an original’.<sup>17</sup> Maria Teresa Sánchez writes elsewhere that domestication ‘refer[s] to the inevitable process of having to adapt the foreign text to our own linguistic and cultural background when we translate.’<sup>18</sup> The similarities with text-critical notions of ‘authenticity’ in Western art music are striking. In cultural theory the concept of ‘hybridization’ has been developed by theorists like Homi Bhabha, Mikhail Bakhtin and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. It is used to describe, in simplified terms,

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<sup>16</sup> Adebayo Adede (ed.), *Indigenization of African Economies*. Anchor Press, 1981, p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre le Tourneur as quoted in: Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*. Routledge, 2000, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Maria Teresa Sánchez, ‘Domesticating the Theorists: a Plea for Plain Language’, in *Translation Journal*, volume 11, nr. 1, 2007. <http://accurapid.com/journal/39plainlanguage.htm>, accessed 6 August 2010.

changes that occur to existing and new cultural utterances due to the cross-pollination of different cultures. This notion is perhaps best distinguished from indigenization through the understanding of hybridization's subversive political tendency with regard to power relations between the West and the 'Other'.

The varied understandings of 'indigenization' outlined in the work of Babiracki, Stillman, Sung Jong Shin and Adede, rest on constructed binaries of 'self' and 'other'. In the context of this study, these binaries could easily morph into one of 'European' and 'African'. The 'self-other' construct is of course firmly rooted in thinking originating from the West, and in musicology 'self' most often references the 'unmarked' position of 'classical music'. However, in the context of South Africa in 2010, it is possible to argue that European culture is not the dominant culture. Thus the Western notion of 'self' and 'other' (that obstinately persists in South Africa) is susceptible to reversal. As will be illustrated in the course of this thesis, this oppositional construct functions ambiguously in the cultural expression that is opera. Although it is clear that European culture in South Africa is in many respects not the dominant culture, opera currently operates in an environment informed by historical dominance – initially via colonialism and later through Apartheid – and despite the major political shift which saw white South Africans lose their political dominion in 1994, the art form still seems to aspire towards a cultural conceit of national importance. This complex dialectic is explored in particular in Chapters 2 and 4 of this dissertation, which document how indigenous (non-white) South Africans engage with music of the 'other' (opera in this case) as cultural expressions of 'self'. In Chapter 3 these binaries are cast differently yet again in the context of an opera composed by a white South African composer acutely convinced of difference as a binary structure.

Not surprisingly, 'indigenization' emerges from this study a more complicated phenomenon than dictionary definitions imply. I remarked above on the possible conflation of the 'self-other' duality with the 'European-African' alternative. In local literature 'indigenization' is indeed often used in conjunction with, or as an alternative for, the term 'Africanization'. The usage of this term in writings on opera in Africa, as well as observations made from fieldwork, confirm that it is easy to misinterpret the term 'indigenization' as 'Africanization'. The critical perspectives presented here will argue against this interpretation as politically driven and ultimately limiting. However, the examples of local opera productions mentioned earlier as well as the topics of at least two

of the chapters in this dissertation indicate an inclination towards narrowing down the term indigenization to refer uniquely to the cultural heritage of Black Africans.

This very point introduces, lastly, the issue of race. In the introduction to their book *Music and the Racial Imagination*, Bohlman and Radano describe the remarkable silence regarding naming issues of race in most music studies despite the fact that race seems pertinently present and plays a decisive role in the content of such writings. After introducing this phenomenon as the ‘specter [that] lurks in the house of music, and it goes by the name of race’, Bohlman and Radano go about ghost-busting the existing literature and exposing the silent racial attitudes prevalent in much musicology and ethnomusicology.<sup>19</sup> Race is deeply entrenched in the discourse of indigenization; the very words used by the *OED*, ‘making predominantly native’, is firmly grounded in a racialized discourse and is therefore insinuated in the very texture of this dissertation. It is clear that tracing ‘difference’ in Western music in South Africa means to trace race.<sup>20</sup>

In South Africa today, the continued use of racial categories such as ‘Coloured(s)’, ‘Black(s)’, ‘Indian(s)’ and ‘White(s)’ – resulting from an Apartheid history – presents an uncomfortable situation as it creates the impression of a continuation of Apartheid practises that insist on difference between races.<sup>21</sup> However, despite valiant efforts by (some) politicians, community leaders and ordinary South Africans to de-emphasize racial differences in attempts towards reconciliation, racial categorization is still unapologetically and brashly characteristic of discourse on all levels of South African society – past and present. It also seeps into the discourse of this dissertation. Racial categorization indeed easily lends itself towards racial prejudice, but an attempt to gloss over the severity of this situation would not only be hypocritical but also futile. For the duration of this dissertation these terms will be used as group and cultural markers in the same way they were historically used by the various protagonists that form part of South Africa’s history and how they are used in our society today.

### *Critical Perspectives*

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<sup>19</sup> Ronald Radano & Philip Bohlman. 2000. *Music and the Racial Imagination*, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Another thorny issue in this respect is whether these terms should be written with capital or small letters.



It is evident that indigenization finds expression in many processes, on many different levels, within varying time zones and to a variety of degrees. The cited discussion of ‘indigenization’ implies that ‘process’ is singular, but this kind of trajectory creates an untenable simplicity of meaning. Indigenization is a term that allows for the exposition of the complexity of cultural trade, enabling enquiry into the core understandings of opera in our local contexts. In an attempt to remain faithful to this complexity, this study therefore focuses on a variety of *strategies* of indigenization, rather than trying to assign hierarchical importance to chosen opera *events* or *works*.

The critical perspectives that follow will not provide a theory of (musical) indigenization. In fact, this dissertation stops well short of such an undertaking, which would develop the topic philosophically and theoretically. The current writer has been more concerned to document – historically and ethnographically – narratives that could demonstrably be enhanced (or so it is argued) by understanding them in terms of indigenization. The focus in this dissertation is therefore less on musical works than on ethnography and historiography through which different strategies towards the indigenization of opera can be illustrated. In the introduction to his book *Beyond Exoticism*, Timothy Taylor makes an ardent plea in support of this approach when he critiques the many studies that have thus far been published on Western (classical) music’s interest in music of the ‘other’.<sup>22</sup> He writes that ‘many of these studies [...] suffer from a well-worn approach that tends to fetishize form and style’. He describes this approach as ‘the classical music ideology [...] that has its two foundational tenets in the concepts of “genius” and “masterpiece”’, an approach that, despite producing important work, is used at the expense of the historical and cultural foundations of scholarly research.<sup>23</sup>

The reader can therefore expect selected perspectives or windows on opera production in the Western Cape, one of three provinces in South Africa where opera has historically and contemporaneously most consistently been produced (the other provinces being Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal). The Eoan Group (the subject of Chapter 2), provides a unique perspective on the practice of opera during and after Apartheid by singers for whom European culture was not part of the cultural heritage they inherited from their parents. The singers who perform in the opera productions discussed in Chapters 2 to 4 (spanning

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<sup>22</sup> Taylor, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

60 years) are all either coloured or black and, to use Stillman's language here, can be seen as 'converts' to opera. However, many of the composers, educators, directors and managers in these productions are whites who were also active in opera production in the Western Cape during Apartheid. The different chapters therefore allow an exploration of how existing management structures have (or have not) adapted new strategies for opera production. Tracing opera production before and after 1994 through these chapters offers a geographically and thematically connected narrative through which the degree of indigenization of opera can be etched more sharply.

The chapters of this dissertation represent the past and the present, connected by reflections on how these critical perspectives cohere under the rubric indigenization. Exploring opera in the Western Cape through the lens of indigenization focuses on the way in which opera has rooted itself historically, the formats in which it has manifested itself, how opera has developed, to what extent local culture has influenced the art form and if, how and why opera production diverged from Western models. It has to be emphasized that the approach here is not a comprehensive one, which, considering the current paucity of research on this topic, would necessitate a study several times the size of this one and exceeding the reasonable time expectations of a doctoral dissertation. Although the *complexity* of indigenization is consistently kept operative in this study, it is never systematically or exhaustively probed.

The colonial condition has proved a fruitful axis against which the theme of indigenization could be plotted. Not only were Western cultural models imposed on indigenous African society, but European cultural traditions also influenced the relationships of the white settlers – who in time became indigenized – towards Europe. Since Jan van Riebeeck set foot on Cape shores in 1652, white settlers have viewed 'Europe' as a cultural beacon. The indigenized white community of the country in turn established a colonizing control over indigenous African peoples. Musically, a fecund source for this dynamic has been local opera composition, not least because new opera composition has experienced an unprecedented upsurge over the past two decades in South Africa. Opera as a multi-layered discourse is an ideal medium to engage with social, political and cultural contexts, as Chapter 3 of this dissertation will illustrate. However, only a cursory investigation of programming confirms that the performance of locally composed operas is the exception

rather than the rule. New works are usually performed for one season only and a number of South African operas have never been performed.<sup>24</sup>

Another possible area of investigation could therefore shift the focus from the work to the production. From the early 1990s, black opera singers have risen in prominence and influenced opera production nationally. This has partly been responsible for novel interpretations and a widening of repertoire. In 2008, the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* described Cape Town Opera as ‘the blackest opera company in the world’.<sup>25</sup> The unprecedented availability of black opera singers created the incentive and opportunity for the translation of libretti into indigenous languages, not only for use in formal opera production, but also in informal music making. Arguably the most famous example is the translation of Bizet’s *Carmen* into isiXhosa in 2006, although other opera choruses are also being translated by Cape Town Opera as part of their drive to make opera accessible to black communities. The history of opera in South Africa constructed in Chapter 1, reveals that the translation of opera into local languages is not a new strategy of indigenization; coinciding with British and Afrikaner nationalisms, many standard repertoire operas were translated into Afrikaans and English during the twentieth century. These translations were often driven by ulterior (political) motives.

An intriguing aspect of indigenization not covered in this dissertation but important to note for future investigation, is the informal sphere of opera production. Fascinating occurrences of opera can be found in townships and residential areas where people were forcibly resettled during the Apartheid era. In these instances, especially after 1994, opera as a Western form of art is largely stripped of its historical and European context and illustrates an African urban culture that frees the Western operatic genre from the scholarly baggage of so-called authentic opera production. Here we find opera functioning in musicals, as showpieces for singers, extracts sung in choral competitions, multicultural pageants, television shows or items by Coon Bands on New Year’s Day in Cape Town.

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<sup>24</sup> Hendrik Hofmeyr, one of South Africa’s most successful and frequently performed composers, has composed five operas of which only one has been performed (in 1988). Between 1994 and 2006 he composed four operas, of which not one has as yet been performed.

<sup>25</sup> Joerg Koenigsdorf, ‘Corrugated iron huts, Goethe, Apartheid’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 4 July 2008. English translation: <http://www.capetownopera.co.za/htm/news/article.php?r=/view/capetownopera/1388>, accessed 18 August 2009.

A large part of this dissertation explores historical, rather than analytical or ethnographic perspectives on the indigenization of opera in South Africa (Chapter 1) and the Western Cape (Chapter 2 and a section of Chapter 4). Opera in South Africa has been practiced since 1801 and its history has been inextricably bound to the country's social, economic and political development. British and Dutch colonial rule, the expansion of the country's borders after the discovery of diamonds and gold in the north, the establishment of the Republic of South Africa with its Apartheid history in the twentieth century – all these political transformations have influenced opera in South Africa. Various theorists have convincingly described how the past influences the present, how the past, as it were, lives in the present.<sup>26</sup> Any attempt to describe or understand the indigenization of opera *today* requires an understanding of opera production in South Africa's past. Thus the four chapters comprising this dissertation could be seen as representing this imperative: chapters one and two are historical studies, whilst chapters three and four engage contemporary perspectives. Chapter 1 constructs a general history of opera in South Africa, mostly from previously unconnected secondary sources, but also from primary sources. Chapter 2 is the first extensive history of the Eoan Group, a Coloured opera company that performed during South Africa's Apartheid years. The last two chapters focus on current opera production. Chapter 3 discusses a new opera composition, Hans Huysen's *Masque*, and the difficulties of its production and reception in Cape Town. Chapter 4 is an investigation into the structures and functioning of Cape Town Opera, a local opera production company.

The narrative constructed in Chapter 1 contextualizes and informs much of what follows in the rest of this dissertation. The importance of attempting to write an integrated historical account of local opera derives from the absence of any attempts, comprehensive or otherwise, in this field of local music historiography. This chapter is the only one in this dissertation that includes material pertaining to opera production outside the Western Cape. Information regarding political and cultural developments and the historical role of opera elsewhere in the country provides a necessary context for current opera production in the Western Cape. This chapter shows that indigenization can be traced in local opera

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<sup>26</sup> See for example Victoria Johnson's *Backstage at the Revolution*. Although Chapter 1 in this book (pp. 15-35) is entitled 'The Past in the present', the concept underscores her entire theory of why and how Paris Opera survived the French Revolution. See also Eyerman and Jamison's treatment of the term 'tradition' in their book *Music and Social Movements*, p. 29.

productions long before the reflection of indigenous cultures in opera became politically relevant. In the context of this dissertation, writing a history of opera represented more of a means than an end. In constructing this history the present writer hoped to identify moments when one musical thing became another, or some musical thing changed enough to become the same thing, but different. Clearly, in the matter of discovering the South African roots of opera and understanding the many projects that characterize the current opera scene in this country, the issue is not only one for cultural or textual analysis. It is, very pertinently, a matter for historiography.

Chapter 2 documents the extraordinary story of the first (and only) Coloured opera company in South Africa, the Eoan Group. This group performed opera during South Africa's Apartheid years, and the drive to transform these musical amateurs into 'good Italian singers' invests the narrative with meanings that are difficult to make sense of today. In one way, Eoan's musical ambitions were clearly aspirational. The 'European ideal' was clearly reflected in a statement by the group's leader, Joseph Manca, (a white South African of Italian decent) when he described Eoan's members to the press in August 1960: 'They are really dark Europeans. Their way of life is Western. Their religion is Christian. They live like us. They think like us.'<sup>27</sup> But also part of this complex history is Manca's personal ambitions and the way in which Coloured agency appropriated Italian opera in a way that indigenized it.

The historical account that takes shape in this chapter also has a wider relevance, and provides a cultural perspective on Apartheid's legacy. Although the Apartheid government advocated the education of non-whites through the model of separate development, the Eoan Group was never given access to first-class education or performing opportunities and was thus kept at arm's length from the centre of opera production in Cape Town. Despite the fact that the group, under the direction of Manca, aimed to produce Italian opera in 'true Italian tradition', the label 'Coloured' restricted them to the margins of local opera production.

The decision to take on the Eoan Group as a case study came in February 2008 when the Documentation Centre for Music at the University of Stellenbosch (Domus) acquired the group's archive. Until this date the archive had been inaccessible, and a first enquiry into

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<sup>27</sup> No author, 'Servants, teachers in Eoan Group Cast'. *The Daily News*, 12 August 1960.

the documentation provided material of an unusually rich nature. Unprecedented evidence was found on how the political regime under Apartheid shaped the opera performances of this group. The material includes, amongst other things, newspaper reviews bearing testimony to a high level of opera production; permits which Coloureds had to apply for in order to perform in White venues or for the Coloured public to attend these performances; the never-ending struggle to obtain funding; the political compromises accompanying government funding; protest letters against their performances and documents illustrating the gradual rejection of the group by their own community. Driven by a sense of urgency stimulated by the content of the archive, combined with the realization of the importance of this material for local musicological historiography, the narrative that unfolded became longer than anticipated. This meant that the balance of this dissertation moved decidedly towards the historical, rather than the theoretical or ethnographic perspectives. More than any other chapter in this dissertation, this material moved and pre-occupied the present author, resulting in an expansive narrative that, in the end, infuses the notion of indigenization with unexpected meanings.

The Eoan Archive contains much material that requires sensitive treatment. Domus is currently engaged in an oral history book project on the Eoan Group. The current writer is involved with this project, and this has resulted in many of these book project interviews informing or complementing the scholarly work done on the archive. The processes preceding the oral history book project included wide public participation from former Eoan members. Not only are a number of former Eoan members now part of the book project, but public meetings and various gatherings have been held in an attempt to involve people from the Eoan community and to achieve a transparent working process. All interviewees cited in this study have formally given consent that information provided in interviews may be used for publication and signed consent forms are kept with the Eoan Archive at Domus.

Chapter 3 grapples with aesthetic indigenization, particularly with regard to voice production, as found in the production of a new opera, *Masque*, composed in 2005 by the South African composer Hans Huyssen. Investigating the indigenization of opera in new opera composition could have focused on any of a number of works. At least twenty new South African operas have been composed since 1990, each of them presenting a particular, sometimes unique, perspective on indigenization. *Masque* was chosen because

it provided the present author with a unique opportunity to study not only a score and/or performance, but to observe the process of preparation and rehearsal months before the production. Thus this moment of inquiry was extended to what Nattiez would call the poietic and, eventually, the aesthetic domains of various levels of reception.

*Masque* also seemed ideal subject matter for the investigation of indigenization in South African opera. The work was composed with the *intention* of being an ‘African opera’ and was composed for predominantly black singers. The story of the opera is based on indigenous African mythology and thematizes the clash of this mythology with modern European society. The libretto is sung in English with some sections in Xhosa and even includes a Zulu praise song. The orchestra included a group of African instruments (the *uhubu*, the *mbira* and the *akadinda* amongst others), a contemporary orchestra and a baroque orchestra. The chapter discusses how the composer’s ideals of vocal sound – described by him as ‘singing in the kraal’ – did not materialize. For one thing, black opera singers were uninterested in producing a sound that came from the ‘kraal’; for another, the composer himself could not describe on a technical level how this sound was to be produced. The composer assumed that, prompted by indigenous African instruments, for example the *uhadi*, black singers would understand the kind of sound that was required. This in turn exposed the myth that black singers (irrespective of their background) would be familiar with the sounds of indigenous music making in tribal environments in the rural areas.

Chapter 4 maps how Cape Town Opera – a local institution promoting opera as a Western form of art – negotiated its way through the tumultuous changes of post-Apartheid South Africa. The transformation from an opera company fully owned and subsidized by the Apartheid state to a privatized opera company that had to compete on equal footing with other cultural activities in order to obtain state funding, can be viewed as a kind of twenty-first century structural indigenization. This chapter explores a number of issues pertinent to local opera production and indigenization. The meteoric rise of ‘the black opera singer’ in South Africa, whose dominance in local opera circles is set to continue and whose prominence internationally is steadily increasing, emerges as an important theme. But the chapter is perhaps most concerned to describe structural perspectives, like the role of artistic management in the indigenization of opera and the design of marketing and finance strategy in the production of opera in South Africa today.

It should be clear from this introduction that this dissertation does not purport to provide a treatment of opera in a national sense. Nor should the title, 'Opera production in the Western Cape: strategies in search of indigenization', lead the reader to expect an exhaustive treatment of either opera in the Western Cape or indigenization. Thorough theoretical engagement with large swathes of material from South Africa's past (as opposed to small historical cameos) will arguably only become possible once histories, claiming to be comprehensive, have been written. In this dissertation indigenization as a concept serves as a tool to understand diverse events, structures and histories. It is a theoretical term, but it performs more of a theoretically connective function in the context of diverse material and perspectives, than providing the basis for systematic theoretical work or new theoretical insights. Similarly, the histories of opera that are recorded here are points of departure rather than destinations.



## **Chapter 1. Indigenization and History: how opera in South Africa became South African opera**

Entering backstage at the Artscape Theatre in Cape Town, I walk past a new and shiny silver grey Saab, displaying Cape Town Opera all over its bodywork. I wonder who the lucky manager is who drives this car, and whose money is paying for it. A few parking bays on, an older Mazda 323 is parked, the office car of Cape Town's classical music radio station FMR 101.3. Next to it is the plain white minibus owned by Artscape and the blue City Golf displaying the logo of the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra. Judging by its choice of wheels, opera in Cape Town is prospering. The image is not contradicted by the many fascinating productions staged during the past few decades, using strong local casts and strikingly indigenous interpretations of standard works from the canon. It appears that opera in South Africa has not only survived the political changes since 1994, but is invigorated by the creative possibilities unleashed by these changes.

How did this happen? How is opera in South Africa in 2009 able to attract so much public attention and do so well compared to other classical music genres, not only in Cape Town, but also in Kwazulu Natal and Gauteng? There are many factors contributing to the apparent success of local opera production, some no doubt due to opera's inherent nature as a spectacular musical event, others to external factors such as visionary planning, strong traditions of vocal education, a keen sense of business, formidable individuals in the industry and shrewd adaptation to political, financial and cultural circumstances. The indigenization of opera in South Africa, the particular focus of this dissertation, has also lent impetus to the creative possibilities of this genre. And it is the historical dimension of indigenization where the present writer should like to focus this chapter, exploring specifically problems in constructing the history of this phenomenon. As so often, Carl Dahlhaus got it right when he pointed out that 'we arrive at a better understanding of a thing, whether it be a piece of music or our own relation to that piece, by knowing the history behind it'.<sup>1</sup> The same should hold true for understandings of genres in specific cultural and social contexts. And if indigenization is the critical perspective that guides this

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 3.

enquiry, the cultural dynamic implied by this term presupposes an historical narrative against which it can be read.

The underlying concern of this chapter is therefore how a history of opera has been constructed in South Africa. This narrative will contextualize much of what is to follow in the rest of this dissertation. Apart from the imperatives of this study, the importance of attempting to write an integrated historical account of local opera derives from the absence of any attempts, comprehensive or otherwise, in this field of local music historiography. Evidence of the presence of opera in South Africa during the past two centuries can be found lurking behind many a ‘fact’ in music-related writing, evidence scattered in bits and pieces archived at institutions throughout the country. These writings include primary sources such as newspapers from 1800 onwards, various writings during the past two centuries by people of hugely varying musical acumen and secondary sources including dissertations by scholars from the 1960s onwards. The following literature review will attempt a systematic survey of this material, using this as a point of departure for considering the historiographic challenges facing the researcher. Clearly, the main obstacles to overcome in any attempt to write a history of opera in South Africa are firstly the dissipation of sources and secondly the subsequent attempt to order that information into a coherent, if not comprehensive, narrative.

## **1.1 Literature Review**

### *1.1.1 Academic Dissertations*

Locally, many academic dissertations exist on the history of classical music in various towns in South Africa. These do not deal exclusively with opera, but might well contain relevant information pertaining to a history of South African opera. The only sources on the history of classical music in the Cape during the early nineteenth century are the writings of Jan Bouws, a Dutch emigrant who published two Afrikaans monographs, *Die musieklewe van Kaapstad 1800-1850* (‘The Musical Life of Cape Town 1800-1850’) in

1966, and *Solank daar musiek is* ('As Long as There is Music') in 1982.<sup>2</sup> Music in Durban from 1850 has been researched by George Jackson, music in Pietermaritzburg by Hubert van der Spuy, Johannesburg's classical music was the subject of a thesis by Lily Wolpowitz, K.J. Bromberger and Timothy Radloff wrote on Grahamstown (Bromberger covering 1812-1862 and Radloff 1863-1879), Albert Troskie wrote on Port Elizabeth, Henning on Graaff-Reinet, Human on the Orange Free State, Vermeulen on Pretoria, Arthur Wegelin on Potchefstroom and even the musical life of Barberton between 1885-1914 has been subjected to historical scrutiny by one Blyda Maré.<sup>3</sup> Although possibly regarded with some bemusement today, there is little doubt that fascinating threads of the historical narrative of opera need to be picked up and connected in these largely forgotten relics of an earlier generation of South African musicology.

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<sup>2</sup> Jan Bouws, *Die musieklewe van Kaapstad 1800-1850*, Cape Town, 1965 and *Solank daar musiek is...*, Cape Town, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> The following overview has been compiled from source lists in *South African Music Encyclopedia (SAME)*, ed. J.P. Malan, Cape Town 1979-1986, Volumes 1-4. The list comprises academic dissertations written on music in South Africa. Although these sources have not been consulted for writing this specific chapter, they are important sources of information for a more comprehensive investigation into the history of opera in South Africa: Elizabeth Magdalena Brill, *Die Lindense Musiekkring*, University of Pretoria, 1968; K.J. Bromberger, *Music in Grahamstown 1812-1862*, Rhodes University, 1967; J.M. Dugmore, *Saint of the city*, Rhodes University, 1966; C.G. Henning, *A cultural history of Graaff Reinet, 1876-1886*, University of Pretoria, 1971; J.J. Horn, *Die Johannesburgse Joodse Gilde-orke*, University of Pretoria, 1968. L.K. Human, *Musiek in die Oranje-Vrystaat vanaf 1850 tot aan die begin van die Anglo-Boereoorlog*, University of the Orange Free State, 1963; J.L.K. Human, *Musiek in Bloemfontein, 1900-1939*, University of the Orange Free State, 1976; G.S. Jackson, *Music in Durban from 1850 to 1900*, University of the Witwatersrand, 1961; Blyda Maré, *Die musieklewe van Barberton, tussen die jare 1885-1914*, University of Pretoria, 1967; J.H. Maritz, *'n Oorsig oor die lewe en werk van Owen Forrester Rorke en sy seun Peter Rorke*, University of Pretoria, 1967; Colleen Nero, *Theo Wendt, first conductor of the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra*, University of Pretoria, 1968; J.H. Potgieter, *'n Analitiese oorsig van die Afrikaanse kunslied*, University of Pretoria, 1967; T.E.K. Radloff, *Music in Grahamstown 1863-1879*, Rhodes University, 1969; T.J. Smuts, *John Connell*, University of Pretoria, 1971; M.J. Sparrow, *Music in Grahamstown 1880-1900*, Rhodes University, 1978; A.J.J. Troskie, *The musical life of Port Elizabeth, 1875-1900*, University of Port Elizabeth, 1969; Ellen M. van Aswegen, *Die lewe en werke van Luscombe Searelle*, University of Pretoria, 1965; M.F. van Coller, *Die Johannesburgse Simfonie-orke*, University of Pretoria, 1968; F. van der Merwe, *The compositions of P.R. Kirby*, University of South Africa, 1977; H.H. van der Spuy, *The musical life of Pietermaritzburg, 1850-1902*. University of Stellenbosch, 1975. H.H. van der Spuy, *W.H. Bell: Enkele aspekte van sy loopbaan en sy invloed op die Suid-Afrikaanse musieklewe*, University of Port Elizabeth, 1970. E.H. van der Walt-Snyman, *Musiek in Oos-Londen tot 1920*, University of Pretoria, 1964; E. Vermeulen, *Die musieklewe in Pretoria tussen 1902 en 1926*, University of Pretoria, 1967; L.H.D. Voorendyk, *Die musiekgeskiedenis van Wes-Transvaal, 1838 – 1960*, Potchefstroom University for Higher Christian Education, 1971; A.W. Wegelin, *Die musieklewe in Potchefstroom, 1838 – 1925*, Potchefstroom University for Higher Christian Education, 1965; Lily Wolpowitz, *James and Kate Hyde and the development of music in Johannesburg up to the first World War*, University of Pretoria, 1965.

### 1.1.2 *The South African Music Encyclopedia*

A second source of information is the *South African Music Encyclopedia*, edited by Jacques Philip Malan and published between 1979 and 1986. Despite the negative press Malan received for his publication, this is an amazing source of information. Not only is the writing factually based (even though it is well known that ‘facts’ contained in this source need to be rigorously checked), but Malan personally had an admirable capacity for collecting and presenting scattered information. Some of the articles in the *Encyclopedia* (for instance the one on touring companies visiting South Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) give an impression of a scholar with a bird’s eye view on masses of information. Unfortunately (and perhaps symptomatically of the endeavour embarked upon in this chapter), the *Encyclopedia* has no entry for opera as such and the information needed to compile such an entry is to be found throughout the four volumes in the entries on towns, touring companies, opera singers, composers, etc.

### 1.1.3 *The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*

Contributions on music in South Africa and specifically opera in South Africa have been made by James May for *The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. One cannot but be grateful for his lucid writing, creating clear beacons in a sea of detail. May does, however, dispense with the whole of nineteenth-century opera production in just one paragraph, and (being a Cape Town-based academic) describes the Cape as the leader in opera production during the past two centuries without paying much attention to opera in places such as Durban or Johannesburg.

### 1.1.4 *Other Sources*

A number of memoirs by singers and producers of the past fifty years, as well as biographies on various opera singers, have been published. Worth mentioning here are the memoirs of stalwarts of Cape Town opera Desiré Talbot and Gregorio Fiasconaro.<sup>4</sup> Percival Kirby shared his experiences as music director at the University of Witwatersrand

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<sup>4</sup> See Desiré Talbot, *For the Love of Singing: 50 Years of Opera at UCT*, Cape Town 1978, as well as Gregorio Fiasconaro, *I’d Do it Again*, Cape Town 1982.

as well as producer and composer of opera in his book *Wits End*. Furthermore, individuals active in the arts industry have published their memoirs, amongst others Donald Inskip, Olga Racster, David Bloomberg and Jack Stodel.<sup>5</sup> More recently, biographies of some of South Africa's opera singers have been published, notably on Gé Korsten, Mimi Coertse and Cecelia Wessels.<sup>6</sup>

Magazines focusing on South African cultural issues have published articles on opera intermittently over the years, among them *Lantern* and *Scenaria*.<sup>7</sup> The latter is a most valuable source on arts in South Africa with information on local opera production in almost every edition. *Scenaria* was published from 1977 until 1998 under the editorship of Julius Eichbaum. Other sources are archival institutions such as the National Archives in Pretoria, the archives of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), as well as archives of the various (now defunct) Performing Arts Councils. In many instances accessibility to these archival materials remains problematic, as archives in South Africa are generally poorly funded, understaffed and much of the material has not been catalogued. Fortunately, the Sound Archives at the SABC in Johannesburg are an exception to this rule and it holds hundreds of recordings of programmes relating to opera and arts and culture from 1960 onwards. This material is readily available to all members of the public.

## 1.2 South African Opera: General Historiographic Points of Departure

In South Africa the development of opera production, and in later years local opera composition, runs parallel with the establishment and gradual development of major cities

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<sup>5</sup> The following books have been written by individuals who were active in various arts in Cape Town: Desiré Talbot, *For the Love of Singing: 50 Years of Opera at UCT*, Cape Town 1978; Gregorio Fiasconara, *I'd Do it Again*, Cape Town 1982; Donald Inskip, *Forty Little Years*, Cape Town 1972; Olga Racster, *Curtain up!* Cape Town 1951; David Bloomberg, *My Times*, Fernwood Press, Cape Town 2007; Jack Stodel, *The Audience is waiting*, Cape Town 1962.

<sup>6</sup> See Wouter de Wet, *Onse Mimi*, Johannesburg 1986; Johan van Rooyen, *Mimi*, Pretoria 2002; Mimi Coertse, *'n Stem vir Suid-Afrika*, Pretoria 2007; Sebastian Pistor, *Gé Korsten, Portrait of a Tenor*, Bellville 2003; Hannes Haasbroek, *Stem en Legende, die lewe van Cecilia Wessels*, Pretoria 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Neither of these magazines is still published today. *Scenaria*'s last edition was published in December 1998 and *Lantern* in the spring of 1995.

in the country. Opera seems to require the stable infrastructure and population density of a relatively powerful economic metropolis in order to exist as a living practice. The history of opera in this country can therefore be traced following the economic and industrial growth of cities like Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, Pretoria and Bloemfontein. Besides the economic viability of the towns in question, many other factors also played a role in the development of opera production, amongst others the interventions by specific individuals and, especially in the twentieth century, various important political contexts.

One could conceive of a history of South African opera having to start with the introduction of opera to the country by foreign touring companies, followed by the emergence of local opera production and the gradual emergence of local opera composition (the latter two processes being more important with regard to indigenization). Furthermore, there are striking similarities between the development of opera locally and in the so-called 'New World', i.e. those countries where Western civilization imposed itself with force from the seventeenth century onwards and where opera was imported from Europe. These countries include Canada, the United States of America, Australia, Argentina and Brazil. *The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* has elaborate entries on the history of opera in each of these countries, displaying similarities with regard to the development of opera production and also opera composition. To simplify, and of course simplify one must, the pattern seems to be the following. Opera developed in cities. Initially, burlesques with singing and dancing, comic opera and operetta were produced by touring groups from Europe. Performances of serious opera followed later, with productions relying heavily on importing musicians from Europe. When local opera production started, local companies usually consisted of amateurs who produced operetta and comic opera with serious opera following only later on. Local opera composition was only able to develop once a solid base for local opera production was established, such as the establishment of music colleges, sustained vocal training and the implementation of funding mechanisms.

Historical similarities between local circumstances and this generic historical 'development formula' are in some instances more remarkable than this writer initially anticipated. The history of the Eoan Group from District Six in Cape Town, for example, who produced opera as a racially segregated group from the 1950s onwards, finds a surprising parallel in the Colored American Opera Company, active in the United States of

America some eighty years earlier.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, and maybe dissimilar in degree from other New World countries, the history of opera in South Africa, especially that of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, cannot be discussed without taking cognisance of politics. Opera is an expensive form of art, dependent on funding from external sources, and in South Africa that has always meant funding from the government. From the advent of National Party rule in 1948, right through the rise and fall of Apartheid and continued into the new dispensation after 1994, the creation of opera in South Africa has been influenced by political structures, an influence played out in particular through access to state funding or the lack thereof.

As will become clear in this chapter, the Apartheid government generally had little interest in the content of opera production, as long as it showcased White excellence.<sup>9</sup> The editor of the arts magazine *Scenaria*, Julius Eichbaum, remarked in 1981: 'In South Africa the nation's leaders display scant interest in the Arts as a whole and it is only on a very rare occasion that a Cabinet Minister is seen attending the theatre, opera or ballet.'<sup>10</sup> However, regardless of this lack of interest, by 1982 the image of the Performing Arts Councils, who were responsible for the production of opera at the time, had been tarnished by the notion of government control. Eichbaum again reported:

History has proven just how susceptible Arts Council Directors are to the whims of politicians. It is, after all, these masters who control the purse strings which are the life and death to the endeavours of any arts council, and quite naturally, an Arts Council Director is placed in the invidious position of having to serve these political masters who provide the funds on the one hand, and the public who look to his organization to provide artistic productions of high standard and relevance on the other. The result is that the public now

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<sup>8</sup> This all-black opera company was based in Washington DC. In 1873 they advertised their first opera production, *The Doctor of Alcantara* by Julius Eichberg, using amongst others these words: 'We hope to be able to demonstrate that our race will in time be capable of taking rank musically with our white brothers and sisters.' Jacqueline Trescott, 'From Church to Stage: Black Opera Company Was The City's First', *Washington Post*, 24 February 2007. This issue will be discussed more elaborately in section 3.2.3 of this chapter as well as Chapter 2 of this dissertation, which deals with opera production by the Eoan Group.

<sup>9</sup> Government did interfere with productions if these were deemed critical of government policies. See for example: No author, 'The crisis at CAPAB', *Scenaria*, September 1981, Issue no. 27, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Julius Eichbaum, 'Isolation through Patriotism', *Scenaria*, September 1981, Issue no. 27, p. 3. This tendency is well illustrated by the case of South African soprano Hanlie van Niekerk, who had been singing in Kassel, Germany for a decade before she married a South African cabinet minister, Lourens Muller, in 1968. After the marriage Muller forbade Van Niekerk to sing, because 'minister's wives do not sing opera'. See the Van Niekerk's Archive housed at DOMUS at the University of Stellenbosch. The story was also related to the present writer by Van Niekerk's son, Jan Smit, on 21 February 2009 at his home in Johannesburg.

views CAPAB and the Nico Malan Theatre as an 'establishment' entity, symbolizing the voice and the attitudes of the governing political party.<sup>11</sup>

Government structures after 1994 have become much more prescriptive with regard to the content of the music produced and the forces by which it is produced. Pressure has been exercised on producers and composers to include certain quotas of 'previously disadvantaged artists' and preference is given to non-European topics and/or settings.<sup>12</sup> Organizations currently producing opera in South Africa have subsequently had to deal extensively with the myth that opera is an exclusively 'Eurocentric' form of art. As recent as September 2005, the then Minister of Arts and Culture, Pallo Jordan, criticized the notion of black South Africans singing Italian opera. During a visit to the Grahamstown Festival, he was reported to have said that 'what tends to happen in South Africa is that when people are speaking about opera they are speaking about European opera, and what it entails is usually teaching African kids to imitate Italians. What's wrong with the way Africans sing? Why should you teach them to sing like Italians? To make them into imitation whites – and poor imitations as well?'<sup>13</sup> Jordan did however concede that 'there is nothing wrong with someone from Soweto wanting to sing Verdi – but it's a bit like exporting "spaghetti to Italy". What the Italians want to see is not someone imitating an Italian composer. They want to see someone from Africa doing something African...'<sup>14</sup>

Tracing the way in which opera has been transferred to and appropriated by South Africa's indigenous cultures is of particular interest to the history of opera in South Africa. The stirrings of this process can be found in the decades preceding 1994, occurring in cultural activities of isolated sections of society, severely hampered by Apartheid. However, the new dispensation of 1994 brought with it a freedom that enabled stripping the genre of its European and elitist connotations. This opened the way for the so-called Africanization of opera in the formal sector of opera production, as well as the appropriation of the genre in township, Malay Choir and Coon music making. The rise and unquestionable dominance of black opera singers in formal opera production today is closely linked to this process.

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<sup>11</sup> Julius Eichbaum, 'Should our Arts Councils be Restructured?', *Scenaria*, January 1982, Issue no. 29, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> A more detailed perspective on this issue is provided in Chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup> Celean Jacobson, 'Disarming cultural weapons, Art's place in a transforming land', *The Sunday Times*, 28 September 2005.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



Through a degree of (forced or spontaneous) indigenization and possibly as a result of the turbulent events in the history of the country, it appears that opera in South Africa has gained a voice of its own, creating a ‘truly South African space’ in the world of opera. It is with the following historical account as a backdrop that the trends of the indigenization of opera in South Africa can be better contextualized and understood.

### 1.3 Towards a History of Opera in South Africa

#### 1.3.1 Touring Companies: Introducing Opera to South Africa

Opera was first performed in the Cape shortly after the African Theatre, the first theatre in the country, was built in 1801.<sup>15</sup> In 1800 Sir George Young,<sup>16</sup> the English governor at the time, decided there was a need for an entertainment venue and the African Theatre was completed on Hottentots Square in October 1801.<sup>17</sup> This was the first building in the country where theatrical works could be performed. Although European settlers performed all sorts of musics in various circumstances since their settlement in the Cape in 1652, no traces of opera-related activities in the Cape before 1802 have been found.

On 10 May 1802 musicians from the English garrison stationed in the Cape during the English occupation staged the ballad opera *The Devil to pay* (composed 1728), by Charles Coffey.<sup>18</sup> The ballad opera is a distinctively English form in which spoken dialogue

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<sup>15</sup> Jan Bouws, *Die musieklewe van Kaapstad 1800-1850*, Cape Town 1965, p. 129.

<sup>16</sup> According to F.C.L. Bosman, the governor was Sir George Yonge, not Young. See F.C.L. Bosman, *Drama en Toneel in Suid-Afrika, Deel I 1652-1855*. Cape Town 1928, p. 94. In his book *The Audience is waiting*, p. 173, Jack Stodel also refers to Sir George Yonge.

<sup>17</sup> The ‘Hottentots Square’ seemed to have had various names. The music historian Jan Bouws refers to it as ‘Boereplein’. Today it is called ‘Riebeeck Square’, situated between Buitengracht and Bree Street, opposite the Christiaan Barnard Memorial Hospital in Cape Town. Sources vary regarding the exact date when the African Theatre was opened. According to James May in *Grove Music Online*, it is 1800. Jan Bouws’s writings, as well as information obtained by the present writer from the committee currently restoring the original building, refer to it as October 1801. Young’s superiors in London decided that he was spending money too lavishly and he was recalled to England before the inauguration of the building.

<sup>18</sup> Jan Bouws. *Die musieklewe van Kaapstad*, p. 130.

alternates with songs set to traditional or popular melodies sung by the actors themselves.<sup>19</sup> The performance was repeated on 28 June of the same year and the group performed another ballad opera, *The Poor Soldier* (1783) by John O’Keefe, on 6 September 1802.<sup>20</sup> Taking the limited resources for opera production into consideration, the ballad opera was an obvious choice for performance in the rough colonial conditions of early nineteenth-century Cape Town. Above mentioned works were performed again by the English garrison in 1818 and 1824. On 10 July 1802 a touring company from Europe, the *Hoogduitsche Toneel Gezelschap*, performed *Der Wildfang* (composed 1798) by August von Kotzebue. However, it is uncertain if it was performed as an opera or as a play with ballet, but the local newspaper reported that the orchestra was to be conducted by the local musician Carl Christoph Pabst.<sup>21</sup>

Touring opera companies from France often visited the Cape on their way to Mauritius, performing one or two operas from their repertoire to the local settlers. During the first decade of the nineteenth century French *opéra comique* was the most frequent form of operatic entertainment at the Cape. The first *opéra comique* was performed in 1803 when a French group staged *Toinon et Toinette* (1767) by Francois Joseph Gossec and *Le tableau parlant* (1769) by André Grétry.<sup>22</sup> In 1809 *Une Folie* (1802), a two act opera by Etienne Nicolas Méhul, was staged by the French group De Boucherville. Within the first seven years of the existence of the African Theatre audiences were treated to *opéra comique* by

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<sup>19</sup> John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* (1728) is probably the most famous example of this genre. The genre and its related forms (pasticcio, comic opera, farce, pantomime, extravaganza, opera-ballet, interlude and afterpiece) also dominated American entertainment in the eighteenth century.

<sup>20</sup> Jan Bouws, *Die musieklewe van Kaapstad*, p. 130.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 130.

<sup>22</sup> Jan Bouws, *Solank daar musiek is....*, p. 24. The present writer has found considerable factual differences between the writings of Jan Bouws and the article on touring companies in the *South African Music Encyclopedia* (‘Touring Theatre Companies and Concert Artists’, *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 350) written by J.P. Malan. Published in 1986, four years after Bouws’s publication, *Solank daar musiek is...*, Malan does not mention these performances at all. Malan mentions 1805 as the first date that any opera was performed in the Cape, when two operas by François-André Philidor and Pierre Alexandre Monsigny respectively were performed by the touring group Amateurs de l’Ile de France. Bouws’s own facts are also inconsistent with regard to the performance details of the first *opéra comiques* at the Cape. In his 1965 publication *Die musieklewe van Kaapstad* he mentions three operas, *Les deux Jumeaux de Bergame* (Marc-Antoine Désaugiers, composed 1782), *Arlequin Afficheur* (Jean-Claude Gillier, date not found) and *La revanche forcée* (composer or date not found) on p. 131, which differs from his 1982 publication *Solank daar musiek is....* Bouws’s lack of references in his texts makes it impossible to retrace his steps, and the present writer has decided to base her narrative on the facts provided in the latter publication. However, nowhere is it made clear by Bouws that this latter publication repudiates or corrects the earlier published information.

composers such as Francois Joseph Gossec, André Grétry, Egidio Duni, Jean Benjamin De la Borde, Adolphe Benoît Blaise, François-André Philidor, Pierre Alexandre Monsigny, Dominique Della-Maria, Marc-Antoine Désaugiers and Chevalier d'Herbain.<sup>23</sup>

However, during the first half of the nineteenth century no consistent pattern of opera production or other musical events at the Cape existed. The *South African Music Encyclopedia* describes the musical life of the Cape during this time as 'rather dull'.<sup>24</sup> Musical events were often dependent on individuals and their initiatives. Charles Mathurin Villet, a French cultural impresario who lived in the Cape at the time, staged most of the *opéra comique*. Other notable examples are Frederick Lemming from Denmark and Etienne Boniface from France who settled in the Cape for a number of years. Lemming and Boniface produced a variety of cultural events together, but after their departure to the Eastern Cape and Denmark respectively, local production ceased again.<sup>25</sup> Bouws mentions sixteen different groups performing no less than thirty two operas during the first fifty years of the nineteenth century, most of them performed by French touring groups.<sup>26</sup> After the occupation of Mauritius and the Cape by Britain in 1806, visits by French groups became less frequent, leaving a lacunae not filled by touring groups from Britain.

Although no reviews on the productions of these early years have been found, Bouws refers to the quality of these performances as rather amateurish. He opens his chapter on the beginnings of opera in the Cape in *Solank daar musiek is...* by referring to the high standards of 'proper' opera production in Europe and speculating on the impossibility of achieving similar standards in the Cape at the time.<sup>27</sup> Bouws's concern with 'proper' opera raises an ontological question which is seminal to this study. Should the production of only parts of an opera, or of opera changed and adapted to local conditions be considered 'proper' opera? Historical evidence emphasizes the relevance of this question. It seems that many operas performed at the Cape were made into burlesques, or even carnivalesque folk theatre in the style of John Gay's *A Beggar's Opera* of 1728 and it is evident that *opéra comique* and *opéra buffa* provided the standard fare for Capetonians in the early

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<sup>23</sup> Jan Bouws, *Solank daar musiek is...*, p. 26. See also Jan Bouws, *Die musieklewe van Kaapstad*, p. 133.

<sup>24</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Touring Theatre Companies and Concert Artists', *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 350.

<sup>25</sup> Jan Bouws, *Solank daar musiek is...*, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Jan Bouws as referenced by Malan, 'Touring Theatre Companies and Concert Artists', *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 350.

<sup>27</sup> Jan Bouws, *Solank daar musiek is...*, p. 24.

nineteenth century. Clearly, this study would like to argue that it is the 'idea of opera' that matters most in investigating the notion of indigenization, and that local adaptations and performance practices become interesting precisely because they deviate from 'proper' opera conceived as, for example, Italian or French opera as staged in Milan or Paris. Still more interesting would be the notion of 'opera' existing only as an idea in lieu of a 'proper' score.

The African Theatre has an interesting history of its own, exposing some of the roots of cultural and artistic separation that would characterize much of the history of the succeeding century in South Africa. As early as 1829, free blacks and slaves were banned from visiting the theatre.<sup>28</sup> Ironically though, in 1839 the theatre was changed into a mission church for freed slaves.<sup>29</sup> This decision caused such an outcry among theatre patrons that they shattered the windows of the building with stones in protest. Because of the stone-throwing incident, the church was named after St Stephen, the New Testament martyr who was stoned to death.<sup>30</sup>

South Africa remained dependent on touring companies from abroad for opera productions until the early twentieth century. From the point of view of the performers, South Africa became increasingly attractive for opera performance from the 1860s onwards, especially after gold and diamonds were discovered on the Witwatersrand after 1880. Malan describes the influx of visiting opera groups at the end of the nineteenth century as follows:

The last two decades (of the nineteenth century) saw a continuous stream of musicians, dancers and entertainers disembark at one of the ports, with Kimberley and the City of Gold as their main objectives. Among them were genuine artists, but also many adventurers, effete performers and youthful bands eager for fame and fortune. All had to face long distances and inadequate transport facilities and most of them preferred a leisurely itinerary with stops for concerts. At these, they were generally dependant on local pianists, singers and bandsmen to stage what must sometimes have been largely improvised performances.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The current writer was unable to establish who decided this and why.

<sup>29</sup> D.O. Reinecke (ed). *Gedenkbrosjyre, Staatsteater Pretoria*, Johannesburg 1981, page not numbered.

<sup>30</sup> St. Stephen's now belongs to the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa. In what is perhaps an unusual example of indigenization of theology, it is worth noting that it is unusual for a church in reformed tradition to be named after a martyr. The African Theatre still functions as a church today and was renovated in 2007-8.

<sup>31</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Touring Theatre Companies and Concert Artists', *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 348.

As a result of the discovery of precious minerals, bigger cities developed and concomitantly, larger European populations seeking opera as entertainment. Touring companies now traveled throughout the country, often returning year after year with new productions. A number of impresarios left their mark on the opera scene of South Africa. The first of these groups was the Miranda-Harper group, touring the country from 1868 onwards, producing comic and serious opera for almost a decade.<sup>32</sup> In 1869 the Trafalgar Hall was constructed in Durban and in 1870 Verdi's *Il Trovatore* was performed by the Miranda-Harper Opera Company, the first serious opera to be presented in full in Durban.<sup>33</sup> Due to internal conflict the Miranda-Harper group ceased to exist shortly after this production. The Harper couple moved to Kimberley where they started a dramatic club with whom they toured the Eastern Cape from 1873 to 1874, performing Verdi's *La Traviata*, amongst others. David Miranda and Annette Hirst (the couple married in 1869) stayed on in Durban.<sup>34</sup>

In 1875 the Carl Rosa Group from London and the Italian Opera Company under the direction of Signor Calli arrived in Cape Town. They were followed a year later by Charles Lascelles with his opera company. Lascelles eventually settled in Natal, pioneering opera production there until his death in 1883.<sup>35</sup> His enthusiasm earned him the nick name 'father of opera' in Natal.<sup>36</sup> In 1876 the British opera singer, Ann Bishop, travelled throughout South Africa, giving concerts in Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Pietermaritzburg and Durban. Bishop, who was 66 years old at the time of this tour, not only gave solo performances, but also initiated productions with local opera groups. She was able to produce Vincenzo Bellini's *La sonnambula* as well as light operas such as *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* (*The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein*) by Jacques Offenbach in Durban.<sup>37</sup> Charles Lascelles was Bishop's accompanist on this tour. After finalizing his concert tour with her, Lascelles decided to return to Pietermaritzburg where he settled. Here he started the Philharmonic Society with whom he produced a number of operas by 1881, amongst others Gaetano Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* (*Daughter of the Regiment*). The reviewer for the *Natal Mercury* was however not impressed by the performance,

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<sup>32</sup> Jan Bouws. *Solank daar musiek is...*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>33</sup> G.S. Jackson, 'Music in Durban', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 421.

<sup>34</sup> There is no evidence of the Miranda couple continuing to perform opera in Durban.

<sup>35</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Lascelles, Charles', *SAME*, Volume 3, p. 143.

<sup>36</sup> G.S. Jackson, 'Music in Durban', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 421.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

commenting on the performance as follows: ‘Certainly Donizetti would not have recognized that he had ever had acquaintance with the piece that was performed at the Trafalgar Theatre on Monday night’.<sup>38</sup>

Enticed by the wealth discovered on the Witwatersrand, many opera companies toured the interior, including those of Bob Bolder, James Henry Harper, Edgar Perkins, Luscombe Searelle and Arturo Bonamici, to name but a few. While Perkins was active in Johannesburg in the late 1880s, Searelle produced 162 operas in Cape Town in 1887.<sup>39</sup> By 1889 Searelle moved his company to Johannesburg where he was active for more than a decade, not only producing opera, but also building theatres and even composing three operas during his stay in South Africa. Searelle was a highly productive impresario. From August to November 1889 he produced fifteen different works in the Theatre Royal,<sup>40</sup> amongst others Bizet’s *Carmen*, Verdi’s *Il Trovatore* and Gounod’s *Faust* as well as two of his own operas, *Bobadil* and *Estrella*.<sup>41</sup> Together with Perkins’s Opera, Drama and Burlesque Company, they made for a bustling operatic life in Johannesburg. Searelle also took opera on tour throughout South Africa, extending his performances to Mozambique and the then Rhodesia.<sup>42</sup> By 1900 Searelle left South Africa again for Europe.<sup>43</sup>

In 1893 a new theatre was built in Cape Town at the cost of £90,000. Soon after its inauguration as the New Theatre, it became known as the Opera House.<sup>44</sup> In the late nineteenth century Capetonians were still fully dependant on touring companies from abroad for opera productions and for the first twenty years of its existence the Opera House mainly staged operettas by Gilbert and Sullivan and French composers such as Edmond Audran and Robert Planquette. Ironically not much ‘serious opera’ was produced in the Opera House. The first such occasion was when the Arthur Rouse Company staged

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<sup>38</sup> Review in the *Natal Mercury*, 20 May 1881, cited in J.P. Malan, ‘Charles Lascelles’, *SAME*, Volume 3, p. 144.

<sup>39</sup> J.P. Malan, ‘Touring Theatre Companies and Concert Artists’, Volume 4, p. 362. This number of productions sounds unusually high. Malan unfortunately did not reference his articles, so it is not possible to trace whether this number is correct or whether it might be a mistake. However, this amount is repeated by Malan in the entry on Luscombe Searelle in the same source. See J.P. Malan, ‘Searelle, Luscombe’, *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 223.

<sup>40</sup> This building was erected on Searelle’s initiative. J.P. Malan, ‘Searelle, Luscombe’, *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 223.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 223-4.

<sup>42</sup> Rinie Stead, ‘Opera in Suid-Afrika’, *Lantern*, Volume 8 nr. 2, December 1963, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> J.P. Malan, ‘Searelle, Luscombe’, *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 224.

<sup>44</sup> J.P. Malan, ‘Theatres and Concerts Halls’, *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 332.

the first performance of Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in South Africa in 1899.<sup>45</sup> The other occasions were in February 1912 and April 1913 respectively when the Thomas Quinlan Opera Group<sup>46</sup> toured the country. In 1912 they produced six grand operas in Cape Town's Opera House: Puccini's *Madam Butterfly* and *Aida*, Gounod's *Faust*, Wagner's *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser* and Bizet's *Carmen*. The 1913 productions coincided with the Wagner Centenary and Quinlan produced a Wagner Festival in both Cape Town and Johannesburg<sup>47</sup> where they produced *Die Walküre* (sung in English), *Tristan und Isolde*, *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser* and *Die Meistersinger*.<sup>48</sup> Of this Olga Racster wrote, 'to introduce into a void a cult which had taken centuries to grow elsewhere was pioneer work indeed.'<sup>49</sup> During the first two decades of the twentieth century it was fashionable to produce Gilbert and Sullivan operettas performed by children. The Lilliputian Opera Company from Australia consisting of thirty two juvenile singers performed them to great acclaim in the Opera House in Cape Town. They also toured the country after these performances.<sup>50</sup> After 1920 the Opera House in Cape Town was used as a cinema and later sold to the South African Post Office in 1937.<sup>51</sup>

### 1.3.2 Local opera production

Local opera production had a slow start in South Africa. By the late nineteenth century amateur opera societies had been formed in many cities, including Bloemfontein, Durban, Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and Johannesburg. In Natal, the Durban Amateur Operatic Society performed its first opera, Arthur Sullivan's *The Mikado*, in 1886 and for the next

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<sup>45</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Touring Theatre Companies and Concert Artists', Volume 4, p. 364. According to Olga Racster, the group was named Arthur Rousbey, not Arthur Rouse. Olga Racster, *Curtain up!*, p. 88.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Quinlan was from Irish descent and an industrious opera impresario in the United Kingdom. His group was nicknamed 'Covent Garden on Wheels'. When the group visited South Africa in 1912 it comprised 170 members. The stage props, equipment and wardrobe that travelled with them weighed a staggering 350 tons. Rinie Stead, 'Opera in Suid-Afrika', *Lantern*, p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> Rinie Stead, 'Opera in Suid-Afrika', *Lantern*, p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Olga Racster, *Curtain up!*, p. 132.

<sup>50</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Touring Theatre Companies and Concert Artists', *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 364.

<sup>51</sup> The building was sold to the South African Post Office in 1937 with the aim of erecting a new central post office. See J.P. Malan, 'Theatres and Concert Halls: Opera House', *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 332. According to Angelo Gobatto, the current main Post Office in Cape Town was built on this site in 1950. See <http://www.capetownopera.co.za/htm/history2008.html>, accessed 27 July 2008.

thirty years such amateur opera performances flourished in Durban under the direction of Ferguson Brown.

#### 1.3.2.1 The Cape during the Nineteenth Century

Jan Bouws's writings are the only secondary sources that mention any local productions during the first fifty years of the nineteenth century. These were by all accounts isolated musical happenings, dependant on the initiatives of specific individuals living in the Cape at the time. During the early decades of the nineteenth century enough local musicians existed to form an orchestra and overtures to operas were performed occasionally as individual items on concert programmes. In 1806, for example, the overtures to Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) and Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* were part of a concert performed in the African Theatre under the direction of local musician Johann Christoph Schruppf.<sup>52</sup>

On 31 July 1824 a Dutch translation of Pierre-Augustin Beaumarchais's *Le barbier de Séville* (*The Barber of Seville*) was performed under the direction of Frenchman Etienne Boniface.<sup>53</sup> According to Bouws the music used for this production was a mixture of the opera setting by Giovanni Paisiello (composed 1782) and Gioacchino Rossini (composed 1816). The orchestral parts were managed by the orchestra of the English garrison. This same group was also responsible for the first ballad opera productions in 1801. The evening's entertainment, which took place in the African Theatre, included the aria *Di tanti Palpiti* from another Rossini opera, *Tancredi*.<sup>54</sup>

The first complete local production of a serious opera in the Cape took place in 1831.<sup>55</sup> Ten years after its première in Berlin in 1821, Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz* was performed in the African Theatre by the local theatre group 'All the World's a Stage'. The orchestral parts were taken care of by 'The Amateur Band', a local group of amateur musicians under the direction of Wilhelm Brandt, the organist at the Lutheran Church. 'All the World's a Stage' had been active as a theatre group for a number of years and had also tried their hand at ballad operas during the 1820s, at times collaborating with groups from

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<sup>52</sup> Bouws, *Solank daar musiek is...*, p. 28.

<sup>53</sup> Bouws, *Musiek in Suid-Afrika*, pp. 37-8

<sup>54</sup> Bouws *Solank daar musiek is...*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>55</sup> Bouws, *Die musieklewe van Kaapstad*, p. 156.



abroad.<sup>56</sup> In this way they staged *The Poor Soldier* by William Shield (composed 1783) and *The Duenna* by Thomas Linley (composed 1775). The direction of *Der Freischütz* was probably done by the London actor and singer, H. Booth.<sup>57</sup> Once again, no information is available on who the singers were. An English translation of the libretto was used and the main characters' names were changed from Agathe to Linda and from Max to Adolphe. The production was staged on 29 October 1831 and repeated on 17 December the same year. The *Commercial Advertiser* reviewed the performance favourably, stating that 'the scenery and contrivances in the Bullet Scene were got up with considerable effect and ingenuity, and gave general satisfaction to the numerous audience.'<sup>58</sup> The reviewer further remarked that the orchestral accompaniment was 'in many of the passages ... extremely difficult and require very great precision in executing', and concluded that the Amateur Band had offered 'their services very handsomely'.<sup>59</sup>

Despite Malan's reference to the Cape's cultural life at this time as 'rather dull',<sup>60</sup> not everyone living in the Cape at the time agreed. At the end of 1833 the editor of the *Nederduitsch Zuid-Afrikaansch Tydschrift*, a certain Professor Changuion, published an article in which he questioned the wisdom of such a small city spending so much money on expensive entertainment ('kostbare genoegens zyn schadelyk voor kleine steden'). Apparently there was much dancing going on and not learning a new dance was considered worse than a child not learning how to write.<sup>61</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century the Cape also produced an international singer who left for Europe in 1865 to pursue a career. Pauline Bredell was born in 1842 and was the daughter of an organ builder in Cape Town, Adam Bredell. According to Bouws, Pauline grew up in

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Booth's full names are not mentioned in any of the sources consulted.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* In a good example of the inconsistencies of South African opera historiography, neither Malan in the *South African Music Encyclopedia*, nor May in *Grove Music Online* notes these performances. They only refer to the fact that between 1810 and 1833 no touring companies visited the Cape. Curiously enough, Bouws is also inconsistent in his treatment of these two performances. In his books *Musiek in Suid-Afrika* (1946) and *Solank daar musiek is ...* (1982), much is made of the 1824 performance of Rossini's *Il Barbiere de Siviglia* whilst the 1831 performance of *Der Freischütz* is mentioned in just a few lines. *Die musieklewe van Kaapstad* (1965) pays substantial attention (4½ pages) to the 1831 production and very little to the 1824 production.

<sup>60</sup> Jacques Philip Malan, 'Touring Theatre Companies and Concert Artists', *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 350.

<sup>61</sup> Bouws, *Musiek in Suid-Afrika*, pp. 41-2.

a musical family and made her debut as a singer in the Cape at the German Lieder Society on 5 September 1864.<sup>62</sup> In 1865 she traveled to Berlin where she studied vocal training at the Julius Stern Conservatoire and sung in opera houses in the city. Later in her life she worked in New York. In 1870 she earned favourable reviews in Berlin newspapers for her interpretation of lieder by Mendelssohn and Schubert as well as an aria from Weber's *Euryanthe*. She married a German, Richard Saksen, but was widowed in 1871. At some stage in her career she changed her surname to Bredelli and toured South Africa in 1879 and 1883 with reviews in amongst others the *South African Illustrated News*, which mentioned that no commentary was necessary as the singer was so well known locally and abroad. In Durban her singing was extolled as 'the finest ever heard in the city'.<sup>63</sup> However, evidence of her 'career' in New York is slight. In the 1874 edition of the Cape magazine *Zingari*, it is mentioned that Eduard Lefèbre, a Frenchman, who started the German Lieder Society in the Cape and later became a saxophone virtuoso living in New York, had met her in New York and wrote that she had made a singing career in opera and church music in the city.<sup>64</sup>

#### 1.3.2.2 The Twentieth century: The College of Music in Cape Town

Regular opera seasons by local production houses in the Cape only materialized from the 1930s onwards when various amateur opera groups had been well established. At the same time the founding of institutions where voice training took place secured the gradual development of indigenous opera production. The existence of adequate voice training, then as now, is a criterion for sustained and consistent local production and Cape Town was no exception to this general rule.

On 10 January 1910 the South African College of Music in Cape Town opened its doors with thirty three registered students. Over the next half century the College had two formidable directors, William Henry Bell and Erik Chisholm, who infused local opera production with new life. The College initially functioned as an independent music school until 1923 when it was incorporated into the University of Cape Town. Bell was appointed head of the school in 1911 and stayed on as director until 1935. During this time he

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<sup>62</sup> Jan Bouws, *Solank daar musiek is ...* pp. 100-2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* See also: Jan Bouws, 'Pauline Bredell', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 231.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

founded and directed the Cape Town Little Theatre, nurturing the public's interest in opera and ballet, and in 1933 he started producing opera with students. In 1931 Bell had secured an old chemistry building and converted it into the Little Theatre, a venue where opera could be performed. The first student production was Domenico Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto* (*Secret Marriage*) which took place in 1933 under the direction of Guiseppe Paganelli (1882-1956), followed by Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*) in 1934.<sup>65</sup> Paganelli was born in Forli, Italy and had a successful early career as a world-class tenor before settling in South Africa in 1926 where he taught voice training at the South African College of Music.<sup>66</sup>

Although opera had been part of the College's activities since the 1920s, it became a more prominent activity after the Second World War when Erik Chisholm, a prolific opera composer and an enterprising and experienced musician, became its director in 1946 (the year of Bell's death). He established the University Opera Company in 1951 as well as the Opera School in 1954 with the Italian, Gregorio Fiasconaro, as full-time director. During this time Cape Town experienced an explosion of opera productions unequalled to this day, as the Company staged many operas from the standard repertory. In less than a decade students produced forty different operas in 650 performances – all accompanied by the University Orchestra under the direction of Chisholm himself. Many of these performances took place in the Little Theatre.<sup>67</sup> The Opera Company toured throughout South Africa, also embarking on extended tours to Northern and Southern Rhodesia (today Zambia and Zimbabwe) and the United Kingdom. In the 1956 to 1957 London season the company presented the first staged performance of Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* in England. Notable premières of locally composed operas included Chisholm's *The Pardoner's Tale* (1961) and John Joubert's *Silas Marner* (1961).<sup>68</sup>

However, in spite of many initiatives during the early parts of the twentieth century, local opera production in Cape Town remained heavily dependent on expertise from artists from abroad. This was not restricted to singers, but also included educators. In Cape Town the

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<sup>65</sup> Donald Inskip, *Forty Little Years*, Cape Town 1972, p. 16.

<sup>66</sup> H.H.van der Spuy, 'William Henry Bell', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 153. See also J.P. Malan, 'Paganelli, Giuseppe', *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Erik Chisholm', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 272. See also the list of opera productions held in the Little Theatre in Donald Inskip's *Forty Little Years*, pp. 119-157.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

Italians had dominated vocal training since the inception of the opera school at the University of Cape Town, extending it to the Eoan Group as well, thus establishing a tradition that continues to this day.<sup>69</sup>

### 1.3.2.3 The Eoan Group in District Six

In 1933, the year the College of Music at the University of Cape Town started student opera productions, a cultural and welfare organization amongst the Coloured population in District Six was started by Helen Southern-Holt.<sup>70</sup> The organization taught drama, music and ballet and throughout the Apartheid years the organization played an important yet ambivalent cultural and educational role in the Coloured community who performed under the strictures of the government's policy of 'separate development' until the end of Apartheid.

In 1943 Joseph Manca (a South African of Italian descent) became musical director of the Eoan Group, a position he held for 34 years. Manca was initially co-opted to coach the small choir that had been cobbled together from the community. He started performing small choral works and at the same time trained individual singers. The choir's numbers and skills grew spectacularly and in 1949 the group's first operatic production, the operetta *A slave in Araby*,<sup>71</sup> using no less than seventy five performers, was staged. After a decade of voice training and ever more ambitious musical productions including light operas and large scale choral works, Manca started producing serious opera with the Eoan Group in 1956.<sup>72</sup>

Under Manca's direction the Eoan Group experienced impressive growth as a cultural organization, offering singers many opportunities to perform and excel in operatic singing. The number of choristers alone grew to one hundred and fifty singers within a few years after he started directing the choir. In 1955 the group decided to set up an Arts Festival which took a year to prepare. As part of the 1956 Festival the group staged a historic

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<sup>69</sup> One of Cape Town's most prominent educators and opera producers, Italian-born Angelo Gobbato, has been affiliated with CAPAB and Cape Town opera since 1965. [http://saoperasingers.homestead.com/Angelo\\_Gobbato\\_Bio.html](http://saoperasingers.homestead.com/Angelo_Gobbato_Bio.html), accessed 4 February 2009.

<sup>70</sup> Southern-Holt named the organization the Eoan Group after the Greek word 'Eos', meaning 'dawn'. Joseph Manca, 'Eoan Group' in *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 26–29.

<sup>71</sup> Composer and date of composition unknown.

<sup>72</sup> Joseph Manca, 'Eoan Group' in *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 26–29.

performance of Verdi's *La Traviata*, sung in Italian.<sup>73</sup> At least six more Italian operas were produced in the decade following the success of *La Traviata*. The second festival took place in 1962. The group also toured the country twice and performed opera in Aberdeen and London in 1975.<sup>74</sup>

For thirty years Eoan was a thriving local opera production company taking centre stage in Cape Town's cultural life, despite being plagued by political problems. The organization's infrastructure and the manner in which it fitted into the cultural environment of the country as a whole was an unhappy reflection of the political and cultural schizophrenia of the country during the Apartheid years. Throughout these years the Eoan Group's musical activities functioned independently and separately from the operatic activities of the white community of Cape Town. In practice this meant that, although whites like Joseph Manca, Allesandro Rota and Gregorio Fiasconara (who directed some productions) helped with training, there was no exchange between the White and Coloured opera performers. Eoan singers, who were all Coloured, did not perform with Chisholm's Cape Town Opera Company or vice versa.<sup>75</sup>

An interesting parallel to the Eoan Group finds itself in opera production in the United States between 1872 and 1882: a unique all-black opera troupe, the Colored American Opera Company from Washington DC, produced opera and toured with a wide-ranging repertory including Julius Eichberg's *The Doctor of Alcantara* (1862) and Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore* (1878). The group developed from a church choir at the St. Augustine Roman Catholic Church and seemed to have been musically well educated. According to Dena Grant, an archivist for St. Augustine's 'they were self-sufficient, literate people who knew music ... we forget there were black people who knew classical music.'<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> The ballet section of the Eoan Group also premiered Stanley Glasser's ballet *The Square*.

<sup>75</sup> The implications of Apartheid and the Group Areas Act for the Eoan Group's opera productions (including their tours through the country) will be explored in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

<sup>76</sup> Jacqueline Trescott, 'From Church to Stage: Black Opera Company Was The City's First', *The Washington Post*, 24 February 2007.

#### 1.3.2.4 Durban, Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth

George Stoney Jackson is the only scholar who has systematically researched the history of classical music in Durban. His research was published between the 1960s and 1980s and it covers the period from the mid-nineteenth century, when the number of British settlers started increasing, until the beginning of the Second World War.<sup>77</sup>

According to Jackson, local opera production in Durban was dominated by light opera for more than eighty years, starting in 1886 when the Durban Amateur Operatic Society was founded by Ferguson Brown. Their first production was Arthur Sullivan's *The Mikado* (composed 1885, libretto by William S. Gilbert), staged in the Theatre Royal. The artists seemed to have been 'ladies and gentlemen who placed themselves under the tuition of Mr. J. Ferguson Brown', the orchestra comprising a mere five musicians, 'two violins, a cornet, and a double bass, was supported by a piano at which Mr. Brown himself was seated in the capacity of conductor'.<sup>78</sup> Playing to packed houses, this production was repeated seven times, and *The Mikado* remained a firm favourite with the Durban public for years to come. The society expanded its repertoire, producing *Ruddigore* (Gilbert and Sullivan, 1887), *Olivette* (composer & date unknown), *Les cloches de Corneville* (composer & date unknown) and *Dorothy* (composer & date unknown) in the following decade. By 1897 the society changed its name to the Diamond Jubilee Opera Company.<sup>79</sup>

Around the turn of the century, local amateur opera production had to compete with the many touring companies from Britain producing the same genre of opera in the city of Durban. Amongst these were the companies of Luscombe Searelle, Edgar Perkins and Frank Wheeler. A number of local amateur singers were however recruited by the visiting companies, Ferguson Brown being one of them.<sup>80</sup> The D'Oyle Carte Opera Company, who was responsible for the premières of many Sullivan operettas in Britain, also toured

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<sup>77</sup> See his doctoral dissertation, *Music in Durban from 1850 to 1900* (University of the Witwatersrand 1961, published by the Human Science Research Council in 1970 as *Music in Durban: an account of musical activities in Durban from 1850 to the early years of the present century*) and his subsequent contributions in the *South African Music Encyclopedia* (ed. J.P. Malan).

<sup>78</sup> G.S. Jackson, 'Durban Amateur Operatic Society', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 411.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* p. 412.

<sup>80</sup> G.S. Jackson, 'Music in Durban', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 435.

Durban during the first decade of the twentieth century and presented most of the Gilbert and Sullivan repertoire there.<sup>81</sup>

By 1919 local opera production was revived by Ferguson Brown's son, Gus Brown. The society was renamed the Durban Opera Society and continued the tradition of staging Gilbert and Sullivan operettas.<sup>82</sup> By 1928, an attempt was made to start the production of grand opera by local singers when Dan Godfrey started up yet another society, the Durban Amateur Grand Opera Society, staging Gounod's *Faust* and Verdi's *Il Trovatore*.

Towards the end of the Second World War another society was formed, this time the Municipal Choral and Light Opera Society who produced more Gilbert and Sullivan at the Criterion in 1946.<sup>83</sup> In the same year John Connell from Johannesburg made Italian opera popular by conducting a series in April. According to Jackson, many Durbanites had been soldiers in Italy during World War Two and were introduced to Italian opera there.<sup>84</sup>

After 1952, the newly opened Alhambra Theatre became the venue for operetta production by local groups. At the same time, yet more societies were formed. The Durban Opera and Drama Society ventured to revive musical comedy from 1954 onwards and The Durban Municipal Light Operatic and Choral Society produced Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers* (composed 1889) as well as *The Mikado* under the direction of Teddy Browne and William Pickerill.<sup>85</sup> The latter two organizations continued to produce light opera until the early 1960s. In 1959 Heinrich Haape launched the Durban Opera Company, the first local opera group to tour to the (then) Transvaal. In 1964 this company was taken over by the Natal Performing Arts Council (NAPAC) who initiated most opera production after this date.<sup>86</sup> Haape became the chairman of the NAPAC Opera Committee and was the main driving force behind NAPAC's decision to buy the Alhambra Theatre.<sup>87</sup> Amateur

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<sup>81</sup> Mr Richard D'Oyle Carte built the Savoy Theatre in London where many of Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas were produced. The D'Oyle Carte Opera Company also held sole copyright to professional productions of Sullivan's operas until 1961. See Robert D. Hume, & Arthur Jacobs, 'London II, I, D'Oyle Carte Opera Company', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy, <http://www.grovemusic.com>, accessed 27 November 2007 and David Russell Holme, 'Arthur Sullivan' *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy, <http://www.grovemusic.com>, accessed 27 November 2007.

<sup>82</sup> G.S. Jackson, 'Durban Amateur Operatic Society', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 412.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* p. 412.

<sup>84</sup> G.S. Jackson, 'Music in Durban', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 435.

<sup>85</sup> G.S. Jackson, 'Durban Amateur Operatic Society', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 413.

<sup>86</sup> G.S. Jackson, 'Music in Durban', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 439.

<sup>87</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Heinrich Haape', *SAME*, Volume 2, p. 151.

organizations, however, still continued their activities and yet another organization with this aim, The Durban Opera Group, was formed in 1968 under the direction of Olive Peel. This group staged two productions annually in a number of towns in Natal.<sup>88</sup>

The development of local opera production in Durban is characterized by the continuous formation of new opera societies,<sup>89</sup> a prevalence of amateur groups right up to the formation of the Performing Arts Councils in 1963 and the seemingly lasting popularity of operettas by Gilbert and Sullivan. In 1971 George Jackson wrote in the *South African Music Encyclopedia* that 'Durban is still very British'.<sup>90</sup> He probably referred to the white population only, and the popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas up to this date supports this claim. David Russell Hulme writes in his article on Sullivan in *Grove Music Online* that Sullivan's operas never quite gained popularity outside English-speaking countries because of the peculiar use of the English language. Furthermore, Hulme notes that '[Sullivan's] synthesis of Victorian musical predilections was undoubtedly a factor in the enormous contemporary popularity his music enjoyed in Britain', indicating that Sullivan's style would be better understood and appreciated by the British (and those familiar with the culture) than those unaccustomed to British culture.<sup>91</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that the Durban productions were essentially amateur productions, Gilbert and Sullivan operetta seemed to appeal and contribute to a specific Durbanite culture, and within the Durban society at large, to a specific population group. These operetta productions also never toured through the country. Although light opera was often performed in Cape Town, it did not achieve the sustained popularity as it did in Durban.

Introducing Western classical music, and specifically opera, to other South African cultures slowly took hold in Durban, although the city pioneered this effort in the country. Under the guidance of Dr Charles Hoby, the Durban Municipal Bantu Brass Band not only produced instrumentalists, but also singers such as the tenor Joseph Dhlamini and the mezzo-soprano Esther Makhoba.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> G.S. Jackson, 'Durban Amateur Operatic Society', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 413.

<sup>89</sup> This is also true for choral societies, chamber music and orchestral societies. See also G.S. Jackson, 'Music in Durban', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 418-41.

<sup>90</sup> G.S. Jackson, 'Music in Durban', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 440.

<sup>91</sup> David Russell Holme, 'Arthur Sullivan' *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy, accessed 27 November 2007, <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

<sup>92</sup> G.S. Jackson, 'The Durban Municipal Bantu Brass Band', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 415.



As was the case in Durban, local opera production in the towns of Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth were in the hands of amateur societies. Port Elizabeth's Gilbert and Sullivan Society was established in 1932<sup>93</sup> and produced at least one operetta per year.<sup>94</sup> After World War II, the Port Elizabeth Musical and Drama Society also presented light opera. Built in 1892 and funded by a group of local businessmen, Port Elizabeth has one of the finest opera houses in the country. The first opera performance was Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, produced that same year.<sup>95</sup> In Bloemfontein light opera was presented occasionally by the Free State Music Society.<sup>96</sup> Serious opera was not attempted until the formation of the Arts Councils in 1963.

### 1. 3.2.5 Opera in Johannesburg

Local opera production in Johannesburg owes much of its development to the efforts of the Scotsman, John Connell. Connell settled in Johannesburg in 1916 as an organist and was active in the music industry until his death in 1955. Initially his energies were focused on choral singing, and he soon extended them to Pretoria, Kroonstad, Bloemfontein and Germiston. However, from 1925 onwards he actively started producing opera and by 1950 Connell staged an average of nine to ten operas per year. He not only directed these productions, but also took responsibility for the entire technical support of each production.<sup>97</sup> Connell introduced 'Music Fortnights' to Johannesburg, musical evenings which were held free of charge, presenting a variety of musical events.<sup>98</sup> In 1930 he produced Bizet's *Carmen* as part of this initiative. In 1936 the Rand Daily Mail reported under the heading 'Johannesburg's Free Week of Opera' that 'Every year Mr. Connell assembles a cast, a chorus and an orchestra and presents opera during Music Fortnight. He does this not for the sake of the box office, not for charity, but solely for the love of the

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<sup>93</sup> <http://www.peoh.co.za/content.asp?pageid=30>, accessed 7 February 2009.

<sup>94</sup> Rinie Stead, 'Opera in Suid-Afrika', *Lantern*, Volume 8 nr. 2, December 1963, p. 19. Connell's surname is spelt with one 'l' in Stead's article.

<sup>95</sup> <http://www.peoh.co.za/content.asp?pageid=30>, accessed 7 February 2009.

<sup>96</sup> Rinie Stead, 'Opera in Suid-Afrika', *Lantern*, p. 19.

<sup>97</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Music in Johannesburg', *SAME*, Volume 3, p. 36.

<sup>98</sup> Rinie Stead, 'Opera in Suid-Afrika', *Lantern*, p. 20.

thing and for the sake of bringing music a little nearer to the people.’<sup>99</sup> During that season 12,000 people attended Music Fortnights.<sup>100</sup>

Gounod’s *Faust*, Bizet’s *Carmen*, Verdi’s *Il Trovatore*, Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* and Lehar’s *The Merry Widow* count among Connell’s many productions.<sup>101</sup> He was also able to stage Modest Mussorgsky’s large scale opera *Boris Gudonov* in 1939 and 1942 respectively. Despite criticism that he produced ‘too many operas ... in an unfinished manner’, patrons in the city kept flocking to his productions.<sup>102</sup>

Connell’s dream was to build a national opera company with its headquarters in Johannesburg with smaller units in the larger cities of the country and he steadily worked towards this goal. The 1942 season was set up as a national opera event, a collaborative effort embracing the main centers in South Africa. The productions during this year included Verdi’s *Aida*, Rossini’s *Il Barbiere de Siviglia*, Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* and Carl Maria von Weber’s singspiel *Abu Hassan* (composed 1811). The forces comprised the orchestras of Cape Town, Johannesburg and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) together with singers and dancers from all over the country. The productions toured from Johannesburg to Pretoria and Cape Town and in each city local choruses and dancers were used. The ever growing scope of productions included operas such as Wagner’s *Lohengrin*, Puccini’s *Tosca* and Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Snow Maiden* being introduced and independent ballet productions being added as part of the tour. In 1946 Connell even staged Bizet’s *Carmen* sung in a mix of both Afrikaans and English, an innovation lauded in the newspapers who lauded it with headlines like ‘Ovation for operatic invasion’.<sup>103</sup> In Johannesburg the Empire Theatre was booked out night after night during this season despite criticism of mediocre performing standards.<sup>104</sup>

Connell managed to stage operas on small budgets. Although there were no institutions formally funding professional orchestras, dancers, choirs or singers, Connell received a small subsidy from the Johannesburg Municipality with which he was able to hire local and foreign soloists. He further used the orchestral resources of the SABC and the

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<sup>99</sup> J.P. Malan, ‘Connell, John’, *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 296.

<sup>100</sup> Rinie Stead, ‘Opera in Suid-Afrika’, *Lantern*, p. 20.

<sup>101</sup> J.P. Malan, ‘Music in Johannesburg’, *SAME*, Volume 3, p. 36.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* p.37.

Johannesburg City Orchestra and dancers from the principle dance studios in town. However, even after several very successful opera seasons, he lamented the constraining financial situation in the *Spotlight* of 31 May 1946:

Opera in South Africa has progressed from sand-bags to shoe strings, existing on a small subsidy from the Johannesburg Municipality and the proceeds of the annual seasons. African Consolidated Theatres, who have rendered great services to the growth of opera, take literally not a penny profit.<sup>105</sup>

Independent from Connell's initiatives, a number other institutions also produced opera in Johannesburg, albeit on smaller scale. Percival Kirby (a composer of opera as well) produced several small scale operas at the University of the Witwatersrand and the Johannesburg Operatic Society's endeavors were successful to a lesser degree.

Connell's 1947 season included the staging of ten operas and four ballets. In an eight week period, fifty-three thousand people attended these concerts in Johannesburg and eighteen thousand attended an eleven-day season in Pretoria. Connell stated that 'Opera has been established, and has persisted in a way comparable with no other city of similar size in the Empire'.<sup>106</sup>

#### 1. 3.2.6 A national body for opera: the Performing Arts Councils

From 1940 onwards a genuine need was developing for a national infrastructure in the interest of opera. A variety of interest groups initiated national organizations during the 1940s and 50s with the aim to sustain opera production in the country. In 1940 Allesandro Rota in Cape Town launched the 'National Opera Company', an organization that floundered due to his internment when Italy joined the Second World War.<sup>107</sup> In the north of the country, John Connell set up a 'National Opera Society' in Johannesburg in 1946, another venture that could not establish itself in durable fashion.<sup>108</sup> In 1948 the newly elected South African government established the first state-funded organization to support

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>107</sup> Rota was an Italian national and therefore interned during the Second World War. See Malan, 'Allesandro Giuseppe Rota', *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 198.

<sup>108</sup> Pieter Kapp, 'Die akademie en opera', in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, Jaargang 48, no. 1, March 2008, p. 5.

the arts, the National Theatre Organisation (NTO). Its mandate was to serve all the arts in the entire country. However, based in Pretoria, this organization was largely ineffective due to insufficient funding and the huge geographical area which needed to be covered.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, most funding seemed to be invested in theatre productions with small amounts channeled to orchestral music, opera and ballet.<sup>110</sup>

In the 1950s two new private organizations were launched, this time with more success. The 'National Opera Association of South Africa' was launched in Johannesburg in August 1955 with the aim 'to encourage indigenous opera and ballet and to encourage South African artists to remain in the country'.<sup>111</sup> Rota was the driving force behind this organization, having moved to Johannesburg in 1950 in an attempt to revive Connell's opera activities there. A year later its counterpart for Afrikaans speakers, the 'Operavereniging van Suid-Afrika' (OPSA) was launched in the same town, with the aim to:

Promote the art of opera in all its facets and, in particular, to encourage the performance of operas in Afrikaans in order to make opera more intelligible to Afrikaans-speaking members of the public, and to encourage the development of an indigenous operatic art.<sup>112</sup>

These two societies collaborated in several productions and both applied for subsidy from the Department of Education, Arts and Science. However, the Department was not willing to subsidize two separate bodies and the societies decided to merge. In October 1958 the 'South African Opera Federation' was launched.<sup>113</sup> However, it was evident that the merger took place on the basis of financial convenience rather than principled conviction. After the merger the original societies did not, in fact, disband and both continued producing opera with much friction between them as each pursued their initial interests. The South African soprano, Cecilia Wessels, and her husband Ernest Beecroft, invested

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<sup>109</sup> Elizabeth Blanckenberg, *The Music Activities of the Cape Performing Arts Board*, Masters dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, May 2009, p. 7.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Fanny Emdon, 'Opera Societies in the Transvaal – National Opera Association of South Africa', *SAME*, Volume 3, p. 312.

<sup>112</sup> Ockert Botha, 'Opera Societies in the Transvaal – Opera Society of South Africa', *SAME*, Volume 3, p. 313.

<sup>113</sup> Pieter Kapp, 'Die akademie en opera', in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, p. 6. According to Emdon though, the year was 1957, see Fanny Emdon, 'Opera Societies in the Transvaal - National Opera Association of South Africa', *SAME*, Volume 3, p. 312.

money in one of Rota's failed attempts to create a national body for opera.<sup>114</sup> Wessels's comment on the situation was indicative of the deep divisions that existed between individual role players at the time: 'But through lack of co-operation it was a failure, like so many other opera companies that have been started in South Africa, and I lost all my money.'<sup>115</sup>

Two groups based in the Cape Province also continued to produce opera, both locally and nationally. The Opera Company of the University of Cape Town as well as the Eoan Group from District Six existed separately, touring not only the bigger cities of South Africa, but also rural towns. The former extended their tours to Northern and Southern Rhodesia. In 1957 the Afrikaanse Kultuurraad of Pretoria launched yet another organization named the 'Opera-organisasie van Suid-Afrika' (OPEROSA). Its stated aim was to grow into a national organization and to lobby for funding from the state.<sup>116</sup>

In 1960 the government held a conference in Pretoria to discuss the need for a centralized body to manage and support the arts on a national level. It was attended by 150 delegates representing cultural organizations and universities across the country. At this meeting the model of four decentralized arts councils funded by national and provincial governments was proposed, a principle on which the management of the Arts Councils was eventually based.<sup>117</sup> During this time both OPSA and OPEROSA lobbied extensively with the government for a national arts body. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1963 four Performing Arts Councils were established in each of the provinces of the Republic of South Africa:<sup>118</sup> the Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB) in the Cape Province, the Performing Arts Council of Transvaal (PACT) in Transvaal, the Natal Performing Arts Council (NAPAC) in Natal and the Performing Arts Council of the Orange Free State (PACOFS) in the Orange Free

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<sup>114</sup> Hannes Haasbroek, *Stem en Legende, die lewe van Cecilia Wessels*. Litera Publications, Pretoria, 2005, pp. 80-81. It is not clear from the source to which opera company Haasbroek referred here, or how much money was involved.

<sup>115</sup> Hannes Haasbroek, *Stem en Legende, die lewe van Cecilia Wessels*, p. 81.

<sup>116</sup> Pieter Kapp, 'Die akademie en opera', in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, Jaargang 48, no. 1, March 2008, p. 6. According to Basil Taylor this happened in 1955 and was called the Pretoria Opera Group. See Basil Taylor, 'Opera Societies in the Transvaal – Pretoria Opera Group', *SAME*, Volume 3, p. 313.

<sup>117</sup> Elizabeth Blanckenberg. *The Music Activities of the Cape Performing Arts Board*, p. 8.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* South Africa had four provinces until 1994.

State.<sup>119</sup> These councils were not about government control in the first place, but answered to a genuine need for support within the artistic community. However, government control became easier through these institutions, as the management of each council resided in a Board of Directors appointed by the Minister of Cultural Affairs.<sup>120</sup> With secure state funding, opera in South Africa was, for the first time, able to offer professional and sustainable careers to local artists. However, within the framework of the government's Apartheid policy, these councils provided opportunities for white singers, dancers and instrumentalists only. Until 1980, access to their productions was likewise only for Whites.

#### 1.3.2.7 Opera in translation

From the 1940s a strong movement existed amongst Afrikaans-speaking intellectuals and art patrons to have operas from the standard canon performed in Afrikaans. This is a particularly interesting aspect of the indigenization of opera in South Africa. The development of the Afrikaans language dates back to 1875 when the 'Genootskap vir Regte Afrikaners' was established.<sup>121</sup> However, the promotion of the language must be seen against the backdrop of its emancipation from both the Dutch and English languages, an emancipation not innocent of political motives. The negative association of political oppression with the Afrikaans language in later years was a result of the segregationist politics of the government after 1948. However, the argument in favour of translating opera was that of accessibility of opera for the general public, hence operas were translated in both Afrikaans and English.<sup>122</sup>

The first opera performed in Afrikaans was Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The work was translated into Afrikaans by Cornelius de Villiers<sup>123</sup> and performed in Stellenbosch in

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<sup>119</sup> In Afrikaans the names of the four organizations were as follows: KRUIK (Kaapse Raad vir Uitvoerende Kunste), TRUK (Transvaalse Raad vir Uitvoerende Kunste), NARUK (Natal Raad vir Uitvoerende Kunste) en SUKOV (Streeksraad vir Uitvoerende Kunste van die Oranje Vrystaat).

<sup>120</sup> No author, *Performing Arts in South Africa, cultural aspirations of a young country*, Issued by the Department of Information. Pretoria 1969. The pages in the book are not numbered; see section under 'Performing Arts'.

<sup>121</sup> Daniel Hugo, 'Die Afrikaanse Taal, 'n liefdesgeskiedenis.', published on Litnet, 2 April 2008. [http://www.litnet.co.za/cgi-bin/giga.cgi?cmd=cause\\_dir\\_news\\_item&news\\_id=35711&cause\\_id=1270](http://www.litnet.co.za/cgi-bin/giga.cgi?cmd=cause_dir_news_item&news_id=35711&cause_id=1270). Accessed 8 February 2009.

<sup>122</sup> No author, 'Scenaria interviews Mimi Coertse', *Scenaria*, June-July 1977, Issue no. 1, p. 31.

<sup>123</sup> Also known as Dr. Con de Villiers.

April 1940 by the Afrikaans National Student Association and the Radio Association.<sup>124</sup> It was produced by Allesandro Rota who also sang the tenor role of Turrido. At the time Rota (an Italian national who settled in South Africa) learnt the Afrikaans language to be able to take part in the production.<sup>125</sup> In Johannesburg John Connell was responsible for a 1946 production of Bizet's *Carmen*,<sup>126</sup> sung in English and Afrikaans.<sup>127</sup> In 1948 Connell also produced Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and in 1950 Mozart's *Magic Flute*, both in Afrikaans.<sup>128</sup> All of these productions were directed by non-Afrikaans speakers.

In 1951 OPSA was established, amongst others, with the explicit aim to promote performance of opera in Afrikaans and to popularize opera under Afrikaans speakers.<sup>129</sup> They committed themselves to producing at least one opera in Afrikaans per year. It is not clear to what extent they succeeded in this goal, but in 1958 they produced Verdi's *La Bohème* in Afrikaans.<sup>130</sup> In 1959-60 a series of operas in Afrikaans was launched during an opera tour in towns surrounding Johannesburg.<sup>131</sup> Among them were Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and *Entführung aus dem Serail*, Smetena's *Bartered Bride* and Puccini's *Madam Butterfly*. During this same tour Verdi's *Rigoletto* was performed in English.<sup>132</sup>

In the former Transvaal a division between the Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking partisans of opera developed over time. The latter preferred Italian opera and the former prioritized opera translated into Afrikaans. Combined with a number of headstrong individuals working in the industry, this resulted in a general lack of co-operation and distrust between the two groups.<sup>133</sup> The formation of the Performing Arts Councils

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<sup>124</sup> Pieter Kapp, 'Die akademie en opera', in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, p. 4. The source does not elaborate on the nature of these organizations.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> According to Stead the opera was in Afrikaans only and the translation was done by Gideon Roos. Rinie Stead, 'Opera in Suid-Afrika', p. 22.

<sup>127</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Music in Johannesburg', *SAME*, Volume 3, p. 37.

<sup>128</sup> Pieter Kapp, 'Die akademie en opera', in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, p. 2. It is not clear from this source who did the translations.

<sup>129</sup> Ockert Botha, 'Opera Societies in the Transvaal – Opera Society of South Africa', *SAME*, Volume 3, p. 313.

<sup>130</sup> Pieter Kapp, 'Die akademie en opera', in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, p. 6.

<sup>131</sup> These towns were, amongst others, Randfontein, Brakpan, Rustenburg, Bethal, Alberton, Ontdekkers and Springs. Pieter Kapp, 'Die akademie en opera', in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, p. 7.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

resulted in a truce between the historically antagonistic camps of Afrikaans and English-speaking opera interests.

The translation of opera was generally unpopular with singers and staunch opera lovers. Criticism against it was often published in the arts magazine *Scenaria* throughout the 1970s and 80s.<sup>134</sup> By 1982 opera translations had been abandoned by PACT and described by *Scenaria* as ‘an outdated practice’, although CAPAB continued to perform operas translated into Afrikaans and English.<sup>135</sup>

#### 1.3.2.8 Opera production by the Arts Councils 1963 to 1994

After the formation of the Performing Art Councils, opera production was predominantly taken over by these well-funded and organized structures. Not all councils were ready to produce opera immediately. PACT’s first opera production was Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* and Puccini’s *Tosca* in 1963, PACOFS and NAPAC followed a year later with Strauss’s *Die Fledermaus* and Puccini’s *Madam Butterfly* respectively and CAPAB’s first production took place in February 1965 with Smetena’s *The Bartered Bride*.<sup>136</sup> Within the first five years of their existence, all four Arts Councils produced an average of three operas and/or operettas annually.<sup>137</sup> From 1963 until the demise of the Arts Councils in 1998, opera production experienced a period of stabilization during which the gradual development of local talent and the expansion of opera repertoire took place.

The establishment of the Arts Councils influenced the activities of companies who produced opera prior to 1963. Although most companies dissolved and found new avenues for opera production via the Arts Councils, in the Cape Eric Chisholm’s UCT Opera Company redirected their activities towards training, moving away from the performances it had been so actively involved with during the fifty years prior to the establishment of

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<sup>134</sup> See for example an interview with Mimi Coertse in *Scenaria*, May-June 1977, Issue no. 1, p. 40, as well as Julius Eichbaum’s article ‘A Language of love, some thoughts on the translation of opera’ in *Scenaria*, July 1978, Issue no. 8, p. 3.

<sup>135</sup> Julius Eichbaum. ‘Scenaria and the Performing Arts, The Past Five Years’, *Scenaria*, May 1982, Issue no. 31, p. 7.

<sup>136</sup> No author. *Performing Arts in South Africa, cultural aspirations of a young country*. Issued by The Department of Information. Pretoria 1969. See lists under ‘Presentations by the Performing Arts Councils’ at the end of the book, no page number.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*



CAPAB.<sup>138</sup> However, the Eoan Group continued to provide annual opera seasons in the City Hall, independent from CAPAB. Since they were classified as a Coloured group, Apartheid legislation prevented them from taking part in CAPAB's productions, using its venues or benefitting from CAPAB's subsidies. Eoan's 1965 opera season took place in April and their performance of Verdi's *Il Trovatore* was well received. Chisholm wrote a letter to the group, complementing them on a sterling performance.<sup>139</sup> In relation to CAPAB's government sponsorship for opera production, which in 1969 for example amounted to R700,000,<sup>140</sup> Eoan's subsidies until the late 1980s were on average R35,000 per annum.<sup>141</sup>

One of the less attractive side effects of the new system was the possibility for government to manipulate the content of productions through funding. One example, which will be explored further in Chapter Two of this dissertation, was the government's political and ideological control over access to first-class cultural education and exposure to the international arts as exercised in financial support for the Eoan Group. Abiding by the government's strategy of segregation provided Eoan with funding to educate singers, develop their skills and tour the country whilst performing opera, albeit in severely limited capacity. An example of what could happen if arts organizations refused to consent to segregationist policies is the withdrawal of government funds from the National Arts Gallery in Cape Town, an institution that refused to be classified as a white 'own affairs' cultural concern. The result was that government funding for the National Gallery was practically stopped.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Desire Talbot, as referenced by Pieter Kapp. 'Die akademie en opera', in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, p. 6.

<sup>139</sup> At the bottom of the letter he wrote by hand: '... as for CAPAB??' indicating his doubts about the quality of CAPAB's opera performances. Letter from Erik Chisholm to Manca, dated 19 May 1965. Eoan Archive, box 3, folder 23.

<sup>140</sup> Elizabeth Blackenberg, *The Music Activities of CAPAB*, p. 15.

<sup>141</sup> Throughout their existence Eoan's singers were never salaried.

<sup>142</sup> See M.A. Nolte. 'SA Kunsmuseums (steeds) erg afgeskeep', *Die Burger*, 11 November 2007. In this article Nolte relates that in 1980 the curator of the National Arts Museum, Raymond van Niekerk, refused to have the museum classified as 'own affairs'. In practice this meant that it refused to exclusively collect and exhibit art by White painters only. Government retaliated immediately. Van Niekerk was apparently threatened by Pretoria officials and the museum received only ZAR 30,000 of the 1980 budget which earmarked ZAR 16.5 million for 'white own-affairs arts and culture'. In the same budget ZAR 170,000 was allocated to the maintenance of campsites.

State funding was also made available for the building of new theatres, providing much needed new technology and stimulus to arts production as a whole. In May 1971 the Nico Malan Theatre was inaugurated in Cape Town, a performance complex including a 1204-seat opera house and various other venues for the performance of theatre, music and ballet. In Pretoria the State Theatre was opened in May 1981, a huge state-of-the-art building comprising five auditoriums, including an opera house with 1300 seats. In Bloemfontein the Sand du Plessis Theatre Complex was completed for PACOFS in 1985.<sup>143</sup> In 1986 the new theatre complex for NAPAC, The Playhouse, was opened in Durban.<sup>144</sup>

The Nico Malan Theatre Centre was the first modern arts complex to be built in the country. Its inauguration in May 1971 coincided with the tenth anniversary of the Republic of South Africa and was celebrated with a performance of Verdi's *Aida*. However, during the inauguration protests were held and performances boycotted due to the venue's racially exclusive policy.<sup>145</sup> The Nico Malan was formally declared open to all races in 1975.<sup>146</sup> However, it took five more years before singers of other races joined CAPAB's opera chorus. In 1980 a few former Eoan members, Ronald Theys and Sidwell Hartmann, accepted employment as members of CAPAB Opera Company.<sup>147</sup> In Pretoria the State Theatre was inaugurated in May 1981. Already in 1978, three years prior to its opening, a public outcry was caused when the Administrator of the then Transvaal, Sybrand van

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<sup>143</sup> [www.pmg.org.za/docs/2007/070529pacofspres.ppt](http://www.pmg.org.za/docs/2007/070529pacofspres.ppt), accessed 7 February 2009. The building was inaugurated on 1 August 1985.

[http://www.pacofs.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=46&Itemid=55](http://www.pacofs.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=46&Itemid=55), accessed 7 February 2009.

<sup>144</sup> [www.playhousecompany.com](http://www.playhousecompany.com), accessed 7 February 2009.

<sup>145</sup> During an interview with John Orr from the SABC, David Poole explained that many of CAPAB's staff considered leaving CAPAB because of its racial policy. Others hoped to reform the company from within. At the time of the inauguration, Poole made a public statement that he hoped the Nico Malan Theatre would soon open its doors to all races. After his comment was published in the newspapers he was reprimanded by the Administrator of the Western Cape who demanded an apology. Poole replied in a letter that he was sorry to have upset the Administrator but felt that he had to mention the matter. John Orr in conversation with David Poole, 'CAPAB – 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary', as broadcast on Radio South Africa on 19 April 1988, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. T 88/418. This is all the more poignant as Poole grew up classified as a Coloured. He studied balled in England and had himself re-classified as a 'White' before his return to the country.

<sup>146</sup> No author, 'Nico Malan Theatre Centre', *Scenaria*, December 1977/January 1978, p. 14.

<sup>147</sup> Veronica Allen, 'Eoan Annual General Meeting, Chairman's report' date 15 June 1980. Eoan Archive, box 4, folder 30.

Niekerk, proclaimed that the building was to be earmarked for Whites only.<sup>148</sup> However, when the theatre was inaugurated, the government declared the State Theatre multi-racial.

During the thirty year life-span of the Performing Arts Councils in South Africa, opera was most consistently produced by CAPAB in Cape Town and PACT in Johannesburg and Pretoria.<sup>149</sup> CAPAB was the first Arts Council to benefit from modern production facilities and also benefitted from the UCT Opera School, providing the Arts Council with able singers. Despite many managerial and financial problems,<sup>150</sup> CAPAB was able to stage an average of eight to ten opera productions annually.<sup>151</sup> The repertoire performed during the first twenty years of CAPAB's existence showcased the Italian repertoire predominantly, a fact for which they often were criticized.<sup>152</sup> The appointment of Murray Dickie<sup>153</sup> as head of CAPAB's opera section in 1982 paved the way for the stabilization and expansion of a local opera corps. Dickey was responsible for the much needed development of local singers from chorus members to principle singers. It was during this time that the first black singers joined the CAPAB chorus, of which at least two, Virginia Davids and Sidwell Hartman, progressed to principle singers.<sup>154</sup> During Dickie's reign of seven years, the repertoire of the company included a balance of Italian and German opera. They performed many Mozart operas and Dickey was responsible for the South African

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<sup>148</sup> An interview with the Administrator was published in the *Rand Daily Mail*. Julius Eichbaum, 'An open letter to Mr. Sybrand van Niekerk', *Scenaria*, April/May 1978, p. 3.

<sup>149</sup> PACT moved to Pretoria after the State Theatre was opened there in 1981.

<sup>150</sup> In 1981 CAPAB was declared bankrupt. No author, 'Scenaria interviews CAPAB', *Scenaria*, March-May 1981, Issue no. 22, p. 25. See also Julius Eichbaum, 'The Maestro, the Deputy Director and the Singer', *Scenaria*, January 1982, Issue no. 29, p. 3. CAPAB's managerial and financial misfortunes are also extensively discussed in Elizabeth Blanckenberg's Masters dissertation, *The Music Activities of the Cape Performing Arts Board*, University of Stellenbosch, May 2009.

<sup>151</sup> Julius Eichbaum, 'Pact Opera, the facts', *Scenaria*, March-May 1981, Issue no. 22, p. 2.

<sup>152</sup> Amanda Botha, 'In die Voorportaal', a radio programme that discussed the achievements of Murray Dickey at CAPAB, broadcast on Radio Suid-Afrika on 10 January 1989, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. T 89/428.

<sup>153</sup> Dickey was imported from the Vienna State Opera where he had been singing for thirty years. No author, 'Scenaria interviews Murray Dickie', *Scenaria*, September 1982, Issue no. 33, p. 36.

<sup>154</sup> Amanda Botha, 'In die Voorportaal', a radio programme that discussed the achievements of Murray Dickey at CAPAB, broadcast on Radio Suid-Afrika on 10 January 1989, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. T 89/428.

premières of a number of Wagner's operas, amongst others *Die Walküre*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger* and Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*.<sup>155</sup>

During the first twenty years of its existence, PACT had been performing mainly in the Civic Theatre in Johannesburg, producing an average of four operas every year. Like CAPAB, they also performed predominantly Italian repertoire, including operas by Verdi, Puccini and Donizetti.<sup>156</sup> During the first decade other external factors contributed to PACT's lower output as the organization had no permanent opera company and the then Transvaal also had no opera school to provide trained singers to PACT. Because PACT did not offer professional careers to local singers, they lost much local talent to countries abroad.<sup>157</sup> It was only with the inauguration of the State Theatre in Pretoria in May 1981 that PACT's productions increased. The first opera season held at the State Theatre consisted of four Italian operas, Verdi's *Othello* and *La Traviata*, Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*. All principal roles were sung by singers imported from Europe.<sup>158</sup> In an interview broadcast on the SABC, Eghard van der Hoven, head of PACT at the time, discussed the company's scope of activities. During this interview he stated that within one year after its opening, the complex had hosted 430 performances and admitted 300,000 patrons through its doors.<sup>159</sup> Apart from productions in the State Theatre itself, they had also done 600 productions in schools and toured many smaller towns in the area, bringing the total number of productions to 1800 for that year. By early 1982 the State Theatre had 900 full-time employees and 800 ad hoc employees and their budget for the year amounted to ZAR12 million.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.* A number of Wagner operas were performed in Cape Town by the Thomas Quinlan Opera Group from the UK who toured the country in 1913.

<sup>156</sup> No author, *Decade, a pictorial review*, PACT, 1972. No page numbers, see the lists under OPERA at the end of this source.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> U.G. Starck, *Gedenkbrosjyre, Staatsteater Pretoria*, Penrose Press, Johannesburg, 1981. No page numbers.

<sup>159</sup> Evelyn Levison in conversation with the head of PACT, Eghard van der Hoven, 'Women's Forum' as broadcast on Springbok Radio on 17 February 1982, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. TM 89/1064.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.* These statistics are rather staggering and the current writer has not been able to check these facts with other sources.

Until the early 1980s, the Natal Performing Arts Council (NAPAC) in Durban was deemed the ‘graveyard of the performing arts in South Africa’.<sup>161</sup> Between 1963 and 1970 NAPAC had no fixed venue for their productions, but they settled into the Alhambra Theatre on 23 April 1970 after this historic building was renovated.<sup>162</sup> James Conrad was appointed as NAPAC’s opera director in 1963 and by 1979 he had produced twenty operas, an average of little more than one opera per year.<sup>163</sup> It was only in 1982, when Rodney Phillips joined NAPAC, that the Arts Council was placed on a more solid managerial and artistic footing.<sup>164</sup> He created the NAPAC ballet company, launched the Natal Philharmonic Orchestra and provided much needed managerial structures.<sup>165</sup> In 1987 the Natal Playhouse was inaugurated as NAPAC’s new home. James Conrad produced Wagner’s *Der Fliegende Holländer* for the opening of the Playhouse.<sup>166</sup> Because musicals and operetta had been very popular in Natal for many years, NAPAC also created a Musicals Department which continued to supply light opera to Natal audiences.<sup>167</sup>

The operatic output of PACOFS in Bloemfontein was, compared to the other councils, also rather small. By 1987 the average annual output of opera production was two operas, one musical and one operetta per year.<sup>168</sup> However, financial constraints at the time were huge and the opera board was considering operatic concerts in order to produce more opera and stimulate public interest.<sup>169</sup> A fifth and independent opera company, the Roodepoort City Opera under the guidance of Weiss Doubell, also produced opera for a number of years during the 1980s in the then Transvaal.<sup>170</sup>

Until the late 1980s Italian opera dominated the choice of repertoire performed by all four Arts Councils by a margin of 75%, with works performed by Rossini, Verdi, Puccini,

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<sup>161</sup> Don Ridgway in conversation with Rodney Phillips, ‘25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of NAPAC’, as broadcast on Radio South Africa on 14 April 1988, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. T 88/750.

<sup>162</sup> Don Ridgway in conversation with John Moss, ‘25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of NAPAC’, as broadcast on Radio South Africa on 14 April 1988, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. T 88/750.

<sup>163</sup> No author, ‘Scenaria interviews James Conrad’, *Scenaria*, May 1979, Issue no. 13, p. 30.

<sup>164</sup> Don Ridgway in conversation with Rodney Phillips, ‘25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of NAPAC’.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.* Phillips left the country in 1986 to become head of Queensland Opera in Australia.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Tony Ulliat in conversation with Hans van Heerden, ‘25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of PACOFS’, as broadcast on Radio South Africa on 05 April 1988, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. T88/751.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Henning Viljoen, ‘Roodepoort’s *Hansel und Gretel*’, *Scenaria*, December 1986, p.11.

Bellini and Donizetti. German opera by Mozart, Wagner and Strauss were in second place although Bizet's *Carmen* was always a firm favourite with all companies. Occasionally an opera by Britten, Smetena or Janáček was performed.<sup>171</sup> Julius Eichbaum, editor of the arts magazine *Scenaria*, criticized this trend in 1987 when he wrote: 'For the best part of twenty-five years, the Performing Arts Councils pursued an artistic policy, which stated with every assurance that opera in South Africa had to be predominantly Italian by nature.'<sup>172</sup>

To be sure, professional opera production by the Arts Councils faced significant problems. One of the main issues that had a major influence on the logistics of opera production, was the cultural boycott that was instituted during the 1980s.<sup>173</sup> Neels Hansen, director of PACT opera in 1987, mentioned that although some European artists, singers, conductors and producers with good capabilities did accept invitations at the time, the big names in the industry stayed away from South Africa.<sup>174</sup> The boycott also played havoc with planned productions as finalized contracts with singers and conductors from abroad were often cancelled on short notice.<sup>175</sup> In the long run the boycott resulted in cultural isolation and a lack of development for opera in South Africa.<sup>176</sup> Hansen further noted that 'I do believe we do good work, the standard of opera is high in this country. I do believe that we

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<sup>171</sup> Henning Viljoen, 'Opera planning and repertoire in South Africa', *Scenaria*, August 1988, p. 41. According to Viljoen, these percentages corresponded closely with the choice of repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

<sup>172</sup> Julius Eichbaum, 'Opera in South Africa – a quarter of a century of swimming against the tide', *Scenaria*, August 1988, p. 39.

<sup>173</sup> In the United Kingdom the 'Equity Ban' was put in place in 1985. Equity was the name of the organization to which all artists performing in England belonged to by law. The ban stipulated that all artists from the UK who accepted invitations to take part in arts productions in South Africa would be penalized. In reaction to this, an anti-Ban campaign was also launched as some artists in the UK felt that the ban was instituted by the minority of artists. Peter Gelling, as interviewed in 'The PM Show', as broadcast on 14 April 1986, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. TM2783 (86).

<sup>174</sup> Judith Krummeck in conversation with Neels Hansen, '25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of PACT', as broadcast on Radio South Africa on 29 March 1988, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. T88/751. However, some stars did visit South Africa, amongst others sopranos Victoria de los Angeles in 1977 and Birgit Nilsson in 1980, pianist Alicia de Larrocha in 1980 and guitarist Narciso Yepes in 1984. See David Tidboald, *People I made music with*, Umuzi, Cape Town 2008, pp. 84-92.

<sup>175</sup> Barry Jones in conversation with Murray Dickie, 'The cultural boycott and its effect on South African opera', as broadcast on Radio South Africa on 07 November 1985, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. TM2238(85).

<sup>176</sup> Judith Krummeck in conversation with Neels Hansen, '25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of PACT', as broadcast on Radio South Africa on 29 March 1988, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. T88/751. The issue was also discussed by Hansen in an interview Krummeck, broadcast on Radio Allegro on 04 July 1987, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. TM3568 (87).

are miles behind in the development. We are now where German opera production was in 1966. We are twenty years behind. Not in standard, not in quality, but in development'.<sup>177</sup>

South African opera singer, Elizabeth Connell, who sang with the English National Opera in London at the time, commented on the local opera scene as follows:

What really struck me is the tremendous isolation ... call it artistic isolation. Geographically South Africa is, of course, far away from Europe and America, but today that is no excuse for being isolated. People here, opera people, just don't seem to know what is going on overseas. They have little knowledge of the development of opera over the last decade or so; they don't seem to know of the singers that are at the top today, and have little cognizance of directors and conductors.<sup>178</sup>

Another issue was the lack of sufficient local singers and musicians, an essential part of the infrastructure needed for first-class opera production. Orchestral players had to be imported from Europe, an expensive exercise exacerbated by an ever weakening South African currency and the fact that many of these players stayed in the country for a short time only. Furthermore, locally trained singers, musicians and ballet dancers often found more lucrative and interesting jobs in Europe.<sup>179</sup> Training centers for local singers were also insufficient. By 1977 only two cities in the country offered opera training, one in Cape Town and the other in Pretoria.<sup>180</sup> The treatment of local singers by opera companies also came under fire. In an interview with various leading figures in the world of South African opera broadcast on SABC Radio in 1985, several participants mentioned that singers were not guided carefully from one role to another in order to grow into mature opera singers and that they were moved from a role which they could not manage to another which was

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<sup>177</sup> Judith Krummeck in conversation with Neels Hansen, 'Words and Music', as broadcast on Radio Allegro on 04 July 1987, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. TM3568 (87). Both Eghart van den Hoven, head of PACT, and Francois Swart of the PACT Orchestra, denied these claims on air. They argued that the reason why artists did not come was the huge distance between South Africa and Europe and that politics played a negligible role. See '25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of PACT', as broadcast on Radio South Africa on 29 March 1988, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. T88/751 as well as 'Women's Forum' as broadcast on Springbok Radio on 17 February 1982, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. TM 89/1064.

<sup>178</sup> No author, 'Scenaria interviews Elizabeth Connell', *Scenaria*, January-March 1980, Issue no. 17, p. 7. Connell also sung in various Bayreuth productions in 1979.

<sup>179</sup> Judith Krummeck in conversation with Leo Quayle, '25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of PACT', as broadcast on Radio South Africa on 29 March 1988, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. T88/751.

<sup>180</sup> No author, 'Scenaria interviews Mimi Coertse', *Scenaria*, June-July 1977, Issue no. 1, p. 31.

far below their capabilities. Criticism was further raised that the Arts Councils did not do enough to promote the stature of local singers.<sup>181</sup>

It is interesting to investigate the model that South African opera companies followed during these years. Opposing views can be found in a 1987 panel discussion broadcast on SABC Radio. Neels Hansen of PACT opera challenged the idea that La Scala in Italy or the Metropolitan in New York should be models for South African opera production and said that ‘our biggest endeavor here is to create something which is South African, which fills the opera world with a small piece of South Africa.’<sup>182</sup> The tension between creating an own identity on the one hand, exposure to European standards and following that as closely as possible on the other hand, came to the fore in the same interview. One of South Africa’s stalwarts of the operatic world, soprano Emma Renzi, noted that ‘opera is not South African, ... we have to see to it that we can get that far that we can do [opera] stylistically correctly, as far as we can possibly get’.<sup>183</sup>

Contrary to what one might expect, the ideal of the only opera group in the country that consisted entirely of non-European singers, the Eoan Group, was that of Italian opera produced in ‘true Italian fashion’.<sup>184</sup> Led by Joseph Manca, a South African-born Italian, this ‘Coloured’ opera company produced the first all-Coloured cast of Verdi’s *La Traviata* in 1956.<sup>185</sup> Their 1965 opera season included Verdi’s *La Traviata* and *Il Trovatore*, as well as Puccini’s *La Bohème* and Donizetti’s *L’Elisir D’Amore*.<sup>186</sup> Of this programme, Manca wrote in his press release that ‘this is indeed an ambitious programme equal to seasons presented by the more famous Opera Houses in Europe.’<sup>187</sup>

Surveying the history of opera in South Africa, it is clear that little has been done to stimulate indigenous art production. Black and Coloured principle singers started emerging

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<sup>181</sup> Barry Jones in conversation with Murray Dickie and Emma Renzi, ‘The cultural boycott and its effect on South African opera’, as broadcast on Radio South Africa on 7 November 1985, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. TM2238(85).

<sup>182</sup> Barry Jones in conversation with Neels Hansen, ‘The cultural boycott and its effect on South African opera’, as broadcast on Radio South Africa on 07 November 1985, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. TM2238(85).

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> See the Press Release to the *1965 Eoan Opera Season*, p. 5. Eoan Archive, box 2, folder 9.

<sup>185</sup> See the *1956 Eoan Arts Festival Brochure* in the Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>186</sup> See Minutes of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Eoan Group AGM held on 29 September 1966, pp. 3-4. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>187</sup> See the Press Release to the *1965 Eoan Opera Season*, p. 5. Eoan Archive, box 2, folder 9.



only by the late 1980s and experiments with indigenous interpretations of the standard repertoire only occurred after the demise of the Arts Councils by 1998. No local opera compositions were commissioned or performed by the Arts Councils before 1994. The first locally composed opera performed by an Arts Council was Roelof Temmingh's *Enoch, Prophet of God*, performed by CAPAB in 1995. Apartheid legislation had further severely hampered the growth of indigenous audiences, a legacy still painfully obvious today.

In comparison, local theatre production was on the forefront of indigenization during the existence of the Arts Councils. In 1980, Pieter Fourie, Artistic Director of CAPAB's drama Department, had clashed with the government frequently due to his drive to stimulate indigenous theatre. Of this he said 'I will do anything in my power to see that a South African play of merit reaches production stage, and it is on this issue that I have clashed with the authorities.'<sup>188</sup> Admittedly, strategies of indigenization in opera production are somewhat more complicated and therefore financially more risky than in theatre, but glimpses of a truly South African opera tradition during the thirty years of Arts Council productions are almost impossible to find.

### 1. 3.2.9 South African opera singers during and after Apartheid

During the course of the twentieth century a number of quality local singers started to emerge in South Africa, some of whom pursued successful careers in Europe. The first singers who trained at the UCT Opera Company were sopranos Cecilia Wessels, Desiree Talbot, Emmarentia Scheepers (stage name Emma Renzi) and Nellie du Toit, and the tenor Albie Louw.<sup>189</sup> Singers who had emerged by the mid-1950s and who were active in local opera production well into the 1980s, included Mimi Coertse, Hanlie van Niekerk, Wendy Fine, Carla Pohl, Marita Napier, Joyce Barker, Frederick Dahlberg, Gé Korsten, Hans van Heerden, Dawie Couzyn, George Kok and Louis Knobel.<sup>190</sup> The main problem facing singers wanting to pursue a professional career locally was the limited professional possibilities offered by opera production in South Africa. Furthermore, an opera career in

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<sup>188</sup> No author, 'Scenaria interviews Pieter Fourie' *Scenaria*, Volume 20, July-September 1980, p. 15.

<sup>189</sup> Pieter Kapp, 'Die akademie en opera', in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, Jaargang 48, no. 1, March 2008, p. 3.

<sup>190</sup> A more extensive list of local artists is mentioned in Rinie Stead's article 'Opera in Suid-Afrika', *Lantern*, Volume 8 no. 2, December 1963, pp. 20-7.

Europe, for many the true home of opera, was naturally prized above a career at home.<sup>191</sup> Even after the Arts Councils were established in 1963, budgets were tight and few of the councils were in a position to pay full-time principles.

From the 1950s until the late 1970s, Cape Town-based vocal trainers, Allesandro Rota and Olga Magnoni, trained many singers of the Eoan Opera Group. A number of these singers established national reputations and some also went abroad to pursue careers in Europe. Most notable among them were Joseph Gabriels, May Abrahamse, Ruth Goodwin, Lionel Fourie, Abeeda Parker, Vera Gow, Winifried du Plessis, Patricia van Graan, Gerald Samaai, Cecil Tobin and Sidwell Hartman. Despite Apartheid legislation preventing them from taking part in opera productions by the Arts Councils and the resulting isolation within which they had to operate, Eoan's reputation as a first-rate opera company was well established. In June 1969 Vera Gow was invited to sing with the SABC Symphony Orchestra in Johannesburg. The local newspaper described Gow as 'one of South Africa's outstanding Coloured soprano's'.<sup>192</sup> She was also awarded the Players Club Award in 1971.<sup>193</sup>

Since the 1980s opera schools in both Durban and Cape Town started training black singers as students of these traditional white institutions. David Smith informed the current writer that by 1987 at least 50% of NAPAC's singers were black performers.<sup>194</sup> In the Cape, the training of black singers was started on the initiative of Angelo Gobbato. Of this he wrote:

The existence of large numbers of exceptional operatic vocal talent among the black community could no longer be denied. What became a pressing artistic issue, however, was the creation of a suitable operatic repertoire for these singers and the possible adaptation of the production styles of the standard repertoire to create novel dramatic

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<sup>191</sup> This point is well illustrated in arts and cultural magazine *Scenaria*. Interviews with South African opera singers published between 1977 and 1979 in this magazine invariably start with 'Welcome back in South Africa'. See interviews with Mimi Coertse (*Scenaria*, Issue no. 1, June/July 1977, pp. 30-1), Marita Napier (*Scenaria*, Issue no. 6, April/May 1978, pp. 30-1), Emma Renzi (*Scenaria*, Issue no. 12, September 1978, pp. 22-3) and Wendy Fine (*Scenaria*, Issue no. 13, May 1979, pp. 5-7).

<sup>192</sup> Staff reporter. 'Mayor to hear top soprano', Newspaper unknown. Eoan Archive, box 36, folder 270.

<sup>193</sup> John Orr in conversation with David Poole. 'CAPAB – 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary', as broadcast on Radio South Africa on 19 April 1988, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. T88/418. The interview did not elaborate on the nature of the prize.

<sup>194</sup> Personal email to the current writer on 12 September 2007.

possibilities and credibilities, given the sudden transformation of operatic casts from being 98% white to casts being 98% black.<sup>195</sup>

Since 1994, a substantial number of singers emerged from population groups categorized as 'formerly disadvantaged'. Among them are the singers Sibongile Khumalo, Angela Kerison, Pretty Yende, Given Nkozi, Golda Schulz and Fikile Mvinjelwa. The promising numbers of talented black singers enrolled at the UCT Opera School and the Pretoria Technikon bears testimony to the substantial interest for opera within the indigenous population groups of South Africa.

#### 1. 3.2.10 Opera production after 1994

After the first national democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, governance in the country changed radically. Due to the fundamental shift in state power and the nature of the history that preceded it, much that was achieved by the previous government, also with regard to the arts, was viewed with suspicion.<sup>196</sup> The years following 1994 saw the demise of the four Performing Arts Councils as the new government set other criteria and revised subsidy policies for arts production fundamentally.<sup>197</sup> One of the major challenges following the new dispensation was the restructuring of arts funding. Several theatres and orchestras were on the threshold of bankruptcy or closure, many orchestras had to merge or start performing on an ad hoc basis. As opera is an expensive form of art, heavily dependent on institutional subsidies, local opera production companies were forced into transforming financial strategies.

During the first three years following 1994, the Arts Councils continued to function under the existing structures. In the case of CAPAB, 1995 even showed an upsurge in opera production as the company launched its first Opera Festival from 18 January to 6 February.

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<sup>195</sup> Angelo Gobbato, *The history of Cape Town Opera*, <http://www.capetownopera.co.za/htm/history2008.html>, accessed 27 July 2008.

<sup>196</sup> Julius Eichbaum, 'A necessary blessing', *Scenaria*, September 1998, p. 3.

<sup>197</sup> An interesting parallel regarding the cessation of opera activities after the withdrawal of government subsidies can be found in India. All opera activities were brought to a halt after the Indian Government discontinued its subsidies for opera production in 1985. See entry by Charles Pitt, 'India', in *Grove Music Online*, OUP 2007, accessed 29 July 2007. In the light of India's history as a country colonized by the West, this is an interesting act of post-colonial resistance, albeit alarming for opera production. It is furthermore interesting because of the real possibility of this happening in South Africa.

The festival included four operas and a number of fringe productions.<sup>198</sup> Angelo Gobbato initiated the festival and one of its aims was to break down the image of opera as a euro-centric cultural activity.<sup>199</sup> Apart from the production of three Italian operas, this festival also saw the première of a new locally composed opera, Roelof Temmingh's *Enoch, Prophet of God*, with Fikile Mvinjelwa singing the title role.<sup>200</sup> CAPAB was disbanded in 1998 and its existing opera corps was transformed into a private organization called Cape Town Opera.<sup>201</sup> This smooth transition guaranteed uninterrupted opera production in Cape Town. Furthermore, the city has always been fortunate to have ready access to singers trained by the UCT College of Music and the Opera Studio. More than anything else, this connection between the training institute and the opera company had secured a continued stream of opera productions from the early-twentieth century until this day.

In Pretoria, PACT Opera was transformed into the State Theatre Opera Company in 1996.<sup>202</sup> The State Theatre Opera Company continued to produce opera on a smaller scale until the State Theatre was temporarily 'mothballed' by the government in 2000 after the exposure of alleged financial mismanagement. A government finding furthermore suggested that 'the board and management of the State Theatre did not restructure itself in line with the principles laid out in the White Paper nor has the Institution shown much public impact.'<sup>203</sup> Both PACOFS and NAPAC continued to produce opera, albeit on small scale. In 1997 PACOFS managed to stage Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* with former Eoan singer, Virginia Davids in the leading role. It was, however, their only production for that year.<sup>204</sup>

On 4 June 1996, the Department of Arts, Culture and Technology released its *White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage*, a document stipulating the new government's policy on the development and funding of arts in South Africa. The far-reaching implications of this

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<sup>198</sup> Nancy Richards in conversation with Christine Crouse, 'Woman's World', as broadcast on 13 January 1995, *Sound Archives of the SABC*, Catalogue no. T2001/7.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.* CAPAB's strategy to achieve this is unfortunately not discussed in this interview.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.* The work was described by Crouse as a mix between opera as a European art form and African rhythms. Additional African music for this opera was composed by Lungile Jacobs.

<sup>201</sup> Angelo Gobbato, *The history of Cape Town Opera*, <http://www.capetownopera.co.za/htm/history2008.html>, accessed 27 July 2008.

<sup>202</sup> No author, 'George Kok – spreading one's wings', *Scenaria*, September 1998, p. 11.

<sup>203</sup> No author, *State Theatre to be mothballed*, <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2000/000615410p1006.htm>, accessed 30 June 2007.

<sup>204</sup> Julius Eichbaum, 'Madama Butterfly in Bloemfontein', *Scenaria*, July 1997, p. 21.

document on the performing arts in general and on opera in particular cannot be discussed in depth this chapter. However, a few quotations from Chapter 4 of the *White Paper* will illustrate the direct implications of the new policy on opera production in the new South Africa:

18. In 1995/96, the Performing Arts Councils operating income was R160m, of which box office receipts accounted for 18%. R112m was granted by the State, which represents a very high level of subsidy.<sup>205</sup>

19. Analysis of box office returns shows these do not even cover administrative costs. The inescapable conclusion is that government is subsidizing expensive art forms and infrastructure for a small audience at an unaffordable level. The activity based costing exercise indicates that ballet and opera consume in the order of 30% of the total expenditure. These activities are exclusive to PACT and CAPAB.<sup>206</sup>

23. This strategy involves an immediate cut of 22% in the 1996/97 subsidy to the Performing Arts Councils.<sup>207</sup>

24. In this way, the existing performing arts infrastructure is geared toward reconstruction and development, and all forms of dance, music and theatre are recognized as legitimate components of our cultural heritage.<sup>208</sup>

In the light of these changed circumstances, some of the former Arts Councils reinvented themselves as private opera companies (of which CAPAB experienced the smoothest transition and became Cape Town Opera).<sup>209</sup> Angelo Gobbato, formerly of CAPAB, described the transition as follows:

While the opera companies attached to the Arts Councils operating in Pretoria, Durban and Bloemfontein simply disappeared, in Cape Town we were fortunate that our efforts in the transformation of opera had been welcomed and was backed by a number of opera loving and sympathetic businessmen. Under the determined chairmanship of Jan Kaminski, a Board of Directors was canvassed and the entire staff and functions of CAPAB Opera were re-registered as CAPE TOWN OPERA, a section 21 company not for gain.<sup>210</sup>

Gobbato also explained the difficult financial situation which the private opera companies had to deal with since the tabling of the *White Paper*:

With the Government's declining to increase the total amount of funding available for the performing arts and assigning the entire budget for this funding to a body known as the

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<sup>205</sup> [www.dac.gov.za/white\\_paper](http://www.dac.gov.za/white_paper), accessed 16 March 2009.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> <http://www.capetownopera.co.za/htm/history2008.html>, accessed 27 July 2008.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

National Arts Council while permitting any and all performing groups to apply for [...] funding, it hardly came as a surprise that Cape Town Opera was at first refused any form of funding from this national source. Even now, after many applications and evidence of job creation for underprivileged communities, Cape Town Opera receives an amount of less than 5% of its total annual budget from national sources.<sup>211</sup>

Although times have been very trying for opera companies in South Africa since 1994, the door to radical indigenization has been opened wide, a transition that happened as a matter of urgency and not without political motives. In 1998 Cape Town Opera produced a boldly indigenized version of Verdi's *La Bohème*. Re-named *La Bohème Noir*, Verdi's music was kept intact, but the libretto was re-written and set in Johannesburg during the 1976 student boycotts. Furthermore, the production included black singers only.<sup>212</sup> Although a risky undertaking, exposing the company to potential loss of support from a largely white audience, the production was successful. The issue of 'black singers only' was branded as Apartheid-in-reverse, but critics like *Scenaria's* Julius Eichbaum wrote that 'despite my already stated reservations regarding the policy behind such exercises, I enjoyed *La Bohème Noir* enormously'.<sup>213</sup> After this successful attempt, a number of strongly indigenized versions of operas from the standard canon were produced by local companies. These include an 'Africanized' version of Giuseppe Verdi's *Macbeth*, which was set in a guerilla war in Sierra Leone. Although sung in Italian, the opera was substantially shortened with the specific goal of highlighting a post-colonial message. Sections of Verdi's music were also transcribed for alto saxophone, marimba and djembe and stage props included, amongst others, that ubiquitous symbol of post colonial Africa, the AK47.<sup>214</sup> In recent years two strongly indigenized operas, Georges Bizet's *Carmen* (translated into *uCarmen eKhayelitsha*) and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *The Magic Flute* by the Cape based opera company Dimpho Di Kopane, pocketed prestigious international accolades such as the Golden Bear Award at the Berlin Film Festival in February 2005 and the Laurence Olivier Award in London in March 2008.

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<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> Julius Eichbaum, 'La Bohème Noir', *Scenaria*, February 1998, p. 11.

<sup>214</sup> Herman Wasserman. 'Opera 'n onredbaar Eurosentriese kunsvorm?' No date. [www.oulitnet.co.za/klank/09opera.asp](http://www.oulitnet.co.za/klank/09opera.asp), accessed 08 April 2008.

The private companies currently producing regular opera in the country are Cape Town Opera<sup>215</sup> and Dimpho Di Kopane,<sup>216</sup> both situated in the Western Cape, and Opera Africa<sup>217</sup> and The Black Tie Ensemble,<sup>218</sup> situated in Johannesburg and Pretoria respectively. Cape Town Opera will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 4 as a case study of institutional and structural responses to indigenization of opera in post-1994 South Africa.

### 1.3.3 *Local opera composition*

In the interest of clarity, the present writer chose to discuss the composition of opera in South Africa as a separate issue to that of local production of opera. This subsection will therefore revert to the beginning of the nineteenth century to trace the roots of local opera composition in the country.

Compared to other New World countries, local opera composition developed late in South Africa. In the United States operas were composed regularly as early as the late-eighteenth century.<sup>219</sup> Brazil,<sup>220</sup> Argentina<sup>221</sup> and Canada<sup>222</sup> followed a century later. However, it is difficult to speak conclusively to the question as to what constitutes a South African opera. Is South African-ness a matter of place, or a matter of content, or both? Is it convincing to classify an opera composed by William Henry Bell in 1910 (shortly after his arrival in Cape Town) as a South African opera? On the other hand, should John Joubert's operas, composed after he had left South Africa, containing no apparent reference to local content, still be considered South African operas? This is perhaps a less vexing problem when

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<sup>215</sup> See website on [www.capetownopera.co.za](http://www.capetownopera.co.za).

<sup>216</sup> This company produces film, theatre and opera. See website on [www.ddk.etownship.co.za](http://www.ddk.etownship.co.za).

<sup>217</sup> See website on [www.operaafrica.co.za](http://www.operaafrica.co.za).

<sup>218</sup> This company has been active since 1999 and was set up by the former manager of PACT Opera, Neels Hansen and South Africa soprano Mimi Coertse. See their website on [www.blackties.co.za](http://www.blackties.co.za).

<sup>219</sup> See entry by Elise K. Kirk, 'United States of America', in *Grove Music Online*, OUP 2007, accessed 29 July 2007.

<sup>220</sup> See entry by Gerard Béhague, 'Brazil', in *Grove Music Online*, OUP 2007, accessed 29 July 2007.

<sup>221</sup> See entry by Juan Pedro Franze, 'Argentina' in *Grove Music Online*, OUP 2007, accessed 29 July 2007.

<sup>222</sup> See entry by Gaynor G. Jones, 'Canada' in *Grove Music Online*, OUP 2007, accessed 29 July 2007.

considering the process of indigenization, which assumes a process in which culture is always becoming more adapted to its context. For the discussion at hand, the present writer decided to include all operas composed on South African soil, irrespective of their frame of reference or musical ‘language’, as well as operas composed by composers originating from South Africa but residing outside the country.<sup>223</sup>

### 3.3.3.1 The Nineteenth Century

According to Bouws, Frederick Carl Lemming, a Danish musician living in the Cape between 1810 and 1817, composed and produced *Sapho*, a musical work in three acts for theatre in 1815.<sup>224</sup> The first performance of *Sapho* was described in the local newspaper as ‘mixed with speech, song and dance’ and Bouws describes this work as an opéra-ballet. Bouws is of the opinion that this work may well have been the first opera composed on South African soil.<sup>225</sup> The text was written by Charles Etienne Boniface, a gifted Frenchman who lived in the Cape between 1807 and 1844. Boniface’s French text was translated into Dutch by the local schoolmaster P.C. Schonegevel and on 4 July 1815 *Sapho* was performed in the African Theatre by local musicians belonging to the Nederduitsche Genootschap, including the only dance master in the Cape at the time, Johann Ludwig Petersen.<sup>226</sup> The performance was repeated twice, on 19 and 29 July 1815.<sup>227</sup> Lemming returned to his native Denmark in 1817, presumably taking the score of this work (as well as his South African wife Rosina Fredrica Heyns, daughter of the local butcher Joseph Heyns) with him. Bouws did attempt, in vain, to trace the composer and his work in Denmark, but it seems that the score of *Sapho* is now lost. Except for notices in the local newspaper of the time, there is no other information available on the content of this work.

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<sup>223</sup> See the Appendix for a list of South African operas and operettas.

<sup>224</sup> Bouws, *Solank daar musiek is...*, p. 30.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30. Bouws describes it as ‘gemengd met Zamenspraken, Zang en Dans’.

<sup>226</sup> Jan Bouws, ‘Johann Ludwig Petersen’ *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 12. Initially Petersen held a position in the military and later became a cobbler after leaving the Dutch East India Company. He presented various ballets in the African Theatre from 1804 onwards.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.



Although there were a few South African-born composers active in the Cape during the nineteenth century, none of them composed opera.<sup>228</sup> The only operas currently known to have been composed in South Africa during the remainder of the nineteenth century were those of the British opera impresario Luscombe Searelle who lived in South Africa between 1887 and 1899. During this time he composed three operas, *Black Rover*, *Kisses of Circe* and *Evalina*, all performed in Durban in 1899, the year of his return to England.<sup>229</sup> The critic of the *Natal Mercury* dismissed these works, describing *Circe* as a ‘curious compound of crude cleverness and monotonous musical drivel’ and *Evalina* as ‘a musical mélange and that not of a very high order’.<sup>230</sup>

### 3.3.3.2 The Twentieth Century

A trend similar to the development of local opera composition in other countries of the ‘New World’ can be traced in South African opera composition. The generation of home-grown composers initially took on smaller and lighter opera, with operetta for schools and musical comedy being followed by serious opera some years later. Nevertheless, as a result of the migration of European musicians to South Africa, the first serious operas composed in South Africa were those by William Henry Bell (*Hippolytus*, *Isabeau*, *The Mousetrap*, *Doctor Love*, *The Wondering Scholar*, *The Duenna* and *Romeo and Juliet*),<sup>231</sup> Erik Chisholm (*The Inland Women*, *Murder in Three Keys*, *The Midnight Court*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Causcasian Chalk Circle*, *The importance of being Ernest* and *The Life and Loves of Robert Burns*),<sup>232</sup> Albert Coates (*The boy David*, *The Duel* and *Van Hunck and the Devil*)<sup>233</sup> and Percival Kirby (*Open or shut* and *A Maid of Amsterdam*).<sup>234</sup> Renowned English conductor and composer, Albert Coates, settled in South Africa with

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<sup>228</sup> They were mainly from the De Villiers family, the most notable being Jan Stephanus de Villiers (1827-1902), a church musician and composer, also called ‘Jan Orrelis’. De Villiers composed four oratorios. J.P. Malan, ‘De Villiers, Jan Stephanus’, *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 339-45.

<sup>229</sup> J.P. Malan, ‘Searelle, Luscombe’, *SAME*, Volume 4, p. 224.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Hubert van der Spuy, ‘Bell, William Henry’, *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 152-60.

<sup>232</sup> J.P. Malan, ‘Chisholm, Erik’, *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 271-5

<sup>233</sup> J.P. Malan, ‘Coates, Albert, Erik’, *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 281-3.

<sup>234</sup> J.P. Malan, ‘Kirby, Percival Robson’, *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 102-9.

his South African wife Vera de Villiers in 1946 and composed *Van Hunck and the Devil*, an opera based on local folklore, for the Jan van Riebeeck Festival in 1952.<sup>235</sup>

The first serious operas composed by composers born in the country were those by John Joubert. He composed *Antigone* in 1951, *In the Drought* in 1953 and *Silas Marner* in 1961, all of them composed outside South African borders. Joubert had left South Africa in 1946 for the United Kingdom and never returned to the country except for occasional short visits. He later wrote *The Quarry* (1967), *Under Western Eyes* (1968) and *The Prisoner* (1972).<sup>236</sup> To this day he considers himself a South African composer, stating that ‘any introduction to my life and work would have to take account of the fact that I was born and spent the first 19 years of my life in South Africa’.<sup>237</sup>

In 1956 the Dutch composer, Henk Badings, was commissioned by the South African Broadcasting Association (SABC) to compose an opera on a libretto by South African poet N.P. van Wyk Louw, *Asterion*. This radio opera was premiered on 11 April 1958 but has not been performed since.<sup>238</sup> In 1967 Cromwell Everson composed *Klutaimnestra*, a serial composition set in the Afrikaans language. Other operas composed during the 1960s were Stephen O’Reilly’s *The Coming of the Butterflies*, a radio opera which made use of serial techniques,<sup>239</sup> as well as Luigi Bezzio’s *Il Grande Viaggio*, an opera about the Great Trek composed in the Italian language.<sup>240</sup>

Commissions for locally composed opera have been far and few between. The SABC commissioned several radio and television operas as well as operettas from the 1940s through to the 1970s. An unusually large number of local operettas for schools and radio were composed, predominantly for use in schools. The majority of these were in Afrikaans, emphasizing the educative and developmental dynamic responsible for these compositions. Some examples are Adolph Hallis, *Jakaranda* and *Port of Call* (both 1943)

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<sup>235</sup> No author, *Performing Arts in South Africa, cultural aspirations of a young country*, issued by The Department of Information. Pretoria 1969. The pages in this publication are not numbered; see the section on ‘Serious Music’. Coates died a year later, in 1953.

<sup>236</sup> J.P. Malan, ‘Joubert, John Pierre Herman’, *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 58-67.

<sup>237</sup> Stéphé Oosthuysen, ‘Of nationality and displacement: Reflections on an interview with John Joubert’, *Fanfare*, Volume 2, Issue nr 2, Winter 2009, p. 11.

<sup>238</sup> Stephanus Muller, *Sounding Margins: Musical Representations of White South Africa*. Oxford 2000, p. 81.

<sup>239</sup> J.P. Malan, ‘O’Reilly, Stephen’, *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 315-7.

<sup>240</sup> J.P. Malan, ‘Bezzio, Luigi’. *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 166-7.

and *Love is Gold* (1946),<sup>241</sup> Lourens de Kock's *Potjierol* and *Soetkoek* (both 1950) and *Willemien* (1951),<sup>242</sup> Hans Olaf Andresen's *Die heidenooientjie* (1957), *Die drie asterjies* (1960) and *Die mielifeeetjie* (1961)<sup>243</sup> and Lourens Faul's *Prins van Manakatoos* (1957), *Skoenmaker Stillewater* (1960), *Die seemeeu roep* (1962), *Mooifontein se meisies* (1964), *Ons vir jou* (1965) and *Ponkie en sy donkie* (1975).<sup>244</sup>

The mid-1980s marked the beginning of a wave of new serious opera compositions by local composers. Hendrik Hofmeyr composed *The Fall of the House of Usher* in 1987, a chamber opera for which he won the Nederburg Opera Prize that year.<sup>245</sup> In 1990 he completed *The Land of Heart's Desire*. During this time Kevin Volans composed *The Man with Footsoles of Wind* (1988-93) and the dance opera *Correspondences* in 1990. Within five years Roelof Temmingh wrote three operas based on South African themes, *Enoch, Prophet of God* (1994), *Sacred Bones* (1997) and *Buchuland* (1998), all of them performed by CAPAB at the time.

An unsettling characteristic of new opera compositions is their poor performance reception. The operas of Hendrik Hofmeyr are a good example. His first two operas, *Il principe Barbablù* (1986) and *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1987) were both composed while he lived in Italy and the latter was performed in South Africa in 1988. However, since his return to South Africa in 1992, three further operas were composed, *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1990), *Lumukanda* (1995) and *Die laaste aand* (2001).<sup>246</sup> All three operas remain unperformed, despite the fact that Hofmeyr is currently one of South Africa's most frequently performed composers.<sup>247</sup> Furthermore, operas that have been performed are in most cases forgotten after one season. This includes all of Roelof Temmingh's operas, Hofmeyr's early operas, Thomas Rajna's *Amarantha* (2000) and *Valley Song* (2005), Volans's *Confessions of Zeno* (2001) as well as Hans Huysen's *Masque* (2005).

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<sup>241</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Adolph Hallis', *SAME*, Volume 2, p. 159.

<sup>242</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Lourens Bosman de Kock', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 328.

<sup>243</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Hans Andresen', *SAME*, Volume 1, p. 42.

<sup>244</sup> See Appendix for a complete list of South African operas and operettas.

<sup>245</sup> Hofmeyr was living in Italy at the time. See Hilde Roos. *Hendrik Hofmeyr: lewe en werk 1957-1999*. Master's Thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2000, pp. 10-7.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.* Hofmeyr's *The Land of Heart's Desire* was commissioned by the Grahamstown Festival, but was not performed as the organizers of the festival deemed the work not relevant to the political situation of the country at the time. This information has been provided to the current writer by the composer and has not been verified with the festival organizers.

The new dispensation after 1994 brought about a major political shift with an unprecedented influence on the creation of new art and therefore also the composition of new operas. Africanization of opera themes and the forces by which they are performed can be seen in Mzilikazi Khumalo's *Princess Magogo kaDinzulu* (2002), Hans Huyssen's *Masque* (2005), Bongani Ndodana-Breen's *The Passion of Winnie* (2007) and Cape Town Opera's newly commissioned work for 2010, *Five:Twenty*, which consists of five operas of twenty minutes, each composed by a different composer and each addressing a social or political issue of South African society.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

The title of this chapter, 'Indigenization and History: How opera in South Africa became South African opera', seems to imply that the process of opera indigenization in the country has been completed to a degree. More so, it seems to assume that this process has unfolded linearly and incrementally over time. The present writer does not support these claims, but worked within the constraints of these assumptions and implications as minimum conditions for constructing a historical narrative that is thematically focused. Indeed the aim of this chapter was not to write a history of opera in South Africa *per se* – for this more intensive scrutiny of primary sources and a more expansive narrative would be imperative – but to explore the establishment of opera in South Africa since it first occurred in 1801 and to trace the presentation of the genre in secondary literature as influenced by the circumstances, people and institutions involved with opera performance.

The notion of indigenization carries with it expectations of historical embeddedness, of time having passed and rituals and practices having had time to become sedimented and layered in new contexts. This chapter acknowledges that any discourse of indigenization, regardless of its underlying ideological premises, depends on a historical narrative. For a variety of reasons, comprehensive and compelling historical narratives of important themes and topics in South African music history are exceptional. For one thing, South African music scholarship across a broad spectrum has historically lacked the institutional or human resources to attempt the construction of such comprehensive histories. The historical narrative constructed here is also driven less by the need for history, than the

desire to understand how an imported cultural phenomenon in a colonial society – in this case opera – changed and adapted (indigenized) by existing for an extended period in its adopted country. It stands recorded in this chapter how opera functioned as an expression of white settler culture and later of Afrikaner nationalist arrogance. All these uses, however politically compromised in the present, played a role in establishing a position for opera in South African society. Thus the translation of opera into Afrikaans and the effects of the cultural boycott emerge *historically* as important moments of indigenization in the interpretations of standard works from the canon. Whereas later chapters consider indigenization structurally (Chapters 2 and 4) or aesthetically (Chapter 3), this chapter constructs a frame of events, institutions, people and works that contextualize historically how opera was understood and how it functioned as a practice in the other chapters in this dissertation.

The sources consulted to construct this chapter have without exception been written by white South Africans of whom many were Afrikaners who worked in the academic or media structures created by Apartheid. Their contributions to the written history of opera in South Africa entertain conventional ideas about what opera is and are ideologically embedded in the politics of exclusion and exclusivity. With few exceptions, all sources that were consulted for the writing of this chapter were written after 1960, a time in South Africa's history when institutions of learning as well as the media actively and consciously (as well as unconsciously) promoted the value of Western classical music as separate and superior to indigenous African culture. For South Africa's government and many individuals who worked in its ranks, opera symbolized the ideology of European artistic superiority. This attitude is often evident in the tone and style of the writing and on investigating the institutional positions held by these authors, a pattern emerges. The academics quoted in this chapter most frequently are Jan Bouws, Jacques Philip Malan, George Jackson and Pieter Kapp. Bouws, Malan and Kapp worked at Afrikaans institutions that actively supported the idea of Apartheid and the superiority of European cultural manifestations.<sup>248</sup> Other frequently quoted sources include work by media

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<sup>248</sup> Bouws and Kapp were both employed at the University of Stellenbosch. However, Kapp's article was written for the *Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns*, an organization historically affiliated with the ideals of Afrikaner nationalism. Malan worked for the Human Sciences Research Council and was editor of the now (in)famous *South African Music Encyclopedia*, an academic endeavour which was fully funded by the Apartheid government.

personalities such as Julius Eichbaum<sup>249</sup> and radio broadcasters who enjoyed life-long careers with the South African Broadcasting Corporation. The role played by the latter in the advocacy and preservation of Apartheid thinking on cultural matters is a matter of historical record. Reading (and listening to) these sources, the consistently Euro-centered approach of these media sources towards local opera production can be singled out as its most dominant characteristic.

The nationalist agenda of much writing on opera production and the promotion of opera and opera singers as so-called national assets during the Apartheid years cannot go unnoticed. The portrayal, for instance, of the country's best known operatic stars like Mimi Coertse, Gé Korsten and Cecilia Wessels in many a book or *Scenario* article as doing the country proud during a time of intense cultural isolation is conspicuous. The titles of biographies on Mimi Coertse (*Onse Mimi* [Our Mimi]) and Cecilia Wessels (*Stem en Legende* [Voice and Legend]) respectively, clearly illustrate the politically potent nature of South African operatic discourse.

It is important to note that the way in which opera as an art form has been discursively represented in these sources has partially dictated the way the history of opera in South Africa is represented here. The most important effect of this representation is that the current narrative is primarily 'work centered'. It reads in the manner of a narrated list of works, emphasizing the all-too-familiar hierarchical order of 'work' and 'composer' presiding over a structure that upholds these aspects of music production as the most important for the historiographer, whilst singers, directors, teachers, artists, scholars and the opera-going public occupy successively lower ranks of importance. A history of South African opera un beholden to this hierarchy would almost certainly be different from the one presented here. Chapter 2 of this dissertation could be read as an example of a history that de-emphasizes composers and works in favour of considerations of the influence of opera production on the lives of singers and production staff in a pertinent political context. It functions, I would argue, both a corrective to the current historical

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<sup>249</sup> Eichbaum was editor of the arts and culture magazine *Scenario* for 22 years. It is interesting to note that although Eichbaum was an outspoken critic of the Apartheid government, his magazine *Scenario* lost ground after 1994 and completely disappeared by 1998. The content of the last editions of the magazine in 1998 were almost exclusively focused on classical music activities in Europe and not on the production of classical music in South Africa.

representation and as an intimation of how this narrative representation can and should change as more primary research is conducted.

It is clear that this chapter provides little insight into how ‘the idea of opera’ developed, evolved or integrated into South African musical life. This dimension of indigenization is, at least with regard to the Western Cape, more actively pursued in the chapters that follow. What this chapter does make clear is how opera in South Africa was influenced by the political and economic history of the country. The chronological historical structure of this chapter also complements the understanding of indigenization as a *process*, anticipating the problems that will be probed later on in this dissertation in efforts to arrive at concrete aesthetic descriptions of indigenization (Chapter 3) or strategic structural attempts to ‘transform’ opera into an indigenous art form (Chapter 4). As such, this chapter also points to the limitations of the use of the term ‘indigenization’.

Finally, the history constructed here from a wide range of secondary sources not only attempts to show how opera ‘found its place’ in local culture and local circumstances, but also how local culture responded to opera as a form of art. Although the former is perhaps more central to the narrative told here, the implicit aspects of reception that are part of this narrative receive more prominence in the chapters that follow.

## Chapter 2. Archival secrets: constructing the history of Eoan

### 2.1 The early years

In 1933 the Eoan Group was founded by Helen Southern-Holt<sup>1</sup> as a cultural and welfare organization for the Coloured community in District Six in Cape Town.<sup>2</sup> Initially Southern-Holt taught speech classes which soon expanded into literature classes followed by drama productions. During a speech held for the National Council for Women in 1947, she explained that ‘my first desire in giving help to the Coloured community was to start classes for clear, articulate speech. Having had to engage Coloured workers as well as European, I knew from experience that the mass of Coloured boys and girls entering the labour market were ill-equipped, and had not the power of the spoken word to aid them’.<sup>3</sup> Shortly afterwards Southern-Holt also started a ballet section and a choir, recognizing the talents and desire for development in the Coloured community. Southern-Holt explained how she decided on the name Eoan:

On my programme, as I sat planning, I wrote ‘Eos’ the beautiful Greek word meaning Dawn – Eos ... Eoan ... pertaining to the Dawn. And so I named the new group Eoan, in the consciousness that through its illumination the Coloured People could realise the dawning of a new cultural expansion in themselves, and a new understanding of well-being, physical and mental for their race.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Group had its central quarters in the Isaac Ochberg Hall at 302 Hanover Street in District Six, by the mid-1950s fifteen branches had been established throughout

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<sup>1</sup> Little information is available on Helen Southern-Holt. She is described in Christine Lucia’s *The World of South African Music: A Reader* as ‘a social worker’, on the current Eoan website ([www.eoangroup.co.za](http://www.eoangroup.co.za)) as ‘an English woman’, in David Bloomberg’s *My Times* as ‘a benevolent white woman’ and in *Women Marching Into the 21st Century* (published by the HSRC in 2000) no information on her background is mentioned at all (this article also contains incorrect data).

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Manca. ‘Eoan Group’ in *South African Music Encyclopedia (SAME)*, ed. J.P. Malan, Volume 2, pp. 26-9.

<sup>3</sup> Speech given by Helen Southern-Holt at the National Council of Women in South Africa in 1947, p. 1. Eoan Archive, box 37, folder 300.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.



the Peninsula.<sup>5</sup> By this time Eoan offered a wide range of activities to the Coloured people throughout the Cape Peninsula, including ballet, folk dance, speech, drama, singing, painting and sewing.<sup>6</sup>

Already in the first decade of its existence the group started performing in public venues in Cape Town. In 1937 the first Coloured Dance Display was staged with the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra.<sup>7</sup> A year later the first dancers, trained by Eoan, took part in the Royal Academy Dance Examinations.<sup>8</sup> By 1940 a thousand children from fifteen Eoan branches took part in an open air Physical Education Display which included dancing. From this year onwards, the ballet section annually performed with the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra.<sup>9</sup>

At the invitation of Helen Southern-Holt, Joseph Salvatore Manca<sup>10</sup> joined the Music Section of Eoan as choral conductor in 1943.<sup>11</sup> Manca was born in Cape Town in 1908 of Sicilian parents. He was an amateur musician pursuing a professional career at the City Council as a qualified accountant.<sup>12</sup> According to David Bloomberg, Manca ‘had no formal musical education and was self-taught in his love and knowledge of Italian

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<sup>5</sup> In 1938 the Isaac Ochberg Hall was donated to Eoan by the bequest of Mr. Ochberg himself. See letter from Ochberg’s daughter, Mrs Bertha Epstein, to Eoan Chairman, Mr H.G. Ashworth, dated 24 October 1962. Eoan Archive, box 32, folder 221.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Manca, *Advance Publicity Material for the 1956 Arts Festival*, p. 1. Eoan Archive, box 30, folder 203.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Manca was a qualified accountant and worked at the Treasury Department of the City Council. In 1968, aged 60, Manca resigned from his City Council position and became the full-time cultural director at the Eoan Cultural Centre in Athlone. J.P. Malan. ‘Manca, Joseph Salvatore’ in *SAME*, ed. J.P. Malan, Volume 3, pp. 192-194. See also Lucy Faktor-Kreitzer, ‘From Latvia to South Africa’ in *The World of South African Music: A Reader*, edited by Christine Lucia, p. 149.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Manca, ‘Eoan Group’ in *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 26–29. Also: Josepha Manca, *Advance Publicity Material for the 1956 Arts Festival*, p. 2. Eoan Archive, box 30, folder 203.

<sup>12</sup> Manca’s so-called inability to read orchestral scores became the topic of much speculation. During a conversation with the present writer on 19 June 2008, Ronnie Samaai (brother of Gerald Samaai, one of Eoan’s principal tenors) explained that Manca apparently never conducted from an orchestral score, but used the piano reduction. David Bloomberg also elaborated on this in his book *My Times*: ‘While I feel sure that he could read music, many doubted that he could read a score properly and rumour had it that he taught himself the scores by listening repeatedly to the appropriate long-playing records of that era.’ David Bloomberg, *My Times*, Fernwood Press 2007, p. 24.

opera'.<sup>13</sup> During the first thirteen years of his association with Eoan, Manca developed the small choir into an amateur opera company that presented its first full-scale opera in 1956. This much publicized event was the first 'all-Coloured' production of Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata*, sung in Italian and produced in traditional Italian style. In the twenty years following this production, Eoan presented annual opera seasons, launched various arts festivals and embarked on tours countrywide and to Europe.

The gradual development of Eoan's music section from a small choir to an opera company started in 1944 with a choral concert in the Cathedral Hall with approximately 35 choristers.<sup>14</sup> After this concert the productions went from strength to strength, the choir expanded in numbers and the works grew in scale, soon including soloists and orchestra. In 1946 *The Redeemer*<sup>15</sup> was performed with organ and 100 singers and in 1947 the children's cantata *Sherwood*<sup>16</sup> was performed with 500 singers and the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra. A year later the children's operetta *The Rose and the Laurel*<sup>17</sup> was performed with singing and dancing by 500 participants.<sup>18</sup>

#### **1948**

The National Party comes to power, entrenching white minority rule.

#### **1950**

The 'Group Areas Act' (Act 41 of 1950) is passed in Parliament. It assigns racial groups to different residential and business sections in urban areas.<sup>19</sup>

#### **1951**

The 'Separate Representation of Voters Act' is passed whereby Coloureds are removed from the common voter's role.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> 'Advance Publicity Material' for the 1956 Arts Festival, written by Manca, p. 3. Eoan Archive, box 30, folder 203.

<sup>15</sup> The composer and date of composition are unknown.

<sup>16</sup> The composer and date of composition are unknown.

<sup>17</sup> The composer of the work and the date of composition are unknown.

<sup>18</sup> Josepha Manca, *Advance Publicity Material for the 1956 Arts Festival*, p. 3. Eoan Archive, box 30, folder 203.

<sup>19</sup> <http://africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blsalaws.htm>, accessed 20 July 2008.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.districtsix.co.za/frames.htm>, accessed 3 May 2008.

In 1949 Manca produced a costumed version of *The Redeemer* for adult choir and members of the drama section. Manca described this production as ‘a form of passion play’.<sup>21</sup> A major breakthrough came in this same year when Billie Jones<sup>22</sup> produced the Group’s first complete operetta, *A Slave in Araby*,<sup>23</sup> using 75 performers and starring May Abrahamse in her first principal role. It was staged together with the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra in the City Hall in Cape Town.<sup>24</sup> A number of musicals and large-scale works were produced in the following years. In 1950 the light opera *Hong Kong*<sup>25</sup> was performed with the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra, followed by the musical comedy *The Maid of the Mountains*<sup>26</sup> in 1951. Two years later Eoan embarked on a full-scale production of Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* with soloists, an adult choir of over 100 singers and organ accompaniment,<sup>27</sup> followed by a production of the operetta *The Gipsy Princess*<sup>28</sup> which ‘played to packed houses’ and of which ‘all repeat performances were sold out’.<sup>29</sup> In December that year choral concerts were held that included excerpts from Handel’s *Messiah* and the cantata *Bethlehem*.<sup>30</sup> 1954 saw another musical comedy from Eoan as

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<sup>21</sup> See the overview of Eoan’s music productions 1944-1951. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>22</sup> Billie Jones was a white lady who worked with the drama section in the early days of Eoan. Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan’s activities from 1933-1968*, p. 17, Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c. See also the speech given by Helen Southern-Holt at the National Council of Women in South Africa in 1947, p. 1, Eoan Archive, box 37, folder 300, as well as the interesting referral to her elsewhere in this chapter as quoted in a letter from Andrew Mackrill to Joseph Manca, dated 13 July 1955. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>23</sup> Despite the fact that this work has been widely performed, the composer of the operetta and the date of composition are unknown. See for example

[http://www.risleymtc.co.uk/Main/RMTC\\_aboutus.html](http://www.risleymtc.co.uk/Main/RMTC_aboutus.html), accessed 28 May 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Manca, ‘Eoan Group’ *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 26-9. See also: Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>25</sup> Neither the composer nor the date of this composition has been found.

<sup>26</sup> A musical comedy in three acts, lyrics by Harry Graham and music by H. Fraser-Simson, based on a book by Frederick Lonsdale. The first performance took place in the Palace Theatre, Manchester in 1916. [http://www.nodanw.com/shows\\_m/maid\\_mountains.htm](http://www.nodanw.com/shows_m/maid_mountains.htm), accessed 28 August 2008. See Josepha Manca, *Advance Publicity Material for the 1956 Arts Festival*, p. 4 Eoan Archive, box 30, folder 203.

<sup>27</sup> This was the first all-Coloured production of *Elijah* in the country. ‘Advance Publicity Material’ for the 1956 Arts Festival, written by Manca, p. 4. Eoan Archive, box 30, folder 203.

<sup>28</sup> Musical comedy by Emmerich Kalman, composed in 1915. [http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/classical/353434\\_gypsy03q.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/classical/353434_gypsy03q.html), accessed 28 May 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Josepha Manca, *Advance Publicity Material for the 1956 Arts Festival*, p. 4. Eoan Archive, box 30, folder 203.

<sup>30</sup> Neither the composer nor the date of composition has been found.

they produced *Magyar Melody*<sup>31</sup> with 100 performers accompanied by the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra.<sup>32</sup>

The financial means to produce works on this scale were provided by the government. Manca wrote in an undated document that ‘up to the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 1956, the Eoan Group was in receipt of a Financial Grant from the Department of Education’.<sup>33</sup> However, this must have been the Department of Coloured Affairs, as is indicated by the 1956 application for additional funds in a letter to that Department.<sup>34</sup> In addition to this, financial support of R 2 000 was annually received from the Cape Town City Council.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.2 The 1956 Arts Festival

Early in 1955, Manca proposed to the Eoan Group that the Group present an Arts Festival completely administered and organized by the Group itself. Manca felt that ‘the time had now arrived for the Group to undertake a more ambitious venture and that, as in the past, the Group would be the pioneer in the presentation of the first all Coloured Arts Festival’.<sup>36</sup> The preparations for the festival took a full year. Already at this early stage some members had left the organization due to Eoan’s perceived ties with the government, of which the most tangible evidence was the funding provided by the Department of Coloured Affairs. The government had by now implemented a number of Apartheid laws, steadily rolling out formal segregation between races which resulted in a loss of power and freedom of

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<sup>31</sup> A musical comedy adapted by Eric Maschwitz and George Posford from the play by Eric Maschwitz, Fred Thompson and Guy Bolton. The music was composed by George Posford and Bernard Grun. The work was premiered at the Opera House, Manchester on 29 Nov, 1938. [http://www.nodanw.com/shows\\_m/magyar\\_melody.htm](http://www.nodanw.com/shows_m/magyar_melody.htm), accessed 8 May 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Josepha Manca, *Advance Publicity Material for the 1956 Arts Festival*, p. 4. Eoan Archive, box 30, folder 203.

<sup>33</sup> See Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan’s activities from 1933-1968*, p. 12. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

<sup>34</sup> Letter to the Commissioner of Coloured Affairs, dated 23 February 1956, p. 2. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 4. It is not clear in what year Eoan received the grant for the first time and who had applied for it. It may well be that this grant was organized by Southern-Holt prior to Eoan’s opera activities.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan’s activities from 1933-1968*, p. 21. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c. In view of the fact that Manca was Eoan’s chief administrator as well as an employee of the City Council, it is safe to assume that he organized this sponsorship.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Manca, *Advance Publicity Material for the 1956 Arts Festival*, p. 4. Eoan Archive, box 30, folder 203.

movement for the Coloured community. By this time Coloureds had been removed from the voters roll, apartheid was increasingly enforced in public spaces and many Coloured people had been relocated to the Cape Flats.

In a letter to former Eoan member Andrew Mackrill, dated 12 July 1955, Manca requested him to play the principal part in the musical *Zip Goes A Million* for the 1956 Festival. The letter provides some insight into Manca's personal motivation for working with Eoan and the difficulties experienced whilst doing so, whilst also showing a man out of touch with the political imperatives of the day:

My one great regret is and has always been that you decided some time back to disassociate yourself from active participation in the Group's activities. You may have reasons and at this stage I do not wish to question them, nevertheless, I feel that you like me, have a duty to the people in that God has blessed us with certain talents which we must give to the people for their enlightenment, education and enjoyment. [...]

What hurts me is now that I am the organiser behind this project, I would have thought that I would enjoy the support of all those who value art and who would rise above their personal feelings. Let us set aside 'personal questions' and let us serve the people. In spite of the importance of this event I have met and found some sort of passive resistance. This grieves me immensely, as I feel that both the Group and myself do not deserve this sort of treatment. Tell me, Andrew, what is behind all this? Is it jealousy on the part of some individuals? Do they feel that they ought to be at the head of affairs? Andrew, like in all walks of life, if you wish to get to the top, you must work for it and what is more important, put the object before the person.

Anyhow, I must stop talking like this because I could go on forever. Andrew, you know me sufficiently well enough to admit that no matter what may be said, at least I am sincere in my efforts to give to the people what God gave me.<sup>37</sup>

Mackrill's reply to Manca, dated 13 July 1955, made it clear that politics rather than personal animosity was responsible for the resistance amongst some Coloured people against Eoan's activities.<sup>38</sup>

It may help you to understand the new spirit motivating non-Europeans and why there is this 'passive resistance' to your fine efforts in the work you are doing in the Group. Up to ten years ago, Non-Europeans counted it an honour and privilege, as well as a pleasure, to be associated with Europeans. There was so much you could teach us, so much we could learn from the European. And the European enjoyed working with us. Your own experience in the choir and those wonderful caucus meetings we had up at your home in Derwent Road is proof of this. Then came the advent into power of the Nationalist Party as the government of the day. They brought with them the seeds and virulent poison of race-hatred as between White and Non-White. They destroyed over night the happy relations and mutual regard existing between Coloureds and Europeans and Africans, and they did it

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<sup>37</sup> Letter from Manca to Andrew Mackrill, dated 12 July 1955. Eoan Archive, box 29, folder 201.

<sup>38</sup> Formal organizations voicing resistance against Apartheid were formed at a later stage.

all in the name of God and the Holy Bible ... And then they formed a Coloured Affairs Department. That was the final nail in the coffin containing the once peaceful and happy relationships that existed between White and Black.

The Coloured Affairs Department cost me my wonderful dramatic group of young and enthusiastic amateur actors, 'The St. Paul's Players'. Today I miss those young players as much as I miss the Group. Since then the people have noticed an increasing interest in Eoan by this same Coloured Affairs Department.

Non-Europeans hate and loathe that particular Government Department with an intense and savage bitter loathing and hatred. It stands for the Government of the Nationalist Party, the Party at whose feet history will lay the blame for all the bitterness and animosity now existing between Black and White in this country. People are suspicious of the ties existing between this Department and Eoan. People are also beginning to become increasingly worried ... Nobody trusts the Coloured Affairs Department of the Nationalist Government. Nobody!! That Department is a wolf in sheep's clothing ...

No, Mr Manca, it's not 'jealousy' or 'a desire by some individuals to be at the head of affairs'. The reasons are as I set them out briefly as above. During the time I was in Eoan, I was the most politically conscious member in the Group. I was also its stormy petrel, and most outspoken critic. But that's because I love the Group so. Eoan made me, in the world of Art, the man I am today. All my success I've had, on stage in theatre as a singer in big musical works, and now lately as a producer of plays ... I owe it all to Eoan. My grateful thanks to them always for all this.

I have deliberately broken away from the Group, chiefly on matters of principle, and because of my great love and regard for Miss Billie Jones. Today I am in 'the wilderness'. I have no regrets ... in spite of the fact that I shall always love and think with affection of Eoan, and you.'<sup>39</sup>

It is not clear from the documents in the Eoan Archive if, and to what extent Manca was perturbed by the content of Mackrill's reply, as his determination and ambition to achieve financial and artistic success with and for the Eoan Group seemed as strong as ever. Even before the Festival started Manca foresaw a financial shortfall and he applied for additional funding from The Commissioner of Coloured Affairs on 23 February 1956. After describing the Festival's planned activities and providing the financial estimations, he concluded this application as follows:

From the above statement it will be seen that the estimated deficit will be £2,125. In consequence thereof, I apply for a special Grant-in-Aid from your Department, of £1,000 towards the estimated deficit on the Eoan Group Arts Festival. The balance of the deficit will be met from the proceeds of special fund raising efforts to be organized by Eoan.

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<sup>39</sup> Letter from Andrew Mackrill to Manca, dated 13 July 1955. It is evident from the remainder of the letter that the relationship between Manca and Mackrill (and also other ex-Groupers) was a particularly warm and appreciative one. Mackrill specifically mentioned the fond memories he had of his time with Eoan and with Manca in person. See Mackrill's letters in the Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 4 as well as box 29, folder 200.

The special grant now applied for is an addition to the annual grant from your Department, which is devoted to the ordinary running costs of the Eoan Group.’<sup>40</sup>

## 1956

Racial segregation is introduced on public busses.<sup>41</sup>

Sophiatown near Johannesburg is declared a White area, thousands of people are removed from the area and the suburb is renamed ‘Triomf’.<sup>42</sup>

Eoan’s First Arts Festival commenced on 10 March 1956 in the Cape Town City Hall with a performance of Giuseppe Verdi’s *La Traviata*, sung in Italian. The opera was produced by Allesandro Rota and Joseph Manca conducted the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra. The entire orchestra consisted of white musicians.<sup>43</sup> All tickets for the first performance (approximately 1000 seats) were sold out within the first day of booking open to the public.<sup>44</sup> Eight more performances of the opera followed before the end of that month, including a special performance of *La Traviata* held for government dignitaries.<sup>45</sup> The cast included, amongst others, May Abrahamse<sup>46</sup> and Ruth Goodwin, sharing the role of Violetta, Robert Trussell as Dottore and Ron Thebus as Alfredo. The Eoan Group Chorus as well as the Eoan Group Ballet took part in the production. The reviews were

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<sup>40</sup> Letter to the Commissioner of Coloured Affairs, dated 23 February 1956, p. 2. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.districtsix.co.za/frames.htm>, accessed 3 May 2008.

<sup>42</sup> [http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC\\_Materials/ANC-history.htm](http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC_Materials/ANC-history.htm), accessed 20 July 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph S Manca. ‘Eoan Group’ in *SAME*, ed. J.P. Malan, Volume 2, pp. 26-29. See also: 1956 Festival Brochure in Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>44</sup> Letter, dated 27 February 1956, to Mr J.L Hughes, secretary of N.O.D.A. in London. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>45</sup> Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>46</sup> At the time of this production May Abrahamse was working in the ‘Cheque Room’ at the *Cape Times*. In the April edition of *Talk of the Times*, the magazine supplement of the *Cape Times*, an article was published about Abrahamse and her role in *La Traviata*, which included the following: ‘From factory bench to stardom is usually a transition reserved for dreams and fiction. It is a reality, however, for Miss May Abrahamse, the Coloured opera star who created such a tremendous impression with her distinguished acting and singing in the Eoan Group’s presentation of the Verdi opera *La Traviata*, in the City Hall last month. Her job is in our Cheque Department at Parow. It is there that she earns a living but it is in Eoan Group productions that she is earning stage fame.’ No author, April 1956 edition of *Talk of the Times*, magazine supplement of the *Cape Times*. Eoan Archive, box 29, folder 200.

overwhelmingly positive and Eoan seemed to have made a huge impact on Cape Town's cultural circles. Well-known Afrikaans critic Charlie Weich of *Die Burger* wrote that had he not seen with his own eyes what a Coloured Opera company had achieved on the night of 10 March in the City Hall, he would not have believed it. The voices of May Abrahamse and Lionel Fourie and the décor and costumes were singled out as outstanding.<sup>47</sup>

The other productions of this festival included a children's version of *The Mikado*, the South African première of the musical comedy *Zip Goes a Million*, the oratorio *Elijah*, the play *Johnny Belinda*, and many other cultural activities such as Greek and classical ballet shows, a massed physical education display, flower exhibitions and a floral arrangement competition. The festival's productions were spread over six months and came to a close in August 1956. The entire festival was held in the Cape Town City Hall, the only venue where Eoan was allowed to perform before mixed audiences, although the seats for Coloured and White audiences were allocated in separate sections within the hall. The middle and left sections were for Whites and the seats in the right section were for Coloureds.<sup>48</sup> The costumes for all productions were made by Eoan's own members. Carmen Sydow<sup>49</sup> became Wardrobe Mistress from 1955 until her retirement in 1978.<sup>50</sup> In a later document Manca wrote that,

Since the beginning of the Eoan Group's public activities, costumes were made by the mothers of the members and the members themselves. However, with the ever widening scope of activity, it was found necessary to establish a permanent sewing section. Since 1955, the Eoan Group has established a quasi-permanent Sewing Section under the direction of Mrs. C. Sydow. This section has been responsible for all the costumes made for the Arts Festivals, Operas, Dramas, and Ballets presented since 1956. Thus the Eoan Group has at present a valuable wardrobe of costumes for continued productions.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Charlie Weich (who wrote under the pseudonym Emol). 'Kaapse Kleurlinge voer Italiaanse opera met groot welslae uit', *Die Burger*, Monday 12 March 1956.

<sup>48</sup> Most seating plans show White seats in the middle and right sections of the audience, and the Coloured seats in the left section of the audience. Seating plan found in Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>49</sup> Carmen Sydow was the wife of Mr. Ismail Sydow who was Manca's right hand and Eoan's Chairman for many years. She was also the mother of ballet dancer Didi Sydow whom Eoan sponsored to study in the United Kingdom.

<sup>50</sup> 'Advance Publicity Data', box 2, folder 10.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan's activities from 1933-1968*, pp. 16-7. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.



Financially the festival was a success and, instead of the anticipated loss, the profit amounted to £994. The British magazine *Opera* published an article on Eoan's production of *La Traviata*<sup>52</sup> and on 2 April 1956 Manca wrote to the editor, Harold Rosenthal:

This Coloured Premiere of *La Traviata* was the greatest musical success Cape Town has ever witnessed and caused a furore among the local musical circles. Ever since the first night, the whole city has been talking and a special evening was given which was attended by the leading authorities of South Africa – The Governor-General, Members of the Cabinet, Full Diplomatic Corps, Members of Parliament, Senators, etc. etc. History was created in more than one sense. Not only was this the first Coloured performance in the world of a complete Italian Opera, but all [...] booking records were broken. All performances were 'sold out' before the rise of the curtain on the opening night. Altogether, nine performances were given, all playing to packed houses, and thousands of people were unable to gain admission. It is no idle boast to say, that we could continue to play to capacity houses for at least another two weeks. The results have surpassed all expectations, and the Eoan Group is now looking forward to a proper 'Opera Season' when it is hoped to give several operas.<sup>53</sup>

In a historical overview of Eoan's activities written some years later, Manca gave his impression of what he thought the performance meant to the singers and audience:

The presentation of the Italian Opera *La Traviata*, was the dawn of a new era for the Coloured People in their striving for the higher things of life. This introduction into the magical world of opera was the Coloured People's first intimate contact with one of the highest forms of musical art – an unforgettable baptism at whose front new horizons appeared on the educational landscape of the Coloured People's activities while new vistas of beauty were painted on the artistic canvas of their cultural progress.<sup>54</sup>

Today it is impossible not to read this interpretation of events as patronizing, politically compromised and naïve. It endorses apartheid themes of Western cultural superiority, of cultural homogeneity and the civilizing teleology of separate cultural (read: racial) development. If Manca is read at face value, opera in South Africa had a civilizing role to play that depended, if anything, on its status as European and uncompromisingly un-indigenized art (as is illustrated by the emphasis on performances in Italian with Italian sets). In terms of indigenization as described in the introduction to this thesis, Eoan's opera

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<sup>52</sup> Manca wrote to newspapers and organizations in the whole of South Africa as well as abroad (e.g. *Time* in New York, the BBC in London, *Opera* in the United Kingdom, and also a few operatic societies) to advertise and market the festival. See correspondence in Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Manca to the editor of *Opera*, Mr. H. Rosenthal, 2 April 1956. Eoan Archive, box 29, folder 200.

<sup>54</sup> Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan's activities from 1933-1968*, p. 8. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

productions point to the indigenization of the forces harnessed to perform opera, rather than the indigenization of operatic repertoire. Whereas it is possible to interpret the ‘all-Coloured casts’ of Eoan as supporting a racially-informed idea of indigenization, these and other documents in the Eoan Archive suggest exactly the opposite dynamic: for Eoan it was not opera that was supposed to change or adapt or indigenize in South Africa. Instead opera was expected to change (civilize) the (Coloured) South Africans involved in it. It is therefore not surprising that not everyone in the Coloured community was enthusiastic about Eoan’s success. Scathing attacks and objections to Eoan’s activities appeared on two separate occasions documented in the organization’s archive. The first is a letter from the South African Coloured People’s Organization and the second an anonymous circular distributed in the streets. Both letters expressed dismay at the Eoan Group’s special performance of *La Traviata* to government officials.<sup>55</sup> Alex La Guma, chairman of the South African Coloured People’s Organisation, wrote to Eoan as follows:

Allow us to congratulate you on your magnificent performance of ‘La Traviata’. You have shown that, given the opportunities, Coloured people can excel in the realms of culture on par with all other peoples.

It has come to our notice, however, that your group arranged a special performance of the opera for ‘Europeans Only’ on Tuesday night 20<sup>th</sup> [of March] ... Among those invited were the Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament whose attitude towards the Non-Europeans are well known.

It [has been] rumoured for sometime that your group was financially supported by the government through the Coloured Affairs Department. However, Dr. du Plessis now appears to be sufficiently bold as to have arranged for the Group to put on a ‘Europeans Only’ show, and this in the face of the mounting opposition of the Coloured people against Apartheid. [...] People can also conclude, therefore, that the Eoan Group supports Apartheid. In fact, the whole idea reminds one of the slave period when the farmers hired Coloureds to perform for them, their masters. Today in the 20th Century we do not recognize the white man as our master. This is the land of our birth and we demand government support for ALL cultural movements. BUT WITHOUT APARTHEID STRINGS.

The eyes of the world are on you, and we can safely say that all advanced and progressive people bowed their heads in shame when you ... followed the footsteps of your slave forefathers, and performed for a ‘Europeans Only’ audience. We realize however for you to have refused to perform would have required great courage, but that is surely what we – who respect you as artists – have a reasonable right to expect. True art, surely belongs to ALL people of our land.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Letter of protest sold on the streets, dated 31 March 1956, and letter from the South African Coloured People’s Organization, no date. Eoan Archive, box 29, folder 200.

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Alex La Guma, Chairman of The South African Coloured People’s Organization, no date. Eoan Archive, box 29, folder 200.

Manca's politically stilted version of events is also put into perspective by a critical pamphlet which was sold on the streets after the *La Traviata* performance:

#### THE LA TRAVIATA AFFAIR

We do not share the amazement the columns of the daily press oozed out over the recent production of Italian opera by a so-called 'all coloured cast'. We are not surprised that human beings can sing, dance and act.

However, the undoubted enthusiasm of both the performance and the majority of the audiences for 'La Traviata' is an index of the cultural starvation and hunger of the majority of the people, cut off as they are by apartheid and poverty from the best in arts and culture. It is precisely this cultural starvation of the mass of the people that has tricked them into accepting Eoan's 'La Traviata' as a step towards their cultural aspirations. In the same way a man driven by a burning thirst will drink at a sewer for the sake of life itself.

The Eoan Group is befouled by an apartheid atmosphere. [...] Its participation in the apartheid festival in Goodwood at the very time when the Council was demanding removal of the so-called non-whites from the area under the Group Areas Act is unforgivable. But the most smarting humiliation to date, for the majority of the people, was the special performance of 'La Traviata' for South African prominent racialists. People who publicly spit in the faces of the artists, who are horrified at the very thought of sitting next to them in the same bus, or even standing in the same queue to buy a stamp [...], to these the Eoan Group is 'thrilled' to give a special place of honour during the performance of La Traviata. To our shame, not one of the artists walked off the stage in protest against this outrageous insult. This sort of thing can only happen when people are so starved of artistic and cultural expression that the opportunity to express themselves artistically becomes all important.

Many of the so-called Coloured people accept the Eoan Group because they mistake the mere acquisition of skills, techniques and accomplishments as genuine artistic and cultural expression. They are tricked into accepting the apartheid basis of Eoan at the expenses of dignity and self-respect – the foundation of all art and culture. In the long run all development is stifled and the aspirations of the people frustrated and nullified. Operatic art, like all art, cannot thrive on the basis of racialism. It can only be undermined. [...]

The 'so-called whites' in their midst, whatever their feelings may be, are patrons of bosses and not fellow artists. Blacks are implicitly barred. It is to their credit that South Africa's best artists have steered clear of Eoan where people are trained and presented as elegant coons and not artists.<sup>57</sup>

These documents are quoted at length, because they show unequivocally that political resistance to Eoan's operatic activities occurred from the very first opera performance and more importantly, that this resistance was widely publicized and known to Manca. What is not clear from the documentation in the Eoan Archive is to what extent the content of these letters affected Manca or the rest of the group; nor is it clear whether or to what extent the

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<sup>57</sup> Anonymous letter of protest sold on the streets, dated 31 March 1956. Eoan Archive, box 29, folder 200.

members of the group were aware of these letters or the sentiments they expressed.<sup>58</sup> Throughout their existence Eoan's constitution stated that the organization is a non-political organization<sup>59</sup> and from interviews and newspaper cuttings, it is clear that Manca always preached 'art above politics'.<sup>60</sup> In 1957, however, the Group decided not to apply for funding as the government set the condition that, in order to receive the grant, Eoan was not allowed to perform to mixed audiences without a permit.<sup>61</sup> Except for the continuation of the annual R 2 000 grant from the Cape Town Municipality, the Group remained financially independent until 1966. After the 1956 Festival Eoan's financial position and artistic development enabled them to present annual Opera Seasons in March of each year, all of which were held in the City Hall in Cape Town where the group could perform for mixed audiences. From 1957 onwards they added a number of operas to their repertoire, amongst others Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto* and Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème*.

During the 1950s and 60s, opera in the white community of Cape Town was mainly produced by Erik Chisholm, a prolific opera composer and enterprising and experienced musician who emigrated to South Africa in 1946 to take up the post of Dean of the Faculty of Music at the University of Cape Town. He established the University of Cape Town Opera Company in 1951 and the Opera School in 1954, appointing Gregorio Fiasconaro as its director. Cape Town audiences were subsequently treated to an unprecedented variety of opera productions by the Eoan Group as well as the University of Cape Town Company

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<sup>58</sup> This document was filed by Manca in a rather unusual way. The original copy of the document does not exist in the archive, but Manca typed the wording of the pamphlet on blue typing paper and therefore must have had an original copy. On the side of the copied version, Manca penciled the following perplexing note by hand: 'This I typed to let you know of, though I realize not worth worrying about.'

<sup>59</sup> See paragraph 4 of Eoan's constitution. Eoan Archive, box 37, folder 12.

<sup>60</sup> Willem de Vries, 'Abrahamse snoer jare saam', *Die Burger*, 14 May 2007. The situation was also explained to the present writer in an interview with former Eoan singer Patricia van Graan on 19 November 2008 in Somerset West. Van Graan said that Manca always told the group that 'politics was a dirty word'.

<sup>61</sup> Minutes of the 32<sup>nd</sup> AGM held on 29 September 1966, p. 4. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 3. The minutes of the Annual General Meeting in 1957 when this decision was taken are lost. However, the issue was mentioned in a number of newspaper articles from 1960 and 1961. See for example 'The glorious dawn...' *The Daily News*, 15 July 1960, *Ilanga Lase*, 23 July 1960 as well as reviews and newspaper cuttings in Eoan Archive, box 30 folder 208. When Eoan reapplied for government funding in 1965, the conditions stated that they were not allowed to perform before mixed audiences unless they applied for a permit to do so. For further information, see the section on 1965 in this chapter. Eoan Archive, box 33 folder 231.

who staged many operas from the standard repertory. The Cape Town Opera Company also toured through South Africa, extending their tours to Northern and Southern Rhodesia (today Zambia and Zimbabwe) and the United Kingdom. Notable premières of local operas included Chisholm's *The Pardoner's Tale* (1961) and John Joubert's *Silas Marner* (1961).<sup>62</sup>

Collaboration between the White and Coloured opera groups was minimal during these years; they shared Fiasconaro as producer but never exchanged singers or dancers. Whites attended Eoan's opera performances, but Coloureds were not allowed in most venues in town. The opportunities for Coloureds to attend productions by White singers were therefore very limited. However, since 1955 Eoan had been awarding bursaries to some of its dancers, singers and musicians who were able to study music at the College of Music of the University of Cape Town.<sup>63</sup> Among the recipients was the pianist Gordon Jephtas, who later played a pivotal role in training Eoan's singers. The College of Music also offered voice training to Eoan through the services of one of their members of staff, Olga Magnoni, although it is not clear if she did this in her personal capacity or whether Eoan singers attended class at the College.<sup>64</sup> Eoan also sponsored the ballet dancer Didi Sydow to study with the Royal Ballet School in London where she eventually made a career as a dancer.<sup>65</sup>

## 1960

The ANC and PAC are banned by the government under the 'Unlawful Organisations Act'.<sup>66</sup>

The Sharpeville Massacre takes place on 21 March.

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<sup>62</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Erik Chisholm', in the *South African Music Encyclopedia*, ed. J.P. Malan, Volume 1, p. 272.

<sup>63</sup> It is only by the late 1970s that some of Eoan's dancers were used in ballet productions by the UCT Ballet School and a decade later before Eoan's singers found employment with the Cape Provincial Arts Council.

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.capetownopera.co.za/hm/history2008.html>, accessed 27 July 2008.

<sup>65</sup> See Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan's activities from 1933-1968*, pp. 15-16 for a more comprehensive list of individuals who received bursaries from Eoan. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

<sup>66</sup> [http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC\\_Materials/ANC-history.htm](http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC_Materials/ANC-history.htm), accessed 20 July 2008.

### 2.3 The Fourth Opera and Ballet Season and the 1960 Opera and Ballet Tour

1960 was an unusually busy year for Eoan. Not only did they present their annual opera season in March in the Cape Town City Hall (their fourth annual season), they also undertook their first tour of the country between June and September, presenting three full seasons in Port Elizabeth, Durban and Johannesburg respectively. Keeping in mind that Eoan's entire cast and most of the production team were amateurs who received no remuneration for their performances, the difficult circumstances in which they performed and the enormous personal sacrifices which were made to achieve this, is all the more extraordinary.<sup>67</sup> The Fourth Opera and Ballet Season was held from 10 March to 2 April with Gregorio Fiasconaro as producer.<sup>68</sup> The programme included Puccini's *La Bohème* (a new production for Eoan) during which Winifred du Plessis made her debut. Other operas presented were *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata* and *Cavalleria Rusticana* with Vera Gow making her debut as leading soprano solo. A new ballet, *The Pink Lemonade*, was also presented. Johaar Mosaval, a former Eoan member dancing with the Royal Ballet Company in the United Kingdom, returned to South Africa to dance in this production.<sup>69</sup>

It is clear that Manca's control over the Group and its activities was strong and that without his leadership the infrastructure to perform opera would not have existed. In the *Advance Publicity Data* for the 1960 Opera Season, his involvement is described as follows:

The whole opera season is under the direction of Joseph Manca, who in addition to conducting the operas has been responsible for its complete administration and

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<sup>67</sup> The entire cast had to take three months unpaid leave from their daytime jobs to be able to go on tour. Although the Eoan Finance Committee paid compensation for loss of wages, no singer or dancer received payment for their performances. For their performances in Durban, Eoan had to apply for special exemption on Entertainment Duty which all paid performers in Natal had to pay to the provincial authorities. This resulted in an administrative exercise which took many months as Durban officials found it hard to believe that the company's singers were amateurs. See Eoan Archive, box 31, folder 210.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Manca, *Advance Publicity Information Fourth Opera and Ballet Season*, cover page, Eoan Archive, box 2, folder 10.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2. This ballet was based on the life of Mosaval who grew up in District Six. David Poole choreographed this production. The composer of the music is unknown.

organisation. Added to this has been his unstinted training of the principals in the learning of their music, language and translation of the various roles.<sup>70</sup>

Although probably written by Manca himself, documents in the Eoan Archive support this version of events. In the archive one comes across hundreds of documents concerning the detailed planning of finance, festivals, rehearsals, interviews, permits and many other organizational matters, bearing testimony to the huge task Manca had at hand, his penchant for detail, but also the control he exercised over the group and their movements. When Eoan undertook their First Opera and Ballet Tour through South Africa, evidence of his complete control can be seen everywhere in the documentation; all travel arrangements were planned to the minute and he even went as far as planning the sleeping arrangements for every member in each hotel they stayed in during the tour.<sup>71</sup>

The tour was a financial and artistic success and newspaper critics in the various cities wrote as many positive reviews as Eoan held performances.<sup>72</sup> The Eoan Archive also holds many letters by individuals expressing sincere thanks, appreciation and good wishes to Manca and the Eoan Group, many indicating that no consistent or quality opera production was available in their own cities. During the tour Eoan visited Port Elizabeth, Durban and Johannesburg, presenting the programme performed during their March Opera Season in Cape Town (four operas as well as two short ballets).<sup>73</sup> Manca reported in customary superlatives: 'The tour lasted for three months from June to September where the Eoan Group played to absolute capacity houses, making a deep impression on the citizens of these cities. People queued night and day and houses were sold out long before the seasons opened thus proving that South Africa is an opera loving country'.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> See folders on Eoan's 1960 tour to Port Elizabeth, Durban and Johannesburg. Eoan Archive, box 31, folders 209-211.

<sup>72</sup> Early in 1960 Manca visited all three cities to investigate the feasibility of a tour and to meet with people who could help with arrangements. He also travelled to Rhodesia and met with several people with the view to extend the tour there, but due to high costs, heavy demands on the Group's time and the lack of a Coloured community who could support Eoan with accommodation in that country, the plans were dropped. See Eoan Archive, box 32, folder 216.

<sup>73</sup> The cost to undertake the tour totaled R 58 000. Joseph Manca, *Eoan Group, 1962 Arts Festival and future Activities*, p. 5, no date given but presumably written in 1961. Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 436. See also Minutes of the 32<sup>nd</sup> AGM held on 29 September 1966. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>74</sup> Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan's activities from 1933-1968*, p. 9. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

In Port Elizabeth Eoan presented fourteen performances in the Feather Market Hall, which had a capacity of 1496 seats.<sup>75</sup> The season coincided with Port Elizabeth's Centenary Celebrations and Eoan's visit was organized with the help of the Council of Coloured Women. Signs of resistance from anti-Apartheid organizations during this time are absent from the archive.<sup>76</sup> The only recorded protest came from the Port Elizabeth branch of the Coloured Teachers' Organization who decided to boycott the town's Centenary Festival and requested that Eoan cancel their performances in protest against government policies.<sup>77</sup> Documentation in the Eoan Archive suggests that at this stage a fair degree of freedom of movement for Coloured people was still possible in South Africa. There are, for example, no documents in the archive pertaining to the obtaining of permits to perform in the Feather Market Hall or regarding accommodation of the performers.<sup>78</sup>

In Durban Eoan presented another fourteen performances in the Durban City Hall. All performances were well attended, although the support from the Coloured community was 'somewhat disappointing'.<sup>79</sup> It is clear from the archive that already in 1960, Eoan's principal tenor, Joseph Gabriels, had a professional reputation stretching far beyond the Cape Province. The Natal Department of Music and Entertainment was not easily convinced that Gabriels was still working as a store assistant and therefore regarded as an amateur, exempt from the tax the province levied on income produced by entertainment.<sup>80</sup> In both Port Elizabeth and Durban mixed audiences were freely admitted to the venues. The reviews were generous, although not without criticism. *The Natal Mercury* reported on 30 July:

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<sup>75</sup> See letter from the Port Elizabeth Council for Coloured Women to Manca, 21 March 1960. Eoan Archive, box 31, folder 209.

<sup>76</sup> It can be assumed that those who did not want to associate with Eoan had left the organization and did not bother to communicate with them. It is also possible that Manca stopped recording any signs of resistance in his administration.

<sup>77</sup> No author, 'Coloured boycott decision', no date, no name of newspaper. Eoan Archive, box 31, folder 209.

<sup>78</sup> Five years later, during Eoan's 1965 tour, the situation in Port Elizabeth was entirely different. Due to Apartheid legislation freedom of movement for Coloureds was markedly curtailed, causing many problems for the group.

<sup>79</sup> Press statement during Eoan's tour in Johannesburg. No author, no date. Eoan Archive, box 31, folder 211.

<sup>80</sup> Letter from the Provincial Accountant Natal, 11 January 1961. Eoan Archive, box 40, folder 321.



The Eoan Opera Group took a packed City Hall by storm last night with a brilliant production of Puccini's inspiring tragedy, *La Boheme*. It was a magnificent experience and every South African, regardless of colour, can be justifiably proud of this company. Joseph Gabriels (tenor) as the romantic poet Rodolfo let himself go with a soaring and rich, vibrant voice. I heard him in Cape Town earlier this year and last year in the same season of operas but I cannot recall a more outstanding performance. Further training should put him among some of the best that the opera world can produce.<sup>81</sup>

Three days later, the same critic continued:

Seldom has a Durban audience responded so enthusiastically and warmly to a performance as it did last night at the close of the Eoan Group's production of *Rigoletto*. Loud and prolonged, the applause seemed almost deafening at times when any of the principals took their curtain calls.

After an unfortunately indifferent start in Act 1, the company soon rallied, but it was not until the magnificent final act that it reached its peak.

This act was brilliant from any point, but nothing touched such great heights as the singing. This was the Eoan Group at its best.<sup>82</sup>

Success during Eoan's season in Johannesburg was unsurpassed. Arriving in mid-August, their seventeen performances were sold out. Due to public demand, it was decided to extend the season with three weeks. This added another 27 performances to their schedule and the group performed every evening from Monday to Saturday with three additional matinees per week.<sup>83</sup> The performances were held in the University Great Hall and the Alexander Theatre. Again, all race groups were allowed to attend the performances, although for the Alexander Theatre this was an exception to the rule.<sup>84</sup> Keeping in mind that all participants on this tour took unpaid leave from their daytime jobs, were not paid for their performances and only received compensation for lost wages, the achievement of presenting 72 performances in three months at an apparently high artistic level is truly astonishing.

Shortly after the tour, Lionel Fourie, the baritone who sang the role of Rigoletto during that year, passed away at the age of 38. With his passing one of Eoan's legendary stories

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<sup>81</sup> Author's acronym: T.R.W, 'Eoan Group's "La Boheme" takes Durban by storm', *The Natal Mercury*, 30 July 1960. Eoan Archive, box 30, folder 208.

<sup>82</sup> Author's acronym: T.R.W, 'Eoan Cast's "Rigoletto" Delights Audience', *The Natal Mercury*, 2 August 1960. Eoan Archive, box 30, folder 208.

<sup>83</sup> Programme schedule for the Johannesburg season. Eoan Archive, box 31, folder 211.

<sup>84</sup> Press statement during Eoan's tour in Johannesburg. No author, no date. Eoan Archive, box 31, folder 211.

was born. According to a number of singers, Fourie had vowed that no one would sing *Rigoletto* after him, his exact words being ‘nobody will wear my cloak’.<sup>85</sup> It is interesting that Eoan indeed struggled to perform *Rigoletto* again. In 1968 the annual opera season which included this opera, was cancelled due to illness of many singers and insufficient preparation of the group.<sup>86</sup> In 1969 Eoan’s production of *Rigoletto* was cancelled shortly before the beginning of the season when their principal bass, Robert Trousell, died unexpectedly and it was only in 1972 that the group managed to perform this opera again.<sup>87</sup>

## 1961

The Union of South Africa becomes a Republic.

In April 1961 Mimi Coertse visits South Africa to perform in the South African Federation for Opera’s production of *La Traviata*, a work with which Eoan made a name for themselves in the local opera scene five years earlier and which they still performed annually.<sup>88</sup>

## 2.4 The Second Arts Festival of 1962

During 1961 Eoan’s music section started using premises on the third floor in Delta House in Bree Street, Cape Town as rehearsal and office space.<sup>89</sup> Not only was the space limited

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<sup>85</sup> This was confirmed to the present writer in conversations with Peter Voges, Ronald Theys as well as Lionel Fourie’s widow, Ruth, in Cape Town on 22 October 2008.

<sup>86</sup> Letter by Ismail Sydow to the Town Clerk Mr Jan Luyt, 25 September 1968. Eoan Archive, box 34, folder 233.

<sup>87</sup> According to singer Patricia van Graan, Lionel Fourie’s cloak was officially burnt before they performed the opera again. Interview with Patricia van Graan on 19 November 2008.

<sup>88</sup> Her singing was described as follows: ‘Mimi’s voice was brilliant – tender, sparkling, flexible, rich, pure in cantilena, with a fine vibrato in dramatic moments. She held the stage like a true prima donna. She has never looked lovelier.’ Dora Sowden. ‘Dora Sowden at the opera’, *Sunday Times*, 30 April 1961. Eoan Archive, box 33, folder 224.

<sup>89</sup> Opera Chorus Rehearsal list, February 1965, EOAN Archive, box 3, folder 14.

in the Ochberg Hall, the area was also deemed unsafe.<sup>90</sup> In accordance with the Group Areas Act of 1957, Eoan, as a Coloured organization, had to apply for a permit to use this space in a White area. The permit was granted on 24 April 1961 and the Eoan Music section used these premises until 1969 when they moved to the Joseph Stone Auditorium in Athlone.<sup>91</sup>

In order to prepare for the Second Arts Festival planned for 1962, no public performances were held during 1961. Manca was very ambitious (as usual), and at this stage he not only prepared for the festival, but already started to plan a second tour of the country for 1963, this time including visits to the then Rhodesia and South West Africa. He also planned an extended tour of Europe and England where he wanted Eoan to take part in the Commonwealth Arts Festival in Britain in 1964.<sup>92</sup> In appealing for financial assistance for the planned activities, Manca wrote as follows:

Some idea of costs can be gauged when it is realized that the 1960 Tour of the Union cost approximately £ 29,000 (R58,000). There are few cultural organizations which can, out of their own resources, finance such costly ventures ... It is felt that South Africa could have no better 'show window' than by presenting the Eoan Group in Europe and Great Britain, thus showing to what extent South Africa has culturally progressed. Its very appearance would silence the many critics of South Africa and have much more propaganda value than the publication of thousands of magazines and pamphlets. The South African government should not lose this opportunity of sponsoring the Eoan Group and making possible its overseas visit, and an appeal is made to the authority, to South African Commerce and Industry and to the Government itself to see that the Eoan Group's ambition to tour overseas is made a reality.<sup>93</sup>

From the above it is clear that Manca was convinced that a tour abroad would not be possible without substantial funding. Whether he used words such as 'propaganda value' as a ploy to cajole those in power into funding Eoan, or really believed in these ideas, is open to question. Phrases like 'culturally progressed' cohere with his consistently expressed ideals, making it likely that at least on this matter he was being entirely candid.

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<sup>90</sup> See letter to Mrs Bertha Epstein (daughter of Mr Isaac Ochberg) dated 31 October 1962. The Ochberg Hall was still used for other Eoan activities until the organization was forced out of District Six in the late 1960s. Eoan Archive, box 32, folder 221.

<sup>91</sup> See permit issued by the Department of the Interior, dated 24 April 1961. Dr I.D. du Plessis was apparently instrumental in having this permit approved. See letter of thanks from Manca to Du Plessis, dated 3 May 1961. Eoan Archive, box 32, folder 219.

<sup>92</sup> Joseph Manca, *Eoan Group, 1962 Arts Festival and future Activities*, pp. 1-2, no date given, presumably written in 1961. Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 436.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

However, he did seem to be aware that the government's funding largesse was more easily mobilized for projects with propaganda value rather than the cause itself and that the government would sponsor Eoan for its propaganda value to the outside world rather than for the sake of opera production or the upliftment of the Coloured community.

Although Eoan was at this time not receiving funding from the Department of Coloured Affairs, the debate on government funding for their cultural activities and the political compromises that this entailed must have been on-going in the Eoan Group. In March 1961 issues such as segregated audiences, government funding as well as 'art above politics' were discussed in the newspapers of the day. Manca filed these newspaper cuttings in Eoan's 1961 papers. Because these issues were of vital importance in the eventual demise of Eoan's opera activities in the late 1970s, and serve to give some insight into the severity of the debate confronting Eoan at the time, it is worth while citing from two of these articles:

#### **Actors and Apartheid**

The cruel dilemma in which opponents of segregation find themselves is whether to accept the benefits of segregated institutions or to reject them on stern principle.

We can understand and sympathize with the cultural non-White whose aversion to apartheid is so strong that he cannot bring himself to attend segregated performances. He must follow the dictates of his conscience, and should be respected for doing so. But there is a broader view which compels even greater respect – the view that the liberating power of culture can exert itself even in a segregated audience, and that the sense of human brotherhood can be communicated even in a building which denies it.<sup>94</sup>

#### **Conflict on Theatre Apartheid**

The whole question of segregated audiences is one of inconsistencies and contradictions. On the one hand Europeans apparently are determined in their opposition to mixed audiences at shows, and a benevolent Government is only too happy to legislate supporting this opposition. Yet one finds these same Europeans perfectly happy, attending very mixed performances of productions staged by such prominent non-White theatre groups as Drama Centre and the Eoan Group.

On the other hand, non-Whites violently opposed to segregated performances also appear guilty of muddled thinking. It is an accepted fact that separate cinemas cater exclusively for non-Whites. They wait patiently for big film screenings in these exclusively non-White cinemas. Nobody seems to protest. [...]

But hasn't the time arrived for White South Africans to remove the blinkers from their eyes and face facts? Let the European look round him in his daily life. There can never be apartheid. The lives of everybody in this land are so interwoven that in spite of the fanatical efforts of legislators, the scourge of apartheid must finally break down.

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<sup>94</sup> No author, 'Actors and Apartheid' as published in the *Cape Times*, 2 March 1961. Eoan Archive, box 32, folder 219.

Meanwhile time is running out for the non-White, too. Is it necessary for him, on a stand of principle, to cut himself off from everything artistic and educational just because he can't sit next to some White person?<sup>95</sup>

Eoan's Second Arts Festival was held in co-operation with the Peninsula Round Table. From the start of the preparations until all organizational matters had been dealt with afterwards, all correspondence was typed on a letterhead stating 'EOAN Group – Peninsula Round Table Arts Festival 1962', including both organizations' logos and directors. Although the Round Table did not present or take part in any of the productions, they played a financial and organizational supporting role and it was clear that this was a racially mixed initiative.<sup>96</sup>

The festival productions were spread over several months, starting with opera in March and ending with a musical in November. The opera season opened with Giacomo Puccini's *Madam Butterfly*,<sup>97</sup> included the group's existing repertoire of *La Traviata* and *La Bohème* and was augmented with Johann Strauss's operetta *Die Fledermaus*.<sup>98</sup> Eoan produced a drama in April, a children's operetta in July and performed Verdi's *Requiem* in August.<sup>99</sup> In September 1962 Eoan also presented a new ballet, *The Square*, composed for Eoan by the South African composer Stanley Glasser and choreographed by David Poole.<sup>100</sup> The story was a depiction of gang life in District Six and the principal role was again danced by Johaar Mosaval.<sup>101</sup> Manca, quite rightly, claimed another 'first' for Eoan as this was the first complete full-length indigenous ballet composed by a local composer for a local ballet group in South Africa. It is during this time that the composer Stanley Glasser ran into trouble with Apartheid legislation in an event which caused him to flee South Africa. Glasser had an affair with an Eoan singer, Maud Damons, who sang a vocal part in the orchestral score of *The Square*. Having been caught *in flagrante* by a police officer near

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<sup>95</sup> No author, 'Conflict on Theatre Apartheid' as published in the *Cape Times*, 9 March 1961. Eoan Archive, box 32, folder 219.

<sup>96</sup> The directors mentioned are H.G. Ashworth (for Eoan), Joseph Manca (Festival Director) and E. de Klerk (Peninsula Round Table Chairman). The two organizations held weekly meetings during the months preceding the festival. See minutes in Eoan Archive, box 82, folder 634.

<sup>97</sup> Press Release to 1965 Eoan Opera Season. Eoan Archive, box 2, folder 9.

<sup>98</sup> Eoan's first non-Italian production.

<sup>99</sup> Rehearsal and performance schedule for the 1962 Arts Festival. Eoan Archive, box 33, folder 223.

<sup>100</sup> Joseph Manca, 'Eoan Group' in *SAME*, ed. J.P. Malan, Volume 2, pp. 26-29.

<sup>101</sup> Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan's activities from 1933-1968*, p. 12. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

Rhodes Memorial in Cape Town some months after the production, the couple was allegedly arrested on contravening the Immorality Act of 1950.<sup>102</sup> After being released on bail, Glasser and Damons, allegedly crossed the border to Botswana and fled to the United Kingdom via Tanzania.<sup>103</sup> According to Peter Voges, an Eoan ballet dancer who took part in *The Square*, the affair was ‘an open secret’, everybody in the group knew about it but nobody discussed it openly.<sup>104</sup> In London Glasser settled as a lecturer in music. The incident is important because it illustrates, on a level other than funding or administration, how the inevitable inter-racial personal relationships resulting from Eoan performances were conducted in adherence to Apartheid legislative demands and not challenged. Where Apartheid norms were flouted, the consequences were dire.

After the festival the ballet department became dormant for some years.<sup>105</sup> During the 1966 Annual General Meeting this issue was discussed and Manca supplied, amongst others, the following reasons for this development:

The Eoan Group could not afford to pay many Ballet Teachers. Also, there was no ‘professional career’ open to our dancers. Many who were qualified had to enter industry and commerce for a living and so were ‘lost’ to the Group. This was a ‘tragedy’ and for this reason, the Group did not have a regular ‘corps di ballet’.<sup>106</sup>

During the festival Eoan also held a performance of *La Traviata* in the Stellenbosch Town Hall. Yet again Manca claimed a ‘first’ for Eoan, stating that this was the first opera held in this venue for a mixed audience. He wrote: ‘although we appeared before a mixed audience in Stellenbosch, it must be noted that separate seating was allocated to the two races – a feature which caused no friction and which greatly encouraged the Eoan Group in

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<sup>102</sup> The Immorality Act of 1950 forbade sexual relations between members of the white and non-white races.

<sup>103</sup> A photo of Glasser and Damons in their hotel in Dar es Salaam has been published on the internet and can be viewed on <http://www.jamd.com/image/#g3364712>. The caption to the photo reads as follows: ‘Lovers Flee. 19th February 1963: University lecturer, Stanley Glasser and jazz singer, Maud Damons, on the balcony of their hotel in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. They have just arrived after fleeing from South Africa, where they were charged under the immorality act, which forbids sexual relations between members of different races.’

<sup>104</sup> Although the information on this incident existed as gossip for many years, it was confirmed by the journalist Michael Green who related it in his book *Around and About* (2004, p. 52). Green erroneously connects the incident to the production of the musical *King Kong*. The information presented here was confirmed to the present writer in a personal conversation with Peter Voges on 22 October 2008, in Cape Town.

<sup>105</sup> Minutes of the 32<sup>nd</sup> AGM held on 29 September 1966, p. 3. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

its efforts to bring opera to all members of our country. Another milestone was passed [as] this was the first time a mixed audience was allowed on the same night and in the same hall. The Eoan Group thanks Stellenbosch.<sup>107</sup>

### 1963

The National Performing Arts Councils are established, securing state funding and professional careers for White artists only.

In 1963 Manca was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Music from the University of Cape Town<sup>108</sup> ‘in recognition of his work for the cultural progress and uplift of the Coloured Community’.<sup>109</sup> Manca had now been with Eoan for 20 years. During this year he also started planning on a big scale for the 1965 Opera and Ballet Season, including plans to tour to Europe and the USA. In a letter to David Tidboald, at the time director of the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra, Manca wrote that Eoan planned to produce at least seven operas and two ballets, asking to book the Municipal Orchestra for Eoan’s opera season from 22 February to 10 March 1965. He also mentioned that he was to travel to the USA in February 1963 ‘on a lecture and study tour of America and Europe as an “exchange” on a Grant given me by the United States-South Africa Leader Exchange Program’.<sup>110</sup> During his time in the USA he planned to ‘contact various internationally famous American Negro Opera Stars and Artists to visit South Africa and appear as Guest Artists in the Eoan Group Opera and Ballet Season in March 1965’.<sup>111</sup> However, his efforts were apparently unsuccessful. The only document found in the archive relating to this initiative is a letter from Mr. Inia Te Wiata, a UK based bass, who wrote in an obviously evasive manner that

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<sup>107</sup> Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan’s activities from 1933-1968*, p. 13. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c

<sup>108</sup> J.P. Malan, ‘Manca, Joseph Salvatore’ in *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 192-4.

<sup>109</sup> Manca’s own description in the Press Release to the 1965 EOAN Opera Season, Eoan Archive, box 2, folder 9. All correspondence from 1963 onwards consistently mentions Manca’s name with his title.

<sup>110</sup> Letter from Joseph Manca to David Tidboald, the then Director of the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra, 24 January 1963. Eoan Archive, box 3, folder 23.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

he could not see which Verdi roles he could sing with Eoan.<sup>112</sup> The drama Section of Eoan also presented an indigenous play, *Behind the Yellow Door*, by the South African playwright Flora Stohr during this year. The play dealt with the life of a Coloured family in Athlone and was performed in the Little Theatre in Cape Town.<sup>113</sup>

## 1964

Nelson Mandela is sentenced to life imprisonment.

Thousands of people classified as 'Coloureds' are forcibly removed in terms of the Group Areas Act.<sup>114</sup>

## 2.5 The Eoan Group Trust

In order to prepare for the 1965 Opera and Ballet season, no productions were held in 1964.<sup>115</sup> With regard to Eoan's operational structure, however, an important change took place. Due to the excessive burden of the group's financial challenges, the Eoan Group Trust was launched as a separate entity to the Eoan Group with the aim to raise funds for Eoan's activities.<sup>116</sup> The trust consisted of important and seemingly financially well-to-do citizens who supported the group. Among the Trust members was the lawyer, theatre producer and future mayor of Cape Town, David Bloomberg and later also Dr. I.D. du Plessis of the Department of Coloured Affairs.<sup>117</sup> Although Eoan had been financially

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<sup>112</sup> Correspondence between Manca and Te Wiata, February 1964, Eoan Archive, box 3, folder 23.

<sup>113</sup> Joseph Manca. *Historical overview of Eoan's activities from 1933-1968*, p. 14. This play was again presented by Eoan in 1986 in the Nico Malan Theatre. See reviews of the later performance in Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.districtsix.co.za/frames.htm>, accessed 3 May 2008.

<sup>115</sup> Letter from Joseph Manca to David Tidboald, 24 January 1963. Eoan Archive, box 3, folder 23.

<sup>116</sup> Minutes of the 32<sup>nd</sup> AGM held on 29 September 1966, p. 5, Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>117</sup> The Eoan Group Trust members as stated on their letterhead were: C.S. Corder, David Bloomberg, D.R. D'Ewes, W. Gradner, G.K. Lindsay, P. Morkel, Mrs. J. Newton Thompson, J.J. Piek, F.C. Robb, R. Sonnenberg, Prof. W.H. van der Merwe, Louis Charles Vivian Walker and Dr. I.D. du Plessis. See letter from the Eoan Group Trust to Manca, 6 May 1966. Eoan Archive, box 33, folder 231. The minutes of the Eoan Group Trust meeting held on 22 January 1965, also mention William Murray Bisset (secretary), Harold Lister Kennedy and Eric Richard Liefeldt. Eoan Archive, box 33, folder 231. At the time of writing this chapter, the archive of the Eoan



self-reliant since 1957 (except for the annual grant of R 2 000 received from the Municipality of Cape Town), the impossibility of trying to produce opera and fulfill its mission of cultural upliftment in the Coloured community without substantial financial support became increasingly clear. The Eoan Archive holds limited documents regarding the exact nature of the Trust, but it can be deduced from various other letters that various affluent supporters of the group deposited money into a bank account of which the interest was directed towards a financial guarantee for the Group.<sup>118</sup> In a speech held at the Trust's inauguration, the Chairman of the Eoan Group, Ismail Sydow, set out the many problems the group had to deal with.

Up till now, the Eoan Group managed to keep its head above water in so far that the Music Section has provided the main income and so financed the non-revenue producing sections. However, there is, in the world, no Welfare, Educational and Cultural organization which is completely self-supporting and not in need of subsidies. Particularly is this so in the field of opera. All over the world, opera is heavily subsidized by governments, municipalities, industries, commerce, private organizations and persons and by specially established guilds. Therefore, it is a miracle that the Eoan Group has not only been able to carry on but also achieve the already well known and excellent results.<sup>119</sup>

The logistic limitations and difficulties for Eoan members and productions teams, mostly due to Apartheid, were summed up as follows by Sydow:

- Inadequate preparation and rehearsal time, resulting in retarding normal advancement.
- No avenues for professional careers for the talented artists, thereby exposing them to exploitation by unscrupulous promoters and impresarios.
- Heavy demands on the members' private financial resources – often the cause of absenteeism from classes and rehearsals due to lack of money to pay for transport.
- Great physical strain being placed on members due to not being able to go home and relax before coming to rehearsals because of long distances they have to travel.<sup>120</sup>

It was also clear that the group believed that they could stay clear of politics. Sydow confirmed during this speech that, according to their constitution, 'the Eoan Group has

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Group Trust was not yet available for research. Some documents of the Trust were donated to DOMUS in September 2010.

<sup>118</sup> The Trust also functioned as a guarantor for the Group's bank overdraft, with the result that whenever Eoan's cash flow trailed into the overdraft, money from the Trust was temporarily deposited into the Group's account until new income was generated. However, the funds in the Trust never generated much interest. This was also partly due to the Group's frequent use of their overdraft. See correspondence from the Trust to the Group in the Eoan Archive, box 11, folder 75.

<sup>119</sup> Ismail Sydow, *Statement by Chairman: Mr I. Sydow on establishment and acceptance of Eoan Group Trust*, p. 1. Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 439.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

always been and is completely NON-POLITICAL. Our activities are purely concerned with welfare work and our aim is for the cultural development, uplift and progress of our people.’<sup>121</sup> As documents presented in this chapter thus far testify, this was a position clearly at odds with political and social realities in Cape Town at the time. However, within the Eoan Group this position seemed to be endorsed partly as a declaration of loyalty to Manca. The tribute to Manca with which Sydow concluded his acceptance speech was indicative of the admiration and love with which Manca was viewed by the members of the group:

Last but not least on behalf of the Eoan Group and the whole Coloured Community, I take this opportunity of paying a very special tribute and offering our most grateful and heartfelt thanks to a man of faith, vision, determination, indomitable courage and humility – I refer to our beloved Hon. Musical Director, DR JOSEPH MANCA.

For over twenty-one years, Dr. Manca has unselfishly devoted all his available time and efforts to the welfare and cultural progress of my people. He has stood firm as a rock against all antagonisms, all prejudices and attacks, and his boundless devotion to his self-imposed and voluntary labours has been and still is a shining example to all our members.

No sacrifice is too much for him, no request or demand has been refused. He has not cared for his family, his children nor has he spared himself both spiritually and physically on behalf of the Group.

His guidance, his love of humanity, his deep understanding of the problems of my people, his outstanding administrative abilities and his artistic and cultural contribution, have been the major factor in bringing into world prominence the achievements of the Coloured People in the sphere of art.

His faith in the ability and talents of my people has been a perpetual source of inspiration to many aspiring artists, and to all those who came into contact with him. This dedicated man has often publicly defined his labour of love as a ‘Mission in Music’. I unhesitatingly say that this is true in every sense and that the field of his mission is universal but the temple of his artistic worship is the Eoan Group.

It is my dearest wish that God may spare him for years to come and that it soon will be made possible for Dr. Manca to devote his time fully to the Eoan Group.<sup>122</sup>

A ringing tribute, it also reflects much of Manca’s character and his motivation. It is clear that Manca approached his work with Eoan with missionary zeal, indicative of the personal sacrifices he was willing to make and the sacrifices he consciously drove Eoan to make in order to achieve his goals. But applying the term ‘missionary zeal’ of course immediately complicates Manca’s endeavours, as colonial missionary work never could be ideologically neutral or disinterested in power relations between the European minister and the African converted. And yet, this cannot discount the possibility of agency in those

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

being proselytised. On a personal level, it is also unclear what Manca's goals really were. Was he working towards uplifting the Coloured people or living out the dream that he, as an amateur musician and an accountant, could present Cape Town with grand opera? Perhaps it was various degrees of both? Time and again during the historical narrative of Eoan's existence, one is faced with uncomfortable questions about Manca's political consciousness: did he choose to be naïve, was he politically ignorant, did he actually believe that the Apartheid model of separate development was a plausible option? Or was cultivating Eoan's cultural successes for him a kind of resistance to an unjust system? From conversations with various artists, it appears that Manca was extremely possessive of his position and influence as cultural director of the Eoan Group. According to Peter Voges and Tillie Ulster, both ex-Eoan members, Manca apparently insisted on conducting all performances himself to the expense of better qualified conductors from the group itself. Dan Ulster, for instance, the first Coloured person to obtain a degree in music from the University of Cape Town during the 1940s, had studied conducting with Enrique Jorda<sup>123</sup> and is reputed to have been an excellent conductor. Both Voges and Ulster's wife, Tillie, confirmed that Manca always sidelined Dan Ulster and never allowed him to conduct the orchestra. Ulster eventually left the organization and launched his own orchestra.<sup>124</sup>

## **2.6 Eoan's Sixth Opera Season and their Second Tour of the country in 1965**

1965 was an exceptionally active year for Eoan's Opera section. Not only did they present their annual opera season in March and April (this time it was their sixth and the season consisted of four operas), but they also embarked on a three month tour of the country from June to August, travelling to Johannesburg, Durban, East London and Port Elizabeth. During the tour they give a total of 49 performances.

During the March season in Cape Town Eoan performed two operas from their existing repertoire: Verdi's *La Traviata* and Puccini's *La Bohème*. They also added two new

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<sup>123</sup> Jorda was conductor of the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra from 1947 to 1954. J.P. Malan, 'The Cape Town Municipal Orchestra', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 252-3.

<sup>124</sup> Personal conversation with Tillie Ulster and Peter Voges in Cape Town, 22 October 2008.

productions, Verdi's *Il Trovatore* (with which they opened the season) and Donizetti's *L'Elisire D'Amore*, all produced by Allesandro Rota.<sup>125</sup> The season ran from 18 March until 17 April, comprising 31 performances: one every weekday evening, two on Saturdays and a rest day on Sundays.<sup>126</sup> Manca wrote in a press release:

The operas will be once more sung in the Italian language and produced and presented in the Italian tradition. Here again, the immense talents and versatility of our Coloured people come to the fore. It is almost incredible that here are artists who have never seen Italian Opera, have a limited or no knowledge of music, have not had vocal training and cannot speak the Italian language and yet are able to perform opera of a high standard.<sup>127</sup> Each major principal can sing at least two roles and in some cases three or four. [...] This is no mean feat when one realises the time at the disposal of these artists who all have full-time occupations and can only devote themselves to music in their leisure hours.<sup>128</sup>

Manca's ambitions also appeared as high as ever:

This is indeed an ambitious programme equal to seasons presented by the more famous Opera Houses in Europe. Nevertheless, the Eoan Group is proud to bring to Cape Town these very popular operas which are some of the favourites of most opera lovers. The Eoan Group hopes to establish an Annual Opera Season thus making it one of the features of Cape Town's cultural life at the same time providing a long-felt amenity in addition to an attraction for holiday visitors and tourists.<sup>129</sup>

As usual, many letters expressing appreciation were received from the public. Erik Chisholm, Dean of the College of Music and also an avid opera composer and producer, wrote to Joseph Manca on 19 May 1965:

Dear Dr. Manca,  
I should have dropped you a line much earlier than this to tell you how much my wife and I enjoyed your thrilling performance at the opening night of *Il Trovatore*.  
I thought the whole performance a triumph. My sincerest congratulations for the wonderful opera season you and Eoan group have just completed: I cannot begin to tell you how much I admire your courage and achievements.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Minutes of the 32<sup>nd</sup> AGM held on 29 September 1966, pp. 3-4. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>126</sup> Cape Town Municipal Orchestra Call Sheet March 1965. Eoan Archive, box 33, folder 228.

<sup>127</sup> Press Release to The 1965 Eoan Opera Season, p. 4. Eoan Archive, box 2, folder 9.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>130</sup> Letter from Erik Chisholm to Manca, 19 May 1965. Eoan Archive, box 3, folder 23. At the bottom of the page Chisholm added by hand to this otherwise typed letter: 'As for CAPAB....??', indicating that in Chisholm's opinion Eoan competed well, if not better, with CAPAB as far as opera production was concerned. The tone of the letter is indicative of Chisholm's socialist convictions and that he admired Manca for bringing opera by the working class to the working class. Although the admiration he speaks of might have been on the political level rather than the

A letter from a Coloured lady, Mrs. R. Smith, stated that ‘the overwhelming success of the show made up for the hurt that filled me towards those who cannot accept us as part of the human race.’<sup>131</sup> At the very least these fragments of reception indicate that Eoan’s activities were marked by a deep ambivalence between collaboration and agency, represented by sources of funding and Coloured opera stars respectively.

The young and very talented Eoan member, Gordon Jephtas, was prominently involved in training and rehearsing the group.<sup>132</sup> His role during the season and the upcoming tour was that of repetiteur, accompanist and stage conductor, the only non-white person to play this role during this stage of Eoan’s history.<sup>133</sup> In rehearsal schedules Manca gave him the title ‘Meastro Gordon’ (he was 22 at the time) and allowed Jephtas the freedom to rehearse with the group whatever section of the music he felt needed attention. This gifted pianist had been sponsored by the Eoan Group to study music at the College of Music at the University of Cape Town.<sup>134</sup> Manca was particularly fond of Jephtas and often referred to him as ‘God’s gift to Eoan.’<sup>135</sup>

Eoan’s Second Opera Tour through the Republic of South Africa was undertaken from June to August 1965, visiting Johannesburg, Durban, East London and Port Elizabeth.<sup>136</sup> The programme for the tour included the operas presented during the opera season in Cape Town, as well as a new addition to Eoan’s repertoire, Bizet’s *Carmen*.<sup>137</sup> Many arrangements could not be finalized before their departure from Cape Town and from the

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musical level, it is also clear that there was little professional rivalry between the two men. Chisholm passed away on 8 June 1965.

<sup>131</sup> Letter from Mrs. R. Smith to Manca, 20 March 1965. Eoan Archive, box 2, folder 9.

<sup>132</sup> See rehearsal schedules for the 1965 Opera Season in the Eoan Archive, box 3, folder 17.

<sup>133</sup> Joseph Manca, *Advance Publicity 1965 Opera Tour, Johannesburg Season*, no date, p. 6. Eoan Archive, box 83, folder 646a.

<sup>134</sup> No author, ‘Uitdaging het Jephtas gelok’ *Die Burger*, 2 April 1986.

<http://152.111.1.251/argief/berigte/dieburger/1986/04/02/2/10.html>, accessed 9 May 2008. See also Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan’s activities from 1933-1968*, p. 24. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

<sup>135</sup> No author. ‘Hulde aan ‘n vriend’, *Die Burger*, 11 November 1992.

<http://152.111.1.251/argief/berigte/dieburger/1992/07/11/13/6.html>, accessed 8 May 2008. The Eoan Archive holds a striking picture of Manca and Jephtas at the piano during rehearsal. Eoan Archive, box 34, folder 324. More evidence of Manca’s high opinion of Jephtas can be seen in correspondence between Ismail Sydow and Manca in the Eoan archive, box 86, folder 686.

<sup>136</sup> Joseph Manca. *Historical overview of Eoan’s activities from 1933-1968*, p. 24. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

<sup>137</sup> Joseph Manca, *Advance Publicity* for the 1965 Opera Tour. Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 437.

start the tour was beset with problems. The degree to which Apartheid legislation restricted the group's freedom of movement had increased substantially since their first tour in 1960, resulting in many logistical problems. On arriving in Johannesburg they faced one of the coldest winter seasons experienced in years in the city. Apart from the effect of the high altitude and dry winter, the company was affected by serious attacks of flu and colds. Their male principal tenor, Joseph Gabriels, suffered from laryngitis during most of the tour. Since he had a national reputation, a number of concert goers wrote letters to Manca expressing their disappointment at missing the opportunity to hear Gabriels.<sup>138</sup> The Johannesburg season was held at the Civic Theatre and Eoan had to apply for permits to be able to perform as Coloured people in a hall designated for Whites. Eoan was informed that although they were allowed to perform in that venue, a permit allowing two concerts in front of a Coloured public in the same venue was refused. Eoan's letter of appeal was dismissed and the government's message read as follows:

I have to advise you that the Honourable the Minister of Community Development has upheld the decision ... to refuse the issue of a permit authorizing the General Manager [of the] Civic Theatre, Johannesburg, to allow members of the Coloured, Indian and Chinese race groups to attend the opera performances in the Civic Theatre on the 17<sup>th</sup> June and 1<sup>st</sup> July 1965. The Minister has intimated that the Coronationville Hall in the Coloured Group area of Coronationville may be used for the purpose contemplated.<sup>139</sup>

Eoan eventually presented one performance in Coronationville on 5 July.<sup>140</sup>

Manca's original plan was to extend the tour to Rhodesia and Mozambique after completing the performances in Port Elizabeth by the end of August<sup>141</sup> but, once again, this did not materialize.<sup>142</sup> As late as 23 July 1965, whilst already on tour in Johannesburg, the Department of Home Affairs advised Eoan that passport applications for the whole group would be approved, except for their principal male singer, Joseph Gabriels. No reasons were provided why his application had been turned down.<sup>143</sup> Despite an urgent

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<sup>138</sup> See letters in Eoan Archive, box 83, folder 646a.

<sup>139</sup> Letter from the Department of Community Development, 1 June 1965. Eoan Archive, box 83, folder 646a.

<sup>140</sup> 1965 Eoan Tour Performance Schedule. Eoan Archive, box 83, folder 646a.

<sup>141</sup> Minutes of the 32<sup>nd</sup> AGM held on 29 September 1966, Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 3. See also Documents of financial planning, Eoan Archive, box 3, folder 23.

<sup>142</sup> Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan's activities from 1933-1968*, p. 24. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

<sup>143</sup> Letter from the Department of Home Affairs, 22 July 1965. Eoan Archive, box 83, folder 646b.

appeal to the Secretary of Home Affairs in Pretoria, no favourable answer was received and this leg of the tour was eventually cancelled.<sup>144</sup>

For their performances in Port Elizabeth, Eoan also had to apply for permits to perform in the Opera House and for Coloured people to be able to attend some performances. As late as 7 July, whilst on their way to Durban, Eoan was informed that although their permit had been granted to perform in the Opera House for white audiences, non-white audiences were not allowed 'as the Opera House lacks separate facilities for a non-white audience.'<sup>145</sup> The Department further added that should Eoan 'find a less contentiously situated hall where adequate separate provision for non-white audiences exist, Eoan may submit another application to stage one or more performances by the Group before a non-white (other than Bantu) audience.'<sup>146</sup> The facilities in question were presumably separate entrances and toilets. Knowing that no other venue in Port Elizabeth existed with the necessary facilities to perform opera, this situation posed a particularly difficult problem for the group. Ismail Sydow again wrote an urgent letter of appeal, addressed to the Secretary of Coloured Affairs in Cape Town and stating that:

If there is to be no performance to non-whites (other than Bantu) in Port Elizabeth, the Group's relations with the coloured population of Port Elizabeth are likely to be prejudiced. I would particularly like to point out that there is no suitable hotel accommodation for the cast and I am accordingly obliged to arrange accommodation for 62 non-white members with private families in Port Elizabeth and I very much fear that if I have to advise the coloured population of Port Elizabeth that there will be no performance of any of our operas for them I may not secure the necessary accommodation and will accordingly not be able to perform in Port Elizabeth at all.<sup>147</sup>

In a letter to Murray Bisset (an Eoan Group trustee) Manca wrote: 'When I started out on this tour I was fully aware of the many difficulties and handicaps both Ismail and I would have to face, but it seems that on this occasion they have been more than thousandfold. I have been under constant physical and emotional strain, having no time for myself, working from early morning to midnight every day, yet I must not grumble – this is the way set for me by the Almighty, and I am His humble servant, and must fulfill what He

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<sup>144</sup> Letter to the Secretary of the Interior, 23 July 1965. Eoan Archive, box 83, folder 646b.

<sup>145</sup> Letter from The Department of Community Development, 20 July 1965. Eoan Archive, box 83, folder 646b.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Letter to the Secretary of Coloured Affairs, 23 July 1965. Eoan Archive, box 83, folder 646b.

has ordained for me.’<sup>148</sup> In September 1965 Bisset received a letter from Hymie Udwin, the Theatre International organizer of the tour, stating that ‘Non-European support was negligible. It is not for me to enter into the whys and wherefores of the obvious boycott, but this attitude is surely tragic.’<sup>149</sup>

However, reviews of the tour’s performances were once again positive. Eoan’s production of *Carmen* was criticized, as one critic said it ‘smacked all too coyly of musical comedy rather than Bizet’s fiery portrayal of Espana’.<sup>150</sup> The soprano Winifred du Plessis made her debut as Violetta in *La Traviata* and sang alongside Gerald Samaai as Alfredo. The critic Oliver Walker described her voice in a Johannesburg newspaper as follows: ‘What amazing purity of intonation and certainty of pitch the young Cape Town soprano, Winifred du Plessis, has in the difficult role of Violetta!’.<sup>151</sup> Pieter Serfontein added to this by writing that ‘her mezzo-voce and pianissimo is delightful. Her technique is of such quality that the colour of her voice stays the same in all registers. It is like a silver thread spun throughout her range.’<sup>152</sup> Many other newspaper reviews carried laudatory headlines such as ‘Another outstanding opera’, ‘Triumph for Cape Town Violetta’, ‘A colourful Trovatore’, ‘Eoan at its best in high comedy’, and ‘Il Trovatore gives us a star’.<sup>153</sup>

Judging by the newspaper reviews the tour was an artistic success. Financially, however, it was a disaster and landed the Group in major financial difficulties.<sup>154</sup> The overdraft on Eoan’s bank account by year end amounted to R 34 374. In a later document Manca wrote that ‘regrettably, in spite of the great artistic success of this tour, financially it proved to be a loss – a most inexplicable fact.’<sup>155</sup> As if to soften the blow, he added that:

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<sup>148</sup> Letter from Manca to Bisset, written in Durban, 8 July 1965. Eoan Archive, box 83, folder 646a.

<sup>149</sup> Letter from Udwin to Bisset, 15 September 1965. Eoan Archive, box 83, folder 646a.

<sup>150</sup> Author’s name abbreviated as G.N, ‘Thank you for coming: and for Traviata’, newspaper and date of publication unknown. Eoan Archive, box 93, folder 765.

<sup>151</sup> Oliver Walker. ‘Triumph for Cape Town Violetta’, newspaper and date of publication unknown. Eoan Archive, box 93, folder 765.

<sup>152</sup> Pieter Serfontein, ‘Eoan-groep se La Traviata ’n belewenis’, newspaper and date of publication unknown. Eoan Archive, box 93, folder 765.

<sup>153</sup> Various newspaper reviews in the Eoan Archive, box 93, folder 765.

<sup>154</sup> Letter from the Eoan Group Trust to the Department of Coloured Affairs, 10 December 1965. Eoan Archive, box 33, folder 231.

<sup>155</sup> Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan’s activities from 1933-1968*, p. 24. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.



Until 1965 the Eoan Group has had to finance itself from its own work and it has been and still is a very onerous undertaking to meet the growing financial requirements of an organisation such as the Eoan Group which in addition to being a Cultural Institution is also a welfare organisation. In this respect the Eoan Group is 'unique' and must be, if it is not already, one of the few organisations in the world which can present an annual opera season without financial subsidies. This can only be achieved due to the unselfish dedication of its Directors, Workers, Artists and members.<sup>156</sup>

It is clear from documentation in the archive that it had become impossible to meet the spiraling financial demands of an ambitious and ever growing opera company with the R2000 yearly grant from the City Council. Although the Eoan Group Trust was launched in order to raise funds for Eoan's activities, solid financial support had not yet materialized. The task of obtaining funds was still squarely in the hands of Manca and Sydow. The promised financial support from the community was also non-existent<sup>157</sup> and during a special meeting at the end of 1965 Eoan decided to re-apply for financial assistance from the Department of Coloured Affairs. From 1966 onwards Eoan was granted financial support and in so doing the group became further entangled in an ever tightening political web which, in retrospect, cost them dearly. The group also complied with apartheid regulations and annually applied for a permit to perform their opera season in the City Hall for mixed audiences, submitting to the political compromise they refused to make in 1957.<sup>158</sup> Clause 17 of the conditions for receiving the funds stated the following:

No mixed audience of Europeans and Non-Europeans shall be permitted. The following exposition has been accorded to this clause:-

- i) An audience should be either European or Non-European.
- ii) In special circumstances, an audience could consist of Europeans and non-Europeans, provided:
  - a) a specific section of the seating accommodation in the hall is reserved for Europeans and another section for Non-Europeans.
  - b) The floor of the hall is reserved for the one group and the gallery for the other.
- iii) Where the seating accommodation is arranged in accordance with (ii) (a) or (b) above, separate entrances for the two groups should be provided.
- iv) The conditions apply to any hall irrespective of the ownership thereof.

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

<sup>157</sup> See the Group's decision made in 1957 in the Minutes of the 32<sup>nd</sup> AGM held on 29 September 1966, pp. 4-5, Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 3. Also Minutes of the 33<sup>rd</sup> AGM held on 8 December 1970, p. 6, Eoan Archive, box 2, folder 8.

<sup>158</sup> See for example the permit issued to Eoan for its 1968 Opera Season. Eoan Archive, box 34, folder 233.

- v) Generally a Non-European group may perform to a European audience in a generally accepted European area. Conversely a European group may play to a Non-European audience in a generally accepted Non-European Area. Exemption from this clause may be granted in cases where the Department is satisfied that good reason exists for doing so.
- vi) Prior approval must be obtained for any departure from rules (1) and (5).<sup>159</sup>

## 1966

District Six is declared a white area under the Group areas Act of 1950. Forced removals of the 60 000 inhabitants begin in 1968 and by 1982 all inhabitants had been moved to the Cape Flats and their houses flattened by bulldozers.<sup>160</sup>

South Africa's Prime Minister and architect of Apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd, is assassinated on 6 September 1966.

In 1966 Eoan performed *La Traviata* as part of the Republic Festival in Cape Town, celebrating the fifth anniversary of the Republic of South Africa.<sup>161</sup> Manca described the event as follows:

As its contribution towards the celebration for the 1966 Republic Festival, the Eoan Group presented the Italian Opera *La Traviata* to an invited Non-White audience. This presentation was under the aegis of the Department of Coloured Affairs and the performance was graced with the presence of the Minister for Coloured Affairs, the Hon. Mr. Marais Viljoen who

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<sup>159</sup> Two further conditions in this document are indicative of the threatening tone that the Department of Coloured Affairs afforded itself:

- Clause 18. The Department further reserves the right to impose any other conditions in respect of grants as may in its discretion be deemed necessary.
- Clause 19. These conditions must be placed on the first page of your minute book or any other prominent place in order that it may be read, noticed and observed by office bearers of new office bearers.

See *Conditions on which grants are awarded to voluntary organizations*, p. 3. Eoan Archive, box 33, folder 231.

<sup>160</sup> <http://www.districtsix.co.za/frames.htm>, accessed 3 May 2008. It is interesting to note that in the history of the group as described on the current Eoan webpage, no mention is made of the fact that Eoan ever engaged with opera. The current Eoan website's information indicates that the group was forced out of District Six in 1966 and had to practice in warehouses until the Joseph Stone Auditorium was built for them in 1969. See [www.eoangroup.co.za](http://www.eoangroup.co.za), accessed 27 July 2008. Up to February 2008 the information in the Eoan Archive was inaccessible and the website's version of its history was probably based on other sources.

<sup>161</sup> Joseph Manca, 'Eoan Group' in *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 26-9.

after the performance came back stage and personally thanked the Eoan Group Artists for the magnificent performance.<sup>162</sup>

It is at this point that one cannot but question Manca's seeming disregard for the political situation. The gap between the reality of the political environment and the premises on which Eoan was managed is illustrated in no uncertain terms. Not only did many Eoan members lose their homes when District Six was earmarked for White occupation, Eoan itself had to give up their premises in Hanover Street. Many supporters and members of Eoan had left the organization by this time. The same out-of-touch signal came from the Eoan Group chairman, Mr. Ismail Sydow, when he lamented in his chairman's report of the 1966 Annual General Meeting: 'I now appeal to all our ex-groupers, our foundation members, our dancing girls, drama members and all music and choir members to return to the fold – the Eoan Group is one big family and we rejoice in the return of our prodigal brothers and sisters'.<sup>163</sup> In 1967 Eoan yet again performed *La Traviata* during a 'protocol performance for an audience of Members of Parliament, the Diplomatic and Consular Corps and other distinguished guests'.<sup>164</sup> Manca again explained that:

At the invitation of the Department of Coloured Affairs, the Eoan Group in March 1967 presented at the City Hall, with the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra, the Italian Opera *La Traviata* to a specially invited audience of Members of Parliament, the full Diplomatic and Consular Corps and other distinguished guests. The event proved another great artistic success and brought to the notice of the parliamentarians and members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps the great pioneering work which the Eoan Group is doing for the cultural uplift and progress of the Coloured Community of South Africa.<sup>165</sup>

In May 1967 Ismail and Carmen Sydow travelled to London to visit their daughter Didi.<sup>166</sup> Didi Sydow had been sponsored by the Eoan Group to study ballet in the United Kingdom and, by now, had a professional dancing career with the Royal Ballet. They also met with former Eoan repetiteur Gordon Jephtas who was working in London. During this time Sydow wrote several letters to Manca. From these letters it is clear that one of Sydow's

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<sup>162</sup> Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan's activities from 1933-1968*, p. 24. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

<sup>163</sup> Minutes of the 32<sup>nd</sup> AGM held on 29 September 1966, p. 8. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>164</sup> Joseph Manca, 'Eoan Group' *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 26-29.

<sup>165</sup> Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan's activities from 1933-1968*, p. 25. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

<sup>166</sup> According to former Eoan member, Tillie Ulster, Ismail and Carmen Sydow had no children of their own and Didi was an adopted daughter. They also had an adopted son, Allie, who took part in Eoan's productions as a singer for a short while. Conversation with Tillie Ulster in Cape Town on 22 October 2008. Allie Sydow passed away on 7 October 1972. Eoan Archive, box 9, folder 63.

main objectives for this trip was to convince Jephtas to return to South Africa and join Manca in directing the group. At the time Manca was almost sixty years old and had been training Gordon Jephtas for more than a decade in the hope that he would become Manca's successor as Eoan's Musical Director. It seems that both Manca and Sydow were at this time verbally informed of the proposed Council for Culture and Recreation which was to be created for the Coloured people as an equivalent to the whites-only National Arts Council. It is clear from the correspondence that they anticipated an institution with equal state funding and the possibilities for professional careers for Eoan's singers, a situation for which they would need Jephtas. It is also clear that they thought that a situation like this would be the end of their financial troubles. Sydow reported to Manca that Jephtas had many opportunities in England, was offered a six month position in Cardiff, Wales and was not yet in a position to return home to the Eoan Group.<sup>167</sup> Sydow explained the failed negotiation to Manca as follows:

I told Gordon that he must think very hard and carefully about his future and that if he came home the future will be secured forever and that he will earn the same money but with a better position. He does understand but he feels as long as he is here he can learn a lot more. However, after a long talk with him by Didi, John, Mrs. Sydow and myself the whole of yesterday, he has asked us to give him the chance to go to Cardiff.<sup>168</sup>

When Jephtas's decision not to return to South Africa was final, Sydow wrote to Manca on 29 June 1967:

Dear Brother Yusuf,<sup>169</sup>

I must tell you that everything as far as the Group's future is concerned seems very bright, although one thing did not come out the way I wanted. That is for Gordon to come with me, but God knows best, he alone will give us Gordon at the right time. Gordon is going to be to you what you want him to be to you and the Group. In the meantime for a year we will have to be patient and wait, I assure you that you will have your greatest wish because Gordon will come with a vast knowledge that will bring the Group up to a very high standard. Not that it is not high already, but he will be able to help you to build it so that it will be ready for the Arts Council. Please believe me when I say that you will get everything that you wish for the group, only be patient and let us wait one more year.

Please work hard on the forthcoming opera season and have faith. It is going to be an all round successful season. God wants you to make this last struggle alone so that he can be proud of you and after this God will give you help by giving you young Gordon, fully capable and qualified to carry at least half of your burden.

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<sup>167</sup> It is not clear from the letter what kind of position this was.

<sup>168</sup> Excerpts from correspondence between Sydow and Manca, 5 June 1967. Eoan Archive, box 86, folder 686.

<sup>169</sup> Ismail Sydow was a Muslim, hence the translation of 'Joseph' to 'Yusuf'. Manca was a Roman Catholic.

This is all for now. Once again don't be despondent of anything now and believe and trust that you are one of God's beloved workers and that he will never let you fail. Burst through the darkness and see the bright light that is there. We both have been very successful, we have not failed with anything.<sup>170</sup>

Apart from Manca's obvious need for quality artistic support in his position as Musical Director of Eoan, the letter suggests that Manca had begun to experience the responsibility for Eoan's artistic performances as a heavy burden; the letter even suggests that Manca was nearing the end of his tether.<sup>171</sup> Sydow's other mission during this visit to Europe was, however, successful. He had meetings with the Bernard van Leer Foundation in The Netherlands from whom he was able to secure a donation of R 34 000 towards the building costs for the Joseph Stone Theatre in 1969.<sup>172</sup>

Eoan's Seventh Opera Season was held in September 1967 in the Cape Town City Hall and the programme included Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, Verdi's *La Traviata* as well as Donizetti's *L'Elisir D'Amore*.<sup>173</sup> This was Eoan's first full-scale opera season in more than two years, the previous season having been March 1965. Vera Gow made a triumphant debut as the new star soprano of the group, although reviews also praised the other principal singers such as May Abrahamse, Patricia van Graan, Sophia Andrews and various others.<sup>174</sup> Hans Kramer wrote in the *Cape Times*:

On Saturday night salvos of applause punctuated the performance at the city Hall of Verdi's *La Traviata*, the second opera to be presented in the Eoan Group's seventh season. Taking into consideration the tremendous overall achievement, which Capetonians have

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<sup>170</sup> Excerpts from correspondence between Sydow and Manca, 29 June 1967. Eoan Archive, box 86, folder 686.

<sup>171</sup> During a conversation with May Abrahamse on 1 October 2008, she explained to the current writer why Jephtas was unwilling to come back to South Africa and said: 'Look, dr. Manca was a bit of a dictator. He wanted to control everything. Gordon did not want to come because he had many more opportunities in Europe. He also had developed musically much further than dr. Manca and he knew that if he came, he would just have to play the piano and do what dr. Manca tells him to.'

<sup>172</sup> It is not yet clear from the archive how and why The Bernard van Leer Foundation became involved with Eoan. This organization is still active in The Netherlands today and enquiries by the present writer into their donation towards the building of the Joseph Stone Theatre in 1969 have not yielded any results.

<sup>173</sup> Joseph Manca, 'Eoan Group' *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 26-29. Also Joseph Manca, *Historical overview of Eoan's activities from 1933-1968*, p. 26. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

<sup>174</sup> Eoan's star tenor, Joseph Gabriels, had probably left the country by this time as he is not mentioned in any of the correspondence regarding this season or in the programmes.

come to expect of the Eoan Group, this night was Vera Gow's, whose tragic Violetta was, without a doubt, one of the best operatic performances seen here.

In Vera Gow the Eoan Group has a star of the first order. Her pure and beautiful soprano at all times was a pleasure to listen to, for its sustained quality throughout an arduous role, which makes the greatest demands, even on the seasoned performer. Her acting was of rare and natural quality, matching the singing to perfection. This performance will long linger in the memory.<sup>175</sup>

## 2.7 The musicals of the late 1960s

Even before Eoan's first opera performance in 1956, the group had been performing operettas and musicals, and the lighter genres of opera had been popular with the group and audiences for many years. Their first operetta was a production of *A Slave in Araby*<sup>176</sup> in 1947, which starred May Abrahamse as a very young soprano. Over the years many others followed, amongst others *Hong Kong*, *The Gypsy Princess*, *Zip Goes A Million*, *The Mikado* and *Die Fledermaus*. In fact, the shift from light opera to serious opera in 1956 was an important step in Eoan's artistic development and in the decade following 1956, fewer light operas were performed than prior to 1956. In 1955 Andrew Mackrill, a former Eoan member then working in theatre, urged Manca to move away from musicals and proceed to opera. Manca had asked Mackrill to take on the leading role in Eoan's 1956 production of the musical *Zip goes a Million* but he replied as follows:

I am finished with musical comedy. And I would like to see Eoan drop it too! Musical comedy, as far as Eoan is concerned, has served its purpose. Let the Group have done with it. There are fresh fields to explore, new worlds to conquer. Your Italian opera venture points the way and sets the standard for the new goal.<sup>177</sup>

Nevertheless, during the late 1960s and early seventies, a number of important American musicals became part of Eoan's repertoire. During this time, the Cape Town lawyer and theatre producer, David Bloomberg<sup>178</sup> became actively involved with Eoan and their

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<sup>175</sup> Hans Kramer, 'Soprano rose to great heights in her tragic roles', *The Cape Times*, 18 September 1967. Eoan Archive, box 86, folder 685.

<sup>176</sup> Composer unknown.

<sup>177</sup> Letter from Andrew Mackrill, 13 July 1955. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>178</sup> Bloomberg had close ties with Eoan over the years and served on the board of the Eoan Group Trust for some time. As an impresario he brought a number of famous performers to Cape Town and produced many acclaimed theatre productions between 1956 and 1967. He was a director of the Cape Performing Arts Board and closely involved with the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra. He was also an attorney and defended Demitrio Tsafendas, the assassin of the then Prime Minister

productions. Not only was Bloomberg a trustee on the Eoan Group Trust, he was able to secure the performing rights to three American musicals for Eoan, despite the cultural sanctions which were in place against South Africa. Thus the group added more artistic 'firsts' on their already impressive list of cultural activities, as they were the first South African group to perform *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific* and *Carmen Jones* in the country. Bloomberg had close ties with theatre producers in the United States and persuaded the New York producer, Stanley Waren, to come to Cape Town to direct Eoan's South African première of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical *Oklahoma!*.<sup>179</sup> Waren's wife, Florence, a dancer who originated from Johannesburg, was responsible for the choreography. The musical was to be performed in the Alhambra Theatre in the city center which had a capacity of 2 500 seats. The Alhambra was, however, a 'Whites-only building' and no permission was given for Coloureds to attend these performances. Bloomberg tried to negotiate with the Department on behalf of Eoan as these issues apparently had a profound influence on the morale of the group. In a letter to Manca, Bloomberg wrote as follows:

I am not allowing the matter to rest there and am causing urgent representations to be made to the Hon. W.A. Maree, Minister of Community Development. In the interim I think it is important that news of the permit being refused does not leak out. There will be far greater chance of the Minister reversing the Department's decision if it can be shown that this will not be an embarrassment to the Department. Also, there is no reason for members of the Group to become depressed unnecessarily.<sup>180</sup>

However, permission was not granted and eleven performances were scheduled between 19 and 28 January for the white public in the Alhambra and two more for Coloureds in the Luxurama on 31 January and 1 February.<sup>181</sup> The leading roles were sung by Patricia van Graan, Winifried du Plessis, Veronica Jacobs, Cecil Tobin and Allie Sydow.<sup>182</sup> The *Cape Argus* critic, Owen Williams, remarked in his review:

The Eoan Group players have a natural charm which suits the mood of the play or light opera or musical or what you will. I thought, however, that at times last night they seemed

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Hendrik Verwoerd. Bloomberg became mayor of Cape Town from 1973 until 1975. He and his wife emigrated from South Africa in 1988.

<http://www.clarkesbooks.co.za/browse.asp?category=30> accessed 11 June 2008.

<sup>179</sup> David Bloomberg, *My Times*, Fernwood Press 2007, p. 25.

<sup>180</sup> Letter from Bloomberg to Manca, 25 November 1966. Eoan Archive, box 85, folder 684.

<sup>181</sup> It is not clear from documents in the archive how the group reacted to this news.

<sup>182</sup> *Advance Press Publicity*, p. 6. Eoan Archive, box 85, folder 669.

a little inhibited and that they could have given more rein to their natural verve. In general one can say that their singing was far superior than their acting.<sup>183</sup>

In Waren's experience with working with the Eoan group, he noted that 'from a music point of view the group is particularly talented, but its development is hindered by lack of professional contact with Europeans and by lack of playing opportunities.'<sup>184</sup>

Manca had asked Bloomberg to produce Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* with Eoan in March 1968. For Bloomberg this was his first musical production<sup>185</sup> and it turned out to be the biggest financial success of Eoan's entire existence.<sup>186</sup> The musical was again performed in the Alhambra Theatre and all ten performances were sold out. Again, no permission was given to perform for Coloured audiences in The Alhambra, despite Bloomberg's efforts. The production was therefore moved to the Luxurama Theatre in the Coloured section of Wynberg for seven performances after which it was moved back to the Alhambra for another five performances. According to Bloomberg some 50 000 Capetonians had seen the musical by the end of that season.<sup>187</sup> The reviews were even more enthusiastic than for previous Eoan productions. Owen Williams of *The Cape Argus* wrote:

It was a splendid piece of work, one of the milestones in Cape Town theatre history. It is a lavishly mounted, beautifully sung, crisply directed version of this Rodgers and Hammerstein work, one of the classics among American musicals. For one thing, it tells a strong story, and unashamedly, it has a message. The story is of love, the message is of the evils of race discrimination.<sup>188</sup>

This 'message' to which Williams referred illustrated the absurdity and inconsistencies of the South African political system and its administration of the day. Although no permission was given for Coloureds to attend performances in the Alhambra, the lyrics of some of the songs exposed the danger of racial intolerance. The ironic and potentially

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<sup>183</sup> Owen Williams, 'Eoan Group's natural charm in pleasant "Oklahoma"', *The Cape Argus*, 20 January 1967. Eoan Archive, box 85, folder 682.

<sup>184</sup> Stanley A. Waren, 'Theatre in South Africa', *Educational Theatre Journal*, Volume 20, No. 3, October 1968, p. 413.

<sup>185</sup> Bloomberg states in his book that he produced this musical without being able to read music. David Bloomberg, *My Times*, p. 25.

<sup>186</sup> See correspondence in Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 438.

<sup>187</sup> David Bloomberg. *My Times*, pp. 24-31.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.



explosive content of these songs did not register with government officials, despite some of them attending the performances.<sup>189</sup> The lyrics of the song ‘You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught’ is a case in point:

You’ve got to be taught to hate and fear,  
You’ve got to be taught from year to year,  
It’s got to be drummed in your dear little ear,  
You’ve got to be carefully taught.

You’ve got to be taught to be afraid...  
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,  
And people whose skin is a different shade,  
You’ve got to be carefully taught.

You’ve got to be taught before it’s too late,  
Before you are six or seven or eight,  
To hate all the people your relatives hate.  
You’ve got to be carefully taught!<sup>190</sup>

Bloomberg further lamented that the message of the song had made no impact on officialdom. A planned tour of this musical to Johannesburg was jeopardized when the government refused permission for Eoan (as a Coloured cast) to perform in the Civic Theatre, the only venue at the time that could stage the production.<sup>191</sup> The rehearsal schedules for this musical bore testimony to the grueling practice schedule of the Group. Practice sessions were scheduled for every weekday evening from 7.45 to 10 pm, Saturday afternoons from 2.30 to 5.30 pm as well as on Sundays from 3 pm to 6 pm. Starting on Monday 8 January, rehearsals ran until opening night on Wednesday 28 February without a single day’s break. The rehearsal schedule in the Eoan Archive also includes this comment: ‘NO-ONE MUST MISS REHEARSALS’.<sup>192</sup> Bloomberg had much admiration for the members of the Eoan group and noted that:

It was difficult to appreciate that those who were attaining professional standards were by day ordinary workers in the city. While some were teachers, the majority were maids, messengers, labourers, factory hands and clerical workers, yet all were imbued with the same spirit – to give of their best and achieve excellence.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, p. 28-9.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, p. 28.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

<sup>192</sup> See the South Pacific rehearsal schedule in the Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 433.

<sup>193</sup> David Bloomberg, *My Times*, p. 26.

Following their successful musical production earlier in the year the 1968 Opera Season was planned for October. The programme this time included Verdi's *La Traviata* and *Rigoletto* as well as Rossini's *Barber of Seville*.<sup>194</sup> On the organizational side, matters did not go smoothly. Manca had just experienced a very satisfactory season of Eoan's *South Pacific* in the Alhambra Theatre and tried to negotiate some performances for this venue. However, because the Alhambra was a 'Whites-only venue', a permit had to be obtained in order to perform there. Eoan also had to apply for a permit to perform for mixed audiences in the City Hall. Due to the possible change in venue the schedule was revised several times. The Eoan Archive holds copies of an unusually large number of letters Manca wrote to Eoan members regarding absenteeism from rehearsals. Members complained of heavy workloads and limited time.<sup>195</sup> It is also at this time that most members had been moved out of District Six to the Coloured suburbs of Athlone, Bonteheuvel and Heideveld and traveling to Cape Town for rehearsals at night after a full day at work became much more difficult.

One week before the season was due to start, Manca, the producer Allesandro Rota and Ismail Sydow decided to cancel the season altogether. This course of action was unprecedented in Eoan's history. In a letter to the Town Clerk, Sydow explained that the organizers felt that the cast was not sufficiently prepared and that a bad performance would be worse than no performance at all. He further elaborated that their preparations were hindered predominantly by illness experienced by principal artists as well as chorus members throughout the winter.<sup>196</sup> The financial implications resulting from the cancellation of the season were serious. The group had lost approximately R 10 000 in pre-box office expenditures, which not only plunged the organization (yet again) into debt, but also left them with few financial resources for future activities. In a letter from the Eoan Group Trust to the Eoan Board it is clear that the relationship between the two bodies was also compromised. The role of the Trust was to act as financial guarantor of the Group. In the event of serious problems, the final responsibility lay with the Trust.<sup>197</sup> The letter

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<sup>194</sup> See schedules in the Eoan Archive, box 34, folder 233.

<sup>195</sup> See letters to and from cast members in the Eoan Archive, box 34, folder 233.

<sup>196</sup> Letter by Ismail Sydow to the Town Clerk, Mr Jan Luyt, 25 September 1968. Eoan Archive, box 34, folder 233.

<sup>197</sup> The relationship between the Eoan Group and the Eoan Group Trust continues to be problematic to this day. In May 2001 the Trust was on the verge of evicting the group from the

indicated that the Trust and the Board had agreed on strategies for the Group to generate their own income to a large extent, and that the Trust felt the Board did not honour this agreement. The Trust duly complained of not being consulted in the decision to cancel the season and pointed out the grave financial repercussions:

Arising from the Group's lack of liquidity and the prospect of a substantial overdraft building up before any significant revenue is likely to accrue, the Committee expressed strong views on the recent cancellation of the 1968 opera season. It was also the view of the Committee that they should have been consulted before the decision was taken, not because the Trust wishes in any way to interfere in the Group's running of its own affairs, but because of the grave financial implications of the decision.

To alleviate the position the meeting suggested that something should be done to exploit the present holiday season by putting on informal concerts and operatic concerts. I said I would discuss the matter with you and Dr. Manca and informed the meeting of the Group's "Opera for All" programme commencing in March. It was felt that this was not enough and that the Group should take immediate steps to exploit their assets in terms of talent, opera for all, sets, music, etc. etc. It was always understood that Rota would generate the cost of his services – so far nothing has been done and no revenue has accrued to the Group as was planned when the decision to employ him was taken. It is recognized that the work he is doing in voice training and preparation for the 1969 opera season will be of great long-term benefit to the Group but the present financial situation is too critical to be ignored.<sup>198</sup>

## 2.8 The Joseph Stone Auditorium in Athlone

1969 was another important year for Eoan. In order to remedy the financial overdraft caused by the cancellation of the 1968 opera season, the Group presented a number of successful operatic concerts in the Cape Town City Hall in March, followed by their eighth opera season from 23 October to 15 November. Shortly after the close of the opera season, Eoan took residence of the Eoan Group Cultural Centre housed in the Joseph Stone Auditorium, located in the suburb of Athlone.

In March Eoan presented a number of operatic concerts, *Opera for All*, starring their principal singers in arias of various operas. After the disappointment of the cancellation of

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premises. Trevor Oosterwyk, *The Cape Argus*, 'It's Eoan vs Eoan in auditorium tussle', 21 May 2001. In an interview with Sjafiek Rajab, the current chairman of the Eoan Board, on 4 June 2008, he conceded that the relationship with the Trust was almost non-existing at the time of the interview.

<sup>198</sup> Letter from The Eoan Group Trust to Ismail Sydow, the chairman of the Eoan Board, 7 January 1969. Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 437.

the 1968 season, Eoan performed better than ever with Vera Gow as Violetta in Verdi's *La Traviata*. During a visit from Europe Gordon Jephtas had been with Eoan for some months during their training period in 1968<sup>199</sup> and it was clear from a review that the standard of singing had benefitted from his input. Elsa Winckley's review in the *Sunday Express* of 30 March was full of praise, demonstrating that Eoan was admired and well supported by Cape Town's opera-going public:

The Eoan Group has not been seen or heard in the Cape for some time, and the pleasure and pride which Capetonians feel for these talented non-White singers were fully demonstrated by a packed City Hall.

It is astonishing that this company has managed to remain such a welded unit during the formative years. Much credit for this must go to its dedicated musical director and conductor, Dr. Joseph Manca, and its producer Allesandro Rota.

In true prima donna fashion was Vera Gow's singing of 'E Strano' and 'Ah Fors è Lui' from *La Traviata* – her voice has matured in quality and her poise greatly increased. Even more remarkable is the progress of Patricia van Graan, whose singing of 'Una Voce Poco Fa' from *The Barber of Seville* fully invited the thunderous applause she received.<sup>200</sup>

By this time Eoan's reputation was well established in other provinces of the country as well and in June 1969 Vera Gow was invited to sing with the SABC Symphony Orchestra in Johannesburg. The local newspaper described Gow as 'one of South Africa's outstanding Coloured sopranos'.<sup>201</sup>

The opera season was once again held in the City Hall and comprised four operas; Verdi's *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata* and *Il Trovatore* and Rossini's *Barber of Seville*. Rehearsals with individual singers started as early as April.<sup>202</sup> The principal singers for this season included Gerald Samaai, James Momberg, Ronald Theys, Charles de Long, Cecil Tobin, Vera Gow, Josephine Liedemann, Yvonne Jansen, Susan Arendse, Sophia Andrews and Patricia van Graan.<sup>203</sup> Shortly before the season opened the performance of *Rigoletto* had to be cancelled due to the sudden death of the principal baritone, Robert Trussell.

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<sup>199</sup> Minutes of the Special General Meeting held on 26 August 1969, p. 9. Eoan Archive, box 25, folder 178.

<sup>200</sup> Elsa Winckley, 'Eoan group shines brightly as ever', *Sunday Express*, 30 March 1969. Eoan Archive, box 36, folder 270.

<sup>201</sup> Staff reporter, 'Mayor to hear top soprano', Newspaper unknown, June 1969. Eoan Archive, box 36, folder 270.

<sup>202</sup> See rehearsal schedules in the Eoan Archive, box 36, folder 286.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

Manca was seemingly highly regarded by government officials in important positions and was asked to serve on a number of cultural committees. He was elected a member of the Council for Culture and Recreation, a department created separately for the Coloured people as an equivalent to the Performing Arts Councils which were cultural bodies for Whites only. Sydow reported in his Chairman's report that 'on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1968 the Minister for Coloured Affairs, the Honourable Mr. Marais Viljoen officially opened the establishment of the "Council for Culture and Recreation" consisting of ten persons drawn from the four provinces of the Republic. I am happy to state that our Dr. Manca has been appointed as a member of the Council and also its Executive Committee.'<sup>204</sup>

The creation of the National Performing Arts Councils, through which consistent financial support from the government was channeled to white performers only, was a particularly painful situation for Eoan. While professional careers were enabled for white performers, Eoan's singers still went unpaid, despite their excellent reputation and their substantial contribution to opera production in Cape Town. Although they received some funding from the Department of Coloured Affairs, the group had to apply for it annually and the security of a fixed income on which they could budget and plan ahead was by no means guaranteed. In his foreword to the 1969 Opera Season's programme, Ismail Sydow wrote as follows:

I trust the time is not far distant when the Eoan Group may be able to devote themselves fully to the prosecution of the arts and be financially compensated for their services.

The Government has established Performing Boards in the four Provinces for White Professional arts, each board being heavily subsidized by its Province. This is certainly a most admirable policy and a great step forward for the advancement of the cultural arts in our country which deserves every support.

The Eoan Group, as yet does not enjoy such heavy financial assistance, but with the establishment of the recently created 'Council for Culture and Recreation' by the Minister for Coloured Affairs, the Hon. Mr. Marais Viljoen, the Eoan Group looks forward to a greater upsurge in the cultural development of the Coloured Community.

Subsidies are the 'life-line' of all Opera undertakings, yet in spite of the lack of this life-giving necessity, this truly South African Opera Company has contributed in no small measure towards the presentations of regular annual opera seasons with the resultant growing appreciation of 'Opera' in the Republic.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> See the Chairman's report from the Minutes of the Special General Meeting held on 26 August 1969, p. 12. Eoan Archive, box 25, folder 178.

<sup>205</sup> Ismail Sydow's foreword to the 1969 Opera Season programme. Eoan Archive, box 36, folder 279.

Sydow's use of the phrase 'this truly South African Opera Company' illustrates why Eoan presents such a vexing historical case study for the consideration of indigenization in South African opera. Clearly, Eoan felt itself to be a unique South African institution, but in the reconstructed historical narrative presented thus far it is unclear what this understanding was based on. Indigenization in this case had seemingly less to do with the repertoire (that remained static and overwhelmingly Italian), than with all-Coloured (and therefore 'indigenized') casts. However, the group's aspirations were directed towards Europe and support was predominantly from Whites rather than Coloureds. Eoan existed, in short, on Apartheid's terms under white management co-opted in the functioning of separate groups and structures. Writing from the vantage point of the present, it is also clear that not much of the Apartheid government's policy of 'separate though equal development', cited by Sydow in the letter quoted above, came to fruition. The Eoan Group remained solely responsible for obtaining funds for their activities, a situation that never changed throughout their opera-producing years. This was despite expectations raised by the creation of the Council for Culture and Recreation that Eoan performers would eventually enjoy the same rights and privileges as white artists.

Pointing the way to Eoan's programming of many operatic concerts during the next decade, the Eoan Group Trust advised Manca regarding financial outcomes of certain types of productions:

Experience has taught us that the better class of Musicals has a wide public appeal both among White and Coloured Communities and that consequently the prospect of substantial profits is far greater than in the case of classical productions. It would also seem that 'Opera for All' has a wide appeal and that the cost of production is low. The Group will, I know, wish to prove its ability to stand on its own feet as much as possible and to build up a reserve of funds which will help to finance its classical productions in the field of opera, ballet, etc. I do suggest that the Group's programmes each year should include one musical so as to ensure a regular source of production profit and that 'Opera for All' be exploited to the full. It is not a question of giving the non classical precedence over the classical, but merely a matter of using the former as a means to financing the latter.<sup>206</sup>

From 1966 onwards Eoan had been presenting operatic concerts and as time passed, these became more frequent, eventually dominating the operatic endeavors of the Group. Named *Opera for All*, *A night at the Opera* or *Gems of the Opera*, these concerts were not only

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<sup>206</sup> Letter from the Eoan Group Trust to Manca, 20 October 1969, p. 2. Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 439.

economically more viable than full-scale opera productions, but also much easier to take on short tours. Eoan performed in this format in various towns in the Western Cape throughout the 1970s.

Eoan's dream to have its own cultural centre became a reality in November 1969. As early as 1966 Sydow commented on this issue: 'It has always been the wish of the Eoan Group to have its own Cultural centre wherein all our activities could be centralized. At present, we have the Isaac Ochberg Hall in Hanover Street, Cape Town. This hall has served us well, but with the shift of population and with District Six being zoned for White occupation, it became necessary to look elsewhere for the erection of our Cultural Centre.'<sup>207</sup> Within three years this dream came true.

The Eoan Archive holds few documents pertaining to the building of the Eoan Group Cultural Centre. The minutes of a special AGM held on 26 August 1969 states that the Cape Town Municipality donated 3.25 acres of land in Athlone and the main financial contributors to the building of the Cultural Centre were the following:

- The South African Government	R 120 000
- The Joseph Stone Foundation <sup>208</sup>	R 100 000
- The Bernard van Leer Foundation <sup>209</sup>	R 34 000
- The Eoan Group	<u>R 33 000</u> <sup>210</sup>
Total:	R 287 000 <sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Minutes of the 32<sup>nd</sup> AGM held on 29 September 1966, pp. 6-7. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>208</sup> Other than his residential address in Sea Point and his postal address in Somerset West, the archive holds no information on who Joseph Stone was and why he donated this amount to the building of the centre.

<sup>209</sup> The Bernard van Leer Foundation is based in the Netherlands and has been donating money to disadvantaged groups since the 1950s. However, the Eoan Archive holds no information on how this organization became involved with Eoan and why they donated this amount to the building of the centre. The only information found in the archive thus far, is that Ismail Sydow visited them in 1967 and secured the donation. See the letters from Sydow to Manca in the Eoan Archive, box 86, folder 686.

<sup>210</sup> This amount consisted of R8 000 profit earned from the sale of the Ochberg Hall and R25 000 profit earned on the presentation of the musicals *Oklahoma* and *South Pacific* in 1967 and 1968. Minutes of the Special General Meeting held on 26 August 1969, p. 3. Eoan Archive, box 25, folder 178.

<sup>211</sup> Minutes of the Special General Meeting held on 26 August 1969, p. 11. Eoan Archive, box 25, folder 178.

At the time of writing this chapter, it was not clear who took the initiative for the building and who drove the project as a whole. A letter from the Eoan Group Trust to Ismail Sydow suggested that the initial idea was to incorporate the centre as part of a cultural wing of the University of the Western Cape,<sup>212</sup> but this did not materialize. The centre was designed by the well known Cape Town architect, Revel Fox.<sup>213</sup> Eighteen months later, in May 1971, the Nico Malan Theatre Complex, a Whites-only building, was completed in Cape Town's city centre at the cost of 11 million Rands. The project was fully subsidized by the government.<sup>214</sup>

The Eoan Group Cultural Centre, consisting of the Joseph Stone Auditorium, several studios, practice rooms and offices, was inaugurated on 21 November 1969.<sup>215</sup> The ceremony was followed by a short concert in the auditorium. The Eoan Group Trust became the official owner of the Eoan Group Cultural Centre.<sup>216</sup> Once again the expectations for the possibilities created by the new centre were high. As early as 1966, the minutes of the AGM held in August stated that:

The Cultural Centre is to be in the nature of an Academy where all forms of art are to be taught and to be practiced. Its establishment would further provide i) the creation of professional careers for our many artists, ii) serve as a training college, and iii) provide employment for our people in the promotion of the performing and non-performing arts and the general uplift of our Community.<sup>217</sup>

Until 1969 Eoan's activities were central to Cape Town's cultural life. Not only did the Group perform annually in venues in the city, but rehearsals had also been taking place in either the Ochberg Hall in District Six or Delta House in Bree Street. Most administrative tasks and committee meetings took place in Delta House or at Manca's home in Sea Point. The move to Athlone, however, is instructive on how the forced physical removal of

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<sup>212</sup> Letter from the Eoan Group Trust to Sydow, 7 January 1969, p. 4. Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 437. The letter does not indicate where this idea originated although it is possible that, in the light of the government's policy of separate universities, it could have been suggested by government.

<sup>213</sup> Minutes of the 32<sup>nd</sup> AGM held on 29 September 1966, pp. 6-7. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 3. It is not clear why and how Fox became involved with this project.

<sup>214</sup> Elizabeth Blanckenberg, *The Music Activities of the Cape Performing Arts Board*. MMus thesis, University of Stellenbosch, March 2009, p. 39.

<sup>215</sup> Joseph Manca, 'Eoan Group' *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 26-29. Today the centre is known as the Joseph Stone Theatre. It is not clear when the name was officially changed.

<sup>216</sup> Minutes of the 33<sup>rd</sup> AGM held on 8 December 1970, p. 6. Eoan Archive, box 2, folder 8.

<sup>217</sup> Minutes of the 32<sup>nd</sup> AGM held on 29 September 1966, p. 7. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 3.



people under Apartheid could and did disempower them culturally. The physical shift away from the city centre accompanied a shift away from the cultural activities of Cape Town. Documents in the archive indicate that after 1969 Eoan was gradually excluded from main stream cultural activities as venues became more inaccessible and Apartheid legislation made it increasingly difficult for the Group to maintain its position at the centre of Cape Town's cultural life.<sup>218</sup>

In 1970 the New York based producer, Stanley Waren, returned to South Africa to direct Eoan's July performance of the American musical *Carmen Jones* by Oscar Hammerstein II.<sup>219</sup> Once again Eoan was able to claim a 'first', as this was also the South African première of this work. The work was based on Bizet's opera *Carmen* and in this production the setting changed 'from Spain to the American South and the American Negro. The gypsy girl, Carmen, is now the Negress, Carmen Jones.'<sup>220</sup> Manca stated in his publicity material: 'If one were to travel around the world it would be difficult to find a cast more eminently qualified to stage a presentation of *Carmen Jones* than the unique Eoan Group.'<sup>221</sup>

This time performances were held for Coloured-only audiences in the Joseph Stone Auditorium in Athlone and at the Luxurama in Wynberg, both venues situated in Coloured areas. Permits had to be obtained for white newspaper critics to attend the performances in order to review the production. The invitation letters to critics explained: 'I have to advise you that permission has been obtained from the Department of Community Development for the official theatre critics who belong to the White race group.'<sup>222</sup> From this one can conclude that newspaper critics were predominantly white and that journalism covering the arts was controlled by Whites. Furthermore, no evidence was found in the archive of permit applications for members of the white public to attend the performances.

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<sup>218</sup> The 1975 Cape Town Festival was organized without the participation of Eoan, despite Eoan's continuous attempts to be involved in this festival. Eoan eventually gave one operatic concert during this festival. See correspondence between Eoan and the City Council in 1973-4. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>219</sup> This musical is an adaption of Bizet's *Carmen* into an Afro-American setting by Oscar Hammerstein II.

<sup>220</sup> Advance publicity material, p. 1. Eoan Archive, box 10, folder 68.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> Joseph Manca, Invitation letter to newspaper critics, 10 July 1970. Eoan Archive, box 10, folder 68.

Eoan gave several operatic concerts in towns in the Cape in March 1970.<sup>223</sup> Minutes of the 1970 AGM also mention that the group gave concerts further afield, and that ‘three concerts, one at Stellenbosch and two at Paarl to members of our own community met with great success.’<sup>224</sup> Eoan’s opera season during this year was held from 15 October to 7 November in the Cape Town City Hall.

Control over Eoan’s activities by The Department of Coloured Affairs gradually tightened. In reply to Eoan’s application for financial assistance for the 1970/1 financial year, the Administration of Coloured Affairs responded favourably, granting R 3 ,000, but requesting representation on the Eoan Executive Committee.<sup>225</sup> Ismail Sydow replied that same month that the ‘Committee further resolved to take immediate steps to provide for the permanent representation of the administration on the Eoan Group’s governing body, i.e. the Executive Committee, which is responsible for the management of the whole group.’<sup>226</sup> During the AGM held On 8 December 1970 Eoan’s constitution was amended to allow for representation of the Department of Coloured Affairs on their Executive Committee.<sup>227</sup>

## **2.9 The 1971 Republic Festival and beyond**

As they had done in 1966, Eoan took part in the Republic Festival held in 1971. Manca initially planned three productions: an indigenous musical, an international musical and an opera season comprising four operas. As their entire contribution was to be financed by the government, Manca was requested to make detailed financial estimates for these productions. From these estimates it is clear that for this festival the audiences were kept completely separate. Half the performances were planned for white audiences and the other half for non-white audiences, with the performances scheduled in separate venues.

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<sup>223</sup> EOAN Archive, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>224</sup> Minutes of the 33<sup>rd</sup> AGM held on 8 December 1970, p. 10. Eoan Archive, box 2, folder 8.

<sup>225</sup> Letter from the Administration of Coloured Affairs, 8 September 1970, p. 2. Page 1 of this document is available, but page 2 is missing. The content of page 2 can however be deduced from Sydow’s reply to the above letter. Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 436.

<sup>226</sup> Letter to the Administration of Coloured Affairs, 11 September 1970, p. 1. Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 436.

<sup>227</sup> Letter to the Commissioner of Coloured Affairs, 19 April 1971. Eoan Archive, box 71, folder 548. It is not clear, however, if the Department ever sent a representative to the Eoan Board.

The estimated income from admission fees from Whites was double that from Coloureds. From the documentation found in the Eoan Archive, it is clear that for this project, singers, dancers and producing staff were to be paid a professional fee. Approximately 40% of the costs were expected to be covered by the income generated from admission fees, the remaining 60% to be covered by the government.<sup>228</sup> However, few of Manca's plans were eventually implemented. In May 1971 Eoan presented seven operatic concerts in the Joseph Stone Auditorium for the Republic Festival for Coloured-only audiences. Manca later reported that only approximately 1500 people in total attended these performances.<sup>229</sup>

The Group's 1971 opera season was held in October in Cape Town. The programme included Verdi's *Rigoletto* and *La Traviata* and Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*. This year the season was staged in the Alhambra Theatre and permission was obtained to allow people from the Coloured community to attend performances. Having experienced several rejections from the Department of Community Development in recent years to allow a Coloured audience to the Alhambra, the permit was granted, but the arrangements were set up differently this time. From the programme it is clear that performances for Whites and Coloureds were held on separate evenings, 11 performances for Whites and 3 performances for Coloureds, thus carefully avoiding the issue of mixed audiences altogether.<sup>230</sup>

In July 1971 Manca submitted the following year's budget requirements to the Commissioner of Coloured Affairs. In his report accompanying the budget, he discussed, amongst other things, the lack of sufficient training with which the group had had to make do for years:

Despite the fact that for at least the past twenty years the Eoan Group artists have been performing Oratorio, Operettas, Musicals and Opera without any real and serious knowledge of music, it speaks much for their inherent talents that they have achieved so much and been in the forefront, specially of opera. Apart from the many operettas and musicals, the Eoan Group has to date a repertoire of nine operas:

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<sup>228</sup> Financial estimation made by Manca for musical presentations during the 1971 Republic Festival. Eoan Archive, box 7, folder 51. See also the letter from Manca to the Town Clerk regarding Eoan's 1971 activities, dated 26 November 1970. Eoan Archive, box 12, folder 84.

<sup>229</sup> 'Commission of Inquiry into Matters relating to the Coloured Population Group: Group 5: Culture. Questionnaire to Organizations practising the Performing Arts', p. 7. Eoan Archive, box 9, folder 59.

<sup>230</sup> See list of performances for the 1971 Opera Season. Eoan Archive, box 11, folder 79.

1. La Traviata
2. Cavalleria Rusticana
3. Rigoletto
4. La Boheme
5. Madam Butterfly
6. Il Trovatore
7. Carmen
8. L'Elisir D'Amore
9. Barber of Seville

For many years past, it was deemed necessary to establish a Music School where the artists would be taught the theory and rudiments of music, sufficient enough for them to read musical notation. For some reason or another, this much needed requirement did not come about. However, it was finally decided to introduce this pressing need and so the establishment of the Music School was planned to commence this year.<sup>231</sup>

In line with Manca's comments above, the Voice Production School was completely re-organized. Allesandro Rota and Olga Magnoni had been responsible for voice training since the 1960s, but increasingly poor attendance and lack of discipline were apparently common and all students now had to sign a contract binding them to regular attendance, punctuality and the strict control of performing at other occasions not related to Eoan's productions.<sup>232</sup>

By this time Manca had been with the Eoan Group for 28 years and the hunt for a successor was becoming ever more urgent. Due to Apartheid legislation, the scope of suitable Coloured candidates was exceedingly limited and many efforts were made to obtain new and well-trained staff. In a meeting held on 28 July 1971, the Eoan Group's Executive Committee decided formally to approach Didi Sydow<sup>233</sup> to become Eoan's Ballet Director and Gordon Jephtas<sup>234</sup> to become Assistant Cultural Director. Both individuals were former members of Eoan pursuing successful artistic careers in Europe. In August 1971 Eoan's chairman, Ismail Sydow, traveled to Europe to visit his daughter Didi Sydow in the United Kingdom and Gordon Jephtas in Italy to discuss the requests with them personally. This time both Jephtas and Sydow agreed to commit themselves to service to Eoan, although both stated certain conditions.

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<sup>231</sup> Budget application to the Commissioner of Coloured Affairs, 1 July 1971, annexure D, p. 1. Eoan Archive, box 10, folder 70.

<sup>232</sup> See Voice Production School contracts and conditions of enrolment. Eoan Archive, box 7, folder 48.

<sup>233</sup> See letter from Ismail Sydow to The Commissioner for Coloured Affairs, 16 November 1971. Eoan Archive, box 39, folder 314.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

As stated above, the conditions for receiving government funding stipulated that all plans and new initiatives had to be reported to the Department of Coloured Affairs. In a letter to the Department, dated 16 November 1971, Sydow thus explained Eoan's search for professional training staff. He duly conceded that 'in terms of the Grant-in-Aid made by the Administration of Coloured Affairs covering all the Eoan Group's activities and their expansion, all decisions and resolutions affecting their activities with the accompanying financial implications were to be submitted to the Administration of Coloured Affairs for consideration and subsequent approval.'<sup>235</sup> Didi Sydow stated the conditions for her acceptance of the appointment as follows:

It should be especially noted that the above is dependent on permission being granted in writing by the South African government for unrestricted exit and entry, during the term of the contract, for myself and my husband. I am a British citizen and my husband is an Australian citizen. Also that we may live as man and wife while in South Africa, this is to be included in the written authority from the South African Government. The contract will be void without notice should this condition cease to be honoured.<sup>236</sup>

Didi Sydow never took up the position as director of the Ballet Section and there are no documents in the archive suggesting that the permit she requested was applied for or ever granted by the government. Gordon Jephtas's main concern was described in this letter to the Department of Coloured Affairs by Ismail Sydow as follows:

Mr. Jephtas has a most promising career overseas, all of which he is prepared to sacrifice and return to South Africa providing he obtains in writing, from the South African Government, permission to conduct orchestally irrespective whether the members of the orchestra belong to the White group or not.[...] It is Dr Manca's considered opinion, that it will take at least another 50 years before an orchestra consisting purely of coloured musicians will be capable of substituting a white professional orchestra in such matters as accompanying opera.<sup>237</sup>

Permission from the Department of Community Development for Jephtas to be allowed to conduct an orchestra comprising white musicians took a full two years. The permit was granted on 15 October 1973 and was formulated as follows:

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<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> Letter from Didi Sydow to Eoan, dated 10 September 1971 was used as an Appendix to the letter by Ismail Sydow to The Commissioner for Coloured Affairs, 16 November 1971. Eoan Archive, box 39, folder 314.

<sup>237</sup> Letter by Ismail Sydow to The Commissioner for Coloured Affairs, 16 November 1971. Eoan Archive, box 39, folder 314.

I have the pleasure in advising you that the Honourable the Minister of Community Development has approved of the issue of a group areas permit, subject to withdrawal at his pleasure, enabling Mr. Jephtas to conduct all orchestras playing at performances by the Eoan Group as well as at rehearsals. The Minister has at the same time expressed the wish that as the Coloured community is itself musically talented it will develop its own Eoan Group orchestra in the near future.<sup>238</sup>

Despite the setbacks in their search for sustained professional training, Manca's ambitious plans for the Eoan Group Cultural Centre were still very much alive and in July 1971 an application for R 550 000 was submitted to the Administration of Coloured Affairs for a new teaching block to be added to the existing buildings.<sup>239</sup> Ismail Sydow wrote as follows:

Teaching and training were the rocks on which the foundation of the Eoan Group was originally established – activities which have continued and still continue until today. (Public presentations and performances are the end result of such training.) In its never-ending efforts for the promotion and cultural development of the Coloured Community and in an attempt to increase the present available facilities and to cope with the growing demand for teaching space, additional accommodation must be found and provided.<sup>240</sup>

The dream, or rather the expectation, that Eoan should be treated on equal terms to CAPAB by the government, remained unfulfilled and unresolved. After describing the existing facilities of the Eoan Group Cultural Center, Sydow continued in this letter:

From the foregoing remarks, it will be seen that if the Eoan Group is to continue with its teaching and training, the present facilities are quite inadequate and unsuitable. Therefore it now becomes urgently necessary to find additional accommodation in the form of a new Teaching Block. Furthermore, apart from the Eoan Group's current pressing needs, the Administration [...] is considering preliminary plans for the establishment of a) a professional opera company, b) a department of ballet, and c) a department of drama, in other words, the creation of a Performing Arts Company similar to CAPAB.<sup>241</sup>

In the Music Section, the Group's repertoire had now become standardized and operatic concerts such as *Gems of the Opera* had become regular items in their performance

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<sup>238</sup> Letter from Department of Community Development, 15 October 1973, signed by Mr. B.A. van der Vyver. Eoan Archive, box 37, folder 300. It is clear from the permit that Jephtas would be restricted to conducting only Eoan productions and was not allowed to conduct for any other occasion. Jephtas eventually joined the group formally for a short while during 1979.

<sup>239</sup> The proposed teaching block included five new ballet studios, five soundproof studios for one-on-one music lessons, two rehearsal rooms, a storage room for instruments and approximately ten additional rooms for administration and other staff. Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 436.

<sup>240</sup> Letter to the Commissioner of Coloured Affairs, 1 July 1970, pp. 1-2. Eoan Archive box 53, folder 436.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

schedules, providing much needed income. These concerts were less expensive to produce, were well attended and show-cased Eoan's principal singers and their popular hits. New initiatives in opera production were far and few between. Their opera seasons, which continued until 1975, consisted of productions of existing repertoire and no new operas were added during these years. The feeling of excitement, hopeful expectation and general amazement accompanying Eoan's productions in the years prior to 1969 had been replaced by routines as concert after concert was given, leaving the impression of a floundering attempt to match the exuberance of past experiences. Documentation found in the Eoan Archive dating from the early 1970s focuses predominantly on the annual opera seasons, schedules for many operatic concerts, problems and worries regarding funding, maintenance of the Eoan Group Cultural Center, as well as matters of permission and future plans.<sup>242</sup> It is also clear from the documentation that the political situation was worsening, that the control exercised over the group by the Department of Coloured Affairs increased and political tolerance in the Group and the society at large deteriorated.

By early 1972 Eoan's financial affairs were, once again, in dire straits. Eoan's annual costs were estimated at R120 000 of which the Group generated approximately 50% themselves. Of the remaining costs the Department of Coloured Affairs only covered approximately 30% (R35 000 ). The Eoan Board requested financial support for the R28000 short fall on their budget from the Department, but after a meeting decided to reduce the annual staff costs by approximately 20%, therefore reducing the budgeted short fall with R25 000.<sup>243</sup> By end of March the Department allocated another R5 000 to cover the shortfall, bringing the total grant from the Department of Coloured Affairs for the financial year ending March 1972 to R40 000.<sup>244</sup> In a letter of 23 March 1972 to the Eoan Group by Mr. F.L. Gaum, the then Commissioner of Coloured Affairs, the threatening tone is unmistakable:

I should again like to point out that the Administration does not have at its disposal unlimited financial resources. It is, therefore, sine qua non that the Eoan Group itself should undertake its affairs within its financial limits and it should not rely on the

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<sup>242</sup> There is for example the paper trail of a bitter exchange between Manca and David Poole from the UCT Ballet School, telling the story of fierce control games regarding Eoan dancers who study at UCT.

<sup>243</sup> Correspondence between Eoan and the Commissioner of Coloured Affairs, January 1971. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>244</sup> Financial report as supplied Joseph Manca, 6 November 1973. Eoan Archive, box 21, folder 144.

Administration to meet its shortfall. Whereas the White community has hitherto been the main support of the Group, the question of a greater financial contribution and better support from the Coloured Community arises. May I also suggest that the Trust considers extending its own support of the Eoan Group, prior to seeking further aid from the Administration, who I consider has been very generous in its financial assistance to the Eoan Group.

Whereas the representation of the Administration on the executive is at present advisory, it would appear to be necessary, should further financial aid be granted, that stricter control be exercised over the expenditure. The Administration proposes, as a first step, to scrutinize the monthly expenditure closely and should there be any surmise that sufficient control of expenditure is not carried out, the matter will be taken up officially.<sup>245</sup>

Mr. L.C.V. Walker of the Eoan Group Trust addressed this issue in a letter to the Commissioner stating that ‘the overall problem of [Eoan’s] popularity amongst its own community is a very thorny problem which I feel is somewhat beyond our capabilities.’<sup>246</sup> It is clear that, despite Eoan’s proven achievements on many occasions and over many years, the government was in no way interested in supporting opera in the Coloured community to the extent that it supported opera in the White community.

### 1973

Athol Fugard’s play *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* is banned shortly before it is to be performed for a Coloured audience. Apartheid regulations prevent Africans from performing for Coloured audiences without a permit.<sup>247</sup>

In January 1973 the Eoan Group was informed by the City Council that the City Hall was being renovated to its original design from 1905. It became clear that the venue would, after renovations, no longer be suitable for the production of opera or musicals. For Eoan this meant that the City Hall could not host their 1973 Opera Season, and that the venue would not be available for opera productions in the future. For the Group this was hugely problematic, as ‘the Main Hall of the City Hall is the only venue available to the Eoan

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<sup>245</sup> Letter from the Administration of Coloured Affairs, 23 March 1972, p. 1. Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 436.

<sup>246</sup> Letter to the Administration of Coloured Affairs, 10 April 1972, p. 2. Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 436.

<sup>247</sup> [http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC\\_Materials/ANC-history.htm](http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC_Materials/ANC-history.htm), accessed 20 July 2008.



Group to perform to both sections of the White and Coloured Community at the same time, although the Coloured Community is only allowed to use separate entrances, and to sit downstairs in the one block of seats facing the stage on the right hand side.’<sup>248</sup> Thus Eoan lost this venue as the last sign of political tolerance in Cape Town, as the new Nico Malan Theatre Complex was a ‘Whites Only’ building. The City Council proposed that the Green & Sea Point Civic Centre could be used as an alternative to the City Hall. The town clerk ‘produced a detailed sketch of the Centre, showing suitable separate amenities for both White and Coloured Sections of the Community. Both the Communities would enter from the Main Road to Sea Point and provision was possible for the Coloured Community to occupy one section of the seating in the same pattern as in the City Hall.’<sup>249</sup> However, the shift of venue added to Eoan’s burdens. The new venue meant, amongst others, longer distances to be travelled after a day’s work using inadequate public transport (on which most Eoan members and artists depended) and ‘the removal of the last and only one amenity the Coloured Community enjoyed in the heart of our City of Cape Town’.<sup>250</sup> In a rare display of emotion the Chairman, Ismail Sydow, wrote in his report to the Eoan Executive:

Fellow members, I regret I have to present such a gloomy report to you in connection with one of our more important activities. There is nothing we can do if we wish to continue to perform before both sections of the Community at the same time in the same venue. It would be a great tragedy were the Eoan Group not to present opera, operettas and musicals in the future. This would be a great blow to the many talented members of our community, who would have no outlet to express their natural artistic achievements to the people of our country. What has the Eoan Group done to receive this form of treatment? We have always been law abiding and endeavoured at all times to carry out our motto: ‘WE LIVE TO SERVE!’<sup>251</sup>

The 1973 opera and ballet season was held in September. The opera season consisted of five performances of *The Barber of Seville* and two operatic concerts. The season also included ballet presentations.<sup>252</sup> Eoan had no option but to present their season in the Green & Sea Point Civic Centre and had to apply for a permit to perform before mixed audiences in this venue. The permit was granted on 25 April. Except for the regular

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<sup>248</sup> Chairman’s report to Eoan’s Executive Committee on 31 January 1973, p. 4. Eoan Archive, box 25, folder 179.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>252</sup> See the 1974 season schedule. Eoan Archive, box 6, folder 46.

conditions regarding separate entrances, exits, ticket boxes, toilet facilities and seating, a new condition had been added to the permit which illustrated the extent to which the government thought it could control society and the extent to which they tried to keep racial groups apart. The added condition was formulated as follows: 'No social mingling shall be allowed between Whites and Coloureds.'<sup>253</sup>

Eoan's financial position improved somewhat during this year due to increased income from operatic concerts. Although the grant from the Department of Coloured Affairs was reduced by half to R 20 000 (due to stringent financial restrictions imposed by Central Government<sup>254</sup>) other income was higher.<sup>255</sup> However, Manca reported to Eoan Board on his efforts to obtain funding elsewhere:

Furthermore, during 1972/3, the Eoan Group appealed to over 50 Coloured Industrial and Commercial Undertakings for financial assistance. The outcome of this appeal was the receipt of a donation of the magnificent sum of R 15. The burden of the Eoan Group's financial requirements and the implications is indeed very onerous and I regret to state that this heavy responsibility is left in the hands of our Chairman, Mr. I. Sydow and myself in my dual capacity as Administrative Head and Finance Chairman. The time has now come when this burden on two persons is lightened by additional efforts on the part of all Eoan Group members to increase their efforts both financially and artistically in order that the Eoan Group which has been in existence for over 35 years is not only allowed to die, but to grow from strength to strength, especially in its financial position.<sup>256</sup>

From the above it is clear that the local Coloured community was either not interested in Eoan, viewed the Group as being politically compromised, or was really not in a position to make any substantial financial contributions. It is probable that all three reasons could be true. By the late 1970s and early 1980s signs that the community started to reject Eoan due to its perceived ties with government, became increasingly clear.

The minutes of the 36<sup>th</sup> AGM held in November 1973 specifically mentioned that Manca had been ill for some time and that the attendees were happy to see that he could attend the meeting.<sup>257</sup> He was 65 years old by now. During this month the Eoan Group was asked to take part in the 'Commission of Inquiry into Matters relating to the Coloured Population

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<sup>253</sup> Permit issued to the Eoan Group, 25 April 1973. Eoan Archive, box 16, folder 114.

<sup>254</sup> Financial report by Joseph Manca, 6 November 1973, p. 4. Eoan Archive, box 21, folder 144.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>257</sup> Minutes of the 36<sup>th</sup> AGM held on 6 November 1973, p. 5. Eoan Archive, box 72, folder 553.

Group', a commission set up by the State President and headed by Professor Erika Theron. The mandate given to the commission was to investigate a) the progress made by the Coloured people since 1960 in the social, economic and political spheres as well as local governance, sports and culture, b) the identification of factors causing hindrances in these areas and 3) any other related issues.<sup>258</sup> The questionnaire that Manca filled out in March 1974, revealed, amongst others, Eoan's decreasing support by the Coloured community. Section 6 of the questionnaire showed a drastic decline in membership as Eoan's 1920 members in 1960 had dwindled to 370 in 1973.<sup>259</sup> Section 18 of the questionnaire enquired about mixed or separate audiences and Manca answered as follows: 'When the Eoan Group performs before separate audiences, houses are generally poorly attended. The public tends to boycott separate performances. When performing to both sections of the public, houses are generally full.'<sup>260</sup> Manca maintained however that attendance of Eoan's performances remained constant since 1960, but added that 'up to 1960, the Eoan Group had full support of both races. From 1965 Coloured and White support showed a drop in attendance.'<sup>261</sup> The questionnaire extensively investigated the issue of venues. Manca confirmed that the suitable venues for opera production were those situated in White areas. This caused many logistical problems for the Group, such as permits for which Eoan had to apply, the 'separation of races' in the venues and the long distances Eoan's artists had to travel after they have been relocated further away from town under the Coloured housing schemes of the government.<sup>262</sup> The facilities at the Joseph Stone Auditorium came under severe attack from Manca when he wrote that the 'Joseph Stone Auditorium is absolutely inadequate to meet all requirements for Eoan Group activities'. He further added that the complex had insufficient and inadequate facilities for rehearsals of opera, choral singing and ballet and that no studios for voice production classes were available. He listed the shortcomings of the centre as follows:

No stage facilities.  
No proper dressing rooms.

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<sup>258</sup> Erika Theron en J.B. du Toit. 'Kortbegrip van die Theron-verslag', p. 1. Tafelberg 1977.

<sup>259</sup> 'Commission of Inquiry into Matters relating to the Coloured Population Group: Group 5: Culture. Questionnaire to Organizations practising the Performing Arts', p. 2. Eoan Archive, box 9, folder 59.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

No suitable toilets.

In short, complete lack of equipment necessary for a proper theatre such as the Nico Malan.

The Joseph Stone Auditorium is only partially equipped.

Also seating capacity is too small.

Area not suitable for legitimate theatre lovers.

Too dangerous for members of the public.

South Africa has no real opera house or theatre for Coloured persons.<sup>263</sup>

From Ismail Sydow's cover letter to the Commission of Inquiry on 7 March 1974, it is clear that the professional body for Arts and Culture for the Coloured community, which had been expected since 1967, had after seven years still not materialized. The Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB), which made possible professional careers for Whites, had been in existence for eleven years by now. It is also indicated that some of Eoan's artists were able to get paid employment at other cultural organizations and were therefore not willing to sing voluntarily for Eoan any longer. Manca wrote:

In connection with the Eoan Group's future plans for the presentation of opera, the professional body about to be established by the Council for Culture and Administration should assist the Eoan Group financially to invite well-known overseas Coloured artists to participate in the Eoan Group presentations.

Due to the fact that artists taking part in all presentations by the Performing Board receive remuneration, especially Capab in the Cape, the Eoan Group now finds great difficulty in obtaining the voluntary services of performing artists, choristers, producers, décor and costume designers, and all personnel concerned with the organization, administration and technical aspects of the theatre business.<sup>264</sup>

## 1974

The City Councils of Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and Pietermaritzburg pledge to remove petty apartheid as far as the law allows. The Nico Malan Theatre opens its doors to all races.<sup>265</sup>

The 1974 opera season consisted of a full production of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*,<sup>266</sup> a number of operatic concerts and a ballet production.<sup>267</sup> It was held from 13 to 30 March

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>264</sup> Letter to Professor J.B. du Toit of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters relating to the Coloured Population Group, 7 March 1974. Eoan Archive, box 9, folder 59.

<sup>265</sup> [http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC\\_Materials/ANC-history.htm](http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC_Materials/ANC-history.htm), accessed 20 July 2008.

in the Green & Sea Point Civic Centre. In August *The Barber of Seville* was again performed in a series of performances in this venue.<sup>268</sup> On 19 October 1974 Manca was awarded a Gold Medal from the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns. To celebrate the event an operatic concert was held in October in the Joseph Stone Theatre and the medal was presented to Manca by Professor Beukes, the chairman of the Akademie. Sydow thanked the Akademie as follows: 'The Eoan Group is proud of being associated with the Akademie on this unforgettable occasion. The very generous gesture of Die Akademie marks yet another milestone in the history of our beloved country and the Eoan Group is deeply recognisant of the importance of this memorable occasion when we all, as true South Africans met and enjoyed each other's company irrespective of race, colour and creed.'<sup>269</sup>

## 2.10 Eoan tours abroad

In 1975 Manca's dream for Eoan to tour abroad eventually came true when the Group was invited to participate in the 1975 International Festival of Youth Orchestras and Performing Arts held in London and Aberdeen in August.<sup>270</sup> Earlier in the year, the Group also presented their eleventh annual opera season from 26 February to 8 March, and for the first time in years included two ballet productions on 6 and 8 March respectively. The programme comprised six performances of Verdi's *La Traviata* and the two ballet productions each had three sections: a Spanish Ballet, a Classical Ballet and a Modern Ballet, all of which were choreographed by Eoan's dancers. The season was again held at the Green & Sea Point Civic Centre. During the season Eoan also held various operatic concerts in the Coloured suburbs of Elsies River, Bellville South and Athlone.<sup>271</sup> The

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<sup>266</sup> Minutes of the 37<sup>th</sup> AGM held on 4 February 1975, p. 9. Eoan Archive, box 72, folder 553.

<sup>267</sup> See concert schedules in the Eoan Archive, box 16, folder 114.

<sup>268</sup> Seating plans for the Green Point Civic Centre. Eoan Archive, box 10, folder 65. See also Advance Press Publicity in the Eoan Archive, box 6, folder 46

<sup>269</sup> Archive no. 8 of the Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns. Information obtained from Prof. Izak Grové.

<sup>270</sup> Letter from Ismail Sydow to Mrs. Joyce Bryer, Secretary General of the International Festival, 20 March 1974. Eoan Archive, box 53, folder 436.

<sup>271</sup> See rehearsal and performance schedules in the Eoan Archive, box 9, folder 64.

principal singers during this year were May Abrahamse, Gerald Samaai, Ronald Theys, John van der Ross and Josephine Liedemann.

The official invitation for the tour to the United Kingdom, received on 11 February 1974, stated the following:

The Festival Foundation cordially invites 35 members of the Eoan Opera Group to attend the 1975 International Festival of Youth Orchestras which will take place from 4<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> August in Aberdeen and from 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> in London.

The Eoan Group will give one main performance in Aberdeen and another in a neighboring Scottish town as well as participating in the two gala evenings, one in Aberdeen and one in London.

We, the International Festival of Youth Orchestras Foundation, guarantee to pay for the 35 members of the Eoan Group's full board and accommodation. [...] The Festival Foundation will also be responsible for covering the cost of the Eoan Group's transport from Aberdeen to London on 15<sup>th</sup> August.<sup>272</sup>

With their lodging and transport inside the United Kingdom being paid for, Eoan only required sponsorship for the group's airfares and other costs such as loss of wages for those singers who had to take unpaid leave from their daytime jobs, pocket money for the group and freight costs for some of their costumes. Additional funding also had to be raised for an extra two weeks of training for the Group in London after the festival. The initiative to approach the Festival Foundation was taken by Ismail Sydow in December 1972 when he visited his daughter Didi in London. A meeting with the Foundation was set up via Mr. Bruce Pinkard,<sup>273</sup> and Sydow managed to convince the Festival organizers to guarantee Eoan's participation. At this early stage the Eoan Group was already placed on the official list of organizations taking part in the Festival in 1975.<sup>274</sup>

From a letter to South African Airways, dated 20 September 1974, in which Eoan applied for sponsorship of the group's flights, Sydow's sincere and almost naïve approach is apparent: 'Mrs. Bryer replied that the matter of the Eoan Group's participation in the Festival sounded very interesting and exciting not only from the cultural aspect but more

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<sup>272</sup> Letter from the Secretary General, Joy Bryer, 11 February 1974. Eoan Archive, box 24, folder 172.

<sup>273</sup> Mr Pinkard's company, London Associates, handled much of the arrangements in the UK. It is not clear what exactly his initial relationship was to the Eoan Group. See correspondence in the Eoan Archive, box 24, folder 174.

<sup>274</sup> Letter to South African Airways, 7 October 1974, p. 2. Eoan Archive, box 24, folder 172.

importantly from the point of closer understanding of the activities of various countries thereby promoting closer human relationships between the youth of the world'.<sup>275</sup>

The budget for the tour amounted to R 45 000, of which the group was able to contribute approximately R 15 000 from fundraising concerts.<sup>276</sup> The bid for sponsorship from South African Airways was not successful and it was only by April 1975 that Sydow could confirm that the Department of Coloured Affairs had promised to meet the shortfall of their expenses, provided that the Group approach as many other institutions as possible for sponsorship.<sup>277</sup> In June 1975 Sydow applied for additional funding for the tour from the Municipality of Cape Town. This letter too explained the purpose of the Festival, exposing the blatant contrast to the circumstances and political atmosphere in which Eoan was trying to produce opera locally. Just two years earlier, the permit that allowed Eoan to perform in the Green & Sea Point Civic, went as far as to forbid social mingling between the White and Coloured races.<sup>278</sup> Sydow now described the aims and objects of the Festival as follows:

The Festival brings together with a common cultural purpose youth from different countries, varying socio-economic backgrounds, different religions, races and even opposed political ideologies, and encourages a harmonious, co-operative and creative period of living together, with music as the common interest and motivation. A major aim of the Festival is to foster good relationships and international understanding amongst the youth of different countries and to promote respect and tolerance for one's fellowman. Each year leading orchestras, ballet and dance groups, choirs and opera companies from different parts of the world attend a two-week festival which is held in Aberdeen (Scotland) and London. Each group gives performances, attends seminars and various social and sporting events.<sup>279</sup>

Since this was a Youth Festival, the members who were chosen to travel abroad had to be younger than 26 years of age. The full company eventually consisted of 42 persons of

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<sup>275</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>276</sup> Letter to the Municipality of the City of Cape Town, 9 June 1975, p. 1. Eoan Archive, box 24, folder 174.

<sup>277</sup> Letter to Mr L.C. Walker, an Eoan Group Trust member, 28 April 1974. Eoan Archive, box 24, folder 174.

<sup>278</sup> Permit issued to the Eoan Group, 25 April 1973. Eoan Archive, box 16, folder 114.

<sup>279</sup> Letter to the Municipality of City of Cape Town, 9 June 1975, p. 1. Eoan Archive, box 24, folder 174.

which Manca selected a choir comprising 26 singers under the age of 26,<sup>280</sup> four guest singers (Ronald Theys, Gerald Samaai, Vera Gow and May Abrahamse), six dancers, six administrative staff which included Joseph Manca and his wife Minnie, Ismail Sydow and his wife Carmen, Eoan's voice trainer Allesandro Rota and Eoan's accompanist Regina Devereux.<sup>281</sup> To raise more funds for the tour, the Group gave five more operatic concerts: two in Cape Town (of which one in the City Hall and the other in the Nico Malan Theatre<sup>282</sup>) and one in Stellenbosch. The week prior to their departure, they travelled to Johannesburg via Bloemfontein where they gave a concert in the Bloemfontein Town Hall on 25 July. Sydow described this event as follows: 'This represents a great break-through for the Coloured Community. Never before in the history of South Africa have Coloured People been allowed a) to appear in the Orange Free State, and b) to stay in the same hotel with White persons.'<sup>283</sup> On 26 July the Group travelled to Pretoria and gave their last fund raising concert at the University of South Africa in Pretoria. This too is described as 'another break-through'.<sup>284</sup> On 28 July the Group departed for London from Jan Smuts Airport outside Johannesburg.

During the Festival Eoan performed various opera choruses from their existing repertoire with and without soloists. They were accompanied by the Young Person's Symphony Orchestra from Scotland, which Manca conducted.<sup>285</sup> The Festival in Aberdeen was held not only to display musical talent, but also focused on training. The ballet participants attended classes in London and one person was even flown to Madrid for training in Spanish dance. Manca secured the services of Gordon Jephtas who joined the group in Aberdeen and London to train the choir. After the Festival the Group stayed in London for another twelve days during which they received training in acting, movement, dialogue and make-up at the London Opera Centre. Jephtas was also present during these sessions

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<sup>280</sup> The well-known tenor Sidwill Hartman and his three sisters, Avril, Jennifer and Veida, were all part of the choir. See list of participants. Eoan Archive, box 24, folder 174.

<sup>281</sup> 1975 Eoan Group, Names of the members of the official Eoan Group Company. See also correspondence with Mrs Joy Bryer, the Secretary General of the Festival, 1 April 1975. Eoan Archive, box 24, folder 174.

<sup>282</sup> The Nico Malan Theatre became accessible to all races in 1974.

<sup>283</sup> This concert was organized by 'Die Vryburgers van Bloemfontein'. Letter to the Municipality of City of Cape Town, 9 June 1975, p. 3. Eoan Archive, box 24, folder 174.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> According to Winfried Lüdemann, it was clear that Manca was not a good conductor. Apparently the orchestra followed the concert master instead of the conductor. Interview with Prof. Winfried Lüdemann on 14 January 2009 in Stellenbosch.



and took care of choral training in between other classes. On 27 August the Group was treated to a reception hosted by the South African ambassador in England at the South African Embassy. The six Eoan dancers remained in London for further training until 15 September while the remainder of the group departed for South Africa on 30 August.<sup>286</sup>The National Youth Orchestra of South Africa, consisting of white musicians, also took part in the Festival. The two groups were unaware of each other until they met in Aberdeen. According to Winfried Lüdemann, who at the time was a member of this Youth Orchestra, the two groups mingled freely and supported each other's concerts. He also mentioned that anti-apartheid demonstrations took place outside the concert hall where both groups were performing. During the festival informal sports events were organized and the Eoan singers and Youth Orchestra musicians played soccer in one team against Poland.<sup>287</sup>

Earlier in 1975 the first Cape Town Festival was held in March and April, hosting a variety of cultural events. Manca and Sydow had been aware of the preparations for the festival since 1973 and requested that Eoan take part in the festival and serve on the organizing committee. Eoan eventually gave one operatic concert, *Gems of the Opera*, on 20 April 1975 in the Cape Town City Hall.<sup>288</sup>

## 1976

16 June: The Soweto school students' massacre. Within a few weeks over 1000 children are killed and 10000 children imprisoned. Resistance spreads to schools and colleges throughout the country. This incident is regarded as a turning point in the struggle against apartheid.<sup>289</sup>

12 September: Steve Biko is killed in detention.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> *Outline Itinerary U.K. visit Eoan Group 1975*. Eoan Archive, box 24, folder 174.

<sup>287</sup> Apparently they lost 6-0 against Poland. Interview with Prof. Winfried Lüdemann on 14 January 2009 in Stellenbosch.

<sup>288</sup> See correspondence between Eoan and the City Council in 1973/4. Eoan Archive, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>289</sup> [http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC\\_Materials/ANC-history.htm](http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC_Materials/ANC-history.htm), accessed 20 July 2008.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2.11 The beginning of the end

In July 1976 Sydow reported Eoan's future plans to the Commissioner of Coloured Affairs, stating that during the financial year of 1977/8, Eoan would 'endeavour to present an Opera Season or production of a musical in either the Nico Malan Opera House or the Baxter Theatre.'<sup>291</sup> This initiative, however, never took place. In November 1977, at the age of 69, Joseph Manca resigned from Eoan on grounds of ill health.<sup>292</sup> He had been with Eoan for 34 years. During the meeting of the Executive Committee on 29 March 1978, it was agreed that May Abrahamse would again write to Gordon Jephtas 'to try and see how he felt about the group and if he would at all consider coming to South Africa to aid the group if the necessary funds were available to suitably employ him'.<sup>293</sup> In an interview with Bruce Heilbuth published in *Scenaria*, David Bloomberg, who had had a long association with Eoan and was a Trustee member, stated that 'my biggest worry about the future of the Group is not financial but directional. Joseph Manca's going has left a wide gap. They knew it was coming eventually and for years they have tried to find someone who could take his place. Jephtas might have been the answer, had he been available. No, the main problem is to find a new driving force to co-ordinate and train the Group.'<sup>294</sup>

The disintegration of the organizational structures and motivation within the Group accelerated when Ismail Sydow also resigned in March 1978 after having been with Eoan for 36 years. He served as Eoan's Chairman from 1963 to 1977. The reason provided for his resignation was, like Manca's earlier resignation, ill health.<sup>295</sup> Mrs. Veronica Allan was appointed the new chairlady, but no treasurer or artistic director is mentioned on the list of executive committee members during 1978. Although the reasons for Manca's and Ismail Sydow's resignations were stated as ill health, the minutes of an Executive Committee meeting held on 3 May 1978 records that Manca and Sydow had received much criticism

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<sup>291</sup> Letter to the Commissioner of Coloured Affairs, 8 July 1976, p. 1. Eoan Archive, box 7, folder 55.

<sup>292</sup> Bruce Heilbuth, 'The Eoan Group, is this the end?' in *Scenaria*, June/July 1978.

<sup>293</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting held on 29 March 1978, p. 2. Eoan Archive, box 37, folder 300.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

from members.<sup>296</sup> During this meeting three more members of the Eoan Executive Committee resigned, Mr. M. Modak, Mrs. S. Gierdien and Eoan's voice trainer, Mrs. Olga Magnoni. During his resignation speech, Mr. Modak referred to 'the ingratitude and utter unfairness reflected in the recent attacks against Mr. Sydow and Dr. Manca' indicating that all had not been well between Eoan's management structures and members for some time.<sup>297</sup> The minutes also mention that no replacement had yet been found for Dr. Manca.<sup>298</sup> Mrs. Carmen Sydow, who had been Wardrobe Mistress since the early 1950s, also left Eoan together with her husband. The ballet dancer Dick Jaffer was appointed as new Wardrobe Master.<sup>299</sup> Eoan continued to apply for annual grants from the Department of Coloured Affairs and received R 20 000 for the financial year 1977/8. After the departure of Manca, the activities of the Music Section and opera production ceased almost entirely.

Early in 1979 Eoan eventually managed to obtain the services of Gordon Jephtas as artistic director for the group. Manca had always viewed Jephtas as his successor for Eoan and, although Manca was now retired, this was an ideal solution for the Group.<sup>300</sup> However, the solution turned out to be temporary, as Jephtas's term as Artistic Director turned out to be fraught with disagreements and differences between him, the Eoan Executive and the members. Jephtas left the Group in that same year, shortly before his contract expired. Much seemed to be amiss with Eoan's administration during this time and his worries about Eoan surfaced when he wrote to Dulcie Howes<sup>301</sup> in 1979: 'At the eve of my departure, I am still not able to present you with a strong governing body, nor a powerful administrative body.'<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting held on 3 May 1978, p. 2. Eoan Archive, box 37, folder 300.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>300</sup> Jephtas moved to Europe during 1967 and had a successful career as a pianist and repetiteur in Europe and the USA ever since. As has been documented in this chapter, Manca had tried to convince Jephtas to direct Eoan on many occasions, but to no avail.

<sup>301</sup> Howes was a ballet teacher at the University of Cape Town and had been involved with training Eoan's dancers for many years.

<sup>302</sup> Letter from Gordon Jephtas to Dulcie Howes, 23 May 1979. Eoan Archive, box 4, folder 28.

During the AGM of 25 October it became evident that much disagreement and dissention existed among Eoan members regarding a number of issues, amongst others about Jephtas's role as Artistic Director. Besides alleged overspending on a concert in the Nico Malan Theatre, he had apparently written an unfavourable report about Eoan's artistic capabilities which had been leaked to the press.<sup>303</sup> Shortly before the AGM was held, Jephtas resigned from his post via telegram. He formulated his reasons for doing so as follows:

Eoan Executive and members,

I, the willing, let by the unknowing have been doing the impossible for the ungrateful. I am cancelling my commitment to Eoan because I will not deal with an amateur and mediocre business manager and not being a social worker I am not capable of dealing with people with no identity, big mouths behind authority's back, lots of talent but no skills.

Mediocrity and second class situations have never interested me. You all are now qualified to do anything with nothing.

Gordon Jephtas.<sup>304</sup>

In 1980 Eoan's opera activities came to a complete standstill. The organization was entangled in a maze of political difficulties and internal divisions, exacerbated by a gap between the older and younger generations. Early that year, Roy Stoffels, head of the Drama Section of Eoan, compiled a report entitled 'Reasons why the Eoan Group is no longer a viable arts project' for the Eoan Executive Board to be discussed during a meeting on 1 June 1980. It is evident from the minutes of this meeting that the report was deemed necessary as the public (read: the Coloured community) no longer supported Eoan, resulting in empty houses at performances. The report stated the following reasons:

1. Eoan is synonymous with 'Coloured Culture'.
2. 'Coloured Culture' is a political offspring of the government of the day.
3. The young people do not identify themselves with a politically cultivated culture.
4. The history of the Group is riddled with the organizations' acceptances of this phenomenon, i.e. being a showpiece of 'Coloured Culture'.
5. The stigma is indelible because the present generation have been schooled into rejecting Eoan.
6. The scholars who attend at present, often have to keep their membership a secret for fear of victimization from fellow students and also staff.

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<sup>303</sup> Minutes of the AGM held on 25 October 1979, p. 3. Eoan Archive, box 4, folder 29. The report was not filed with the minutes of this meeting and is assumed to be lost.

<sup>304</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting held on 29 November 1979, p. 3. Eoan Archive, box 23, folder 167.

7. Lack of foresight by previous administrations have caused the Group to evolve a stale image; e.g. a place where opera is done or a place where Indian movies are shown.
8. This staleness has remained and the lop-sided distribution of funds proves this point.
9. Businesses have failed to respond effectively enough to appeals for assistance for fear of damaging their own images. We are therefore wholly dependent on the government subsidy.
10. The Eoan Group (with its charter and aims of its founder) has served its purpose to a particular generation.<sup>305</sup>

Stoffels's report was discussed during a general meeting of Eoan's Executive Committee and approximately 60 members on 1 June 1980. It is clear from the minutes that the members were out of their depth and found it difficult to react constructively to the report. The general feedback was recorded in loose sentences in the minutes as follows: 'a fantastic piece of work which could not be dismissed; a delicate matter required deep and earnest thinking; there is hot and cold air and they need to balance; too many crumbling memorials; members must re-assess the situation, not rely on the past and be unaware of the present and future.' Members of the older generation were clearly upset to be labeled 'hot air' and found it difficult to accept the reality of the generation gap. A noticeable ambivalence was expressed about the label 'Coloured Culture'.<sup>306</sup> During the meeting David Poole<sup>307</sup> commented that 'the phrase "Coloured culture" unfortunately does exist, including the generation gap, and while [it was] hurtful to be called old generation and hot air, they cannot sit talking hot air and not notice what is happening. The younger generation cannot accept that one is good enough to be second class. ... One can benefit from some training instead of no training at all. The idea should be to continue training whether called coloured or anything else.'<sup>308</sup> The minutes further noted that:

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<sup>305</sup> Roy Stoffels, *Reasons why the Eoan Group is no longer a viable arts project*, no date. Eoan Archive, box 4, folder 30. The report is discussed during the Eoan Group General Meeting of 1 June 1980. See minutes of this meeting in the Eoan Archive, box 4, folder 29.

<sup>306</sup> Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 1 June 1980. Eoan Archive, box 4, folder 29.

<sup>307</sup> Poole was head of the Ballet Department at the College of Music at the University of Cape Town and had been involved with Eoan for some years. Both Patricia van Graan and Gerald Samaai (former Eoan singers) confirmed during interviews with the present writer that Poole was originally classified as a so-called Coloured and that his family still lives in Athlone. Apparently he had himself re-classified as a White person with the authorities whilst living in England. During a meeting with several former Eoan members, the present writer was told that Poole 'left South Africa as a Coloured and came back as a White'. Interviews with Van Graan and Samaai were held on 19 November 2008 in Paarl and Somerset West respectively. This story was repeated during a group meeting at the University of Stellenbosch on 26 February 2009.

<sup>308</sup> Minutes of the General Meeting held on 1 June 1980, pp. 2-3. Eoan Archive, box 4, folder 29.

Some members felt [that the] animosity stemmed from [the] Government subsidy received. Mr. Arendse pointed out that [that] has been a problem for years. Eoan refused [the] grant many years ago, [and that the] public and ‘fence-sitters’ did not support [them then either].<sup>309</sup>

Roy Stoffels, however, reiterated his opinion that the subsidy was not the crux of the matter and young people’s complaints were that ‘1) the history of the group was subject to suspicion, 2) the public is lead to believe that the centre is run by the government, 3) that Eoan was under direct control of the Coloured Affairs Department, 4) that its members associated themselves with pro-government parties and 5) that they performed at the Joseph Stone Theatre under a permit.’<sup>310</sup> Older members still found it difficult to accept that the political situation of the day influenced the existence of Eoan fundamentally. Mr. Arendse replied that ‘we have been sitting with these problems all the years. All have their personal views, but here we must keep politics out of the Group. [I am] a member because of the love of music, but that does not make [me] a government stooge. We can stick to our principles and continue learning or else stay away.’<sup>311</sup>

During his short tenure as Artistic Director of Eoan in 1979, Gordon Jephtas appointed former Eoan ballet dancer Peter Voges as his assistant. After a year, at the end of 1980, Voges also resigned and reported to the Eoan Board regarding this department as follows: ‘The Music Section, which was in the doldrums after the glorious days of Grand Opera, presented a different problem. Gordon Jephtas wanted the Opera “stigma” to be removed and the choir to sing as a choir and its activities to become more diverse.’<sup>312</sup> The only way forward seemed to be a change of direction and during 1980 the Eoan Choir formed an alliance with the Gilbert and Sullivan Choir. Rosemary Steward was appointed as choir conductor and informed the Artistic Committee that the Choir had broken away from the opera-type music.<sup>313</sup> Voges also reported that ‘The Music Section enters a new era with its amalgamation with the Cape Town Gilbert and Sullivan Society.’<sup>314</sup> The strict Apartheid laws seemed to be thawing as collaboration with a primarily white organization became

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<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>312</sup> Peter Voges, *Artistic Report*, November 1980, p. 1. Eoan Archive, box 45, folder 352.

<sup>313</sup> Minutes of the Artistic Committee meeting held on 5 November 1980, p. 2. Eoan Archive, box 45, folder 352.

<sup>314</sup> Peter Voges, *Artistic Report*, p. 2.

possible. At this time yet another Eoan stalwart resigned when long-time voice trainer and producer, Allesandro Rota, retired. A farewell concert was held for him on 26 November 1980 at the Italian Embassy.<sup>315</sup>

Adding to the existing difficulties caused by the political situation and the lack of artistic resources, the organization continued to be crippled by infighting, distrust and gossip. In his Artistic Report of November 1980, Peter Voges echoed Gordon Jephtas's memorable resignation telegram a year earlier: 'Too many uninformed people stir up needless trouble by spreading malicious gossip with the main aim being character assassination and further with the aim of promotion of personal opinions; and these in turn lack total artistic commitment or value. Where else but in Eoan are so many unqualified people allowed to voice so many unqualified opinions, and sadly receive qualified attention.'<sup>316</sup>

Political imperatives were also belatedly entering into Eoan's decision making. During the Executive Committee meeting of 30 October 1980, the Group decided not to participate in the Republic Festival celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the South African Republic, changing direction from their participation in previous celebrations in 1966 and 1971.<sup>317</sup>

Despite the Group's disintegration, some former Eoan members were still active as musicians or singers locally and abroad. Since the late 1960s a number of singers had left South Africa and pursued careers abroad. Joseph Gabriels was the first singer to leave Eoan. In 1971 he made his debut at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in the role of Canio in Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*. He also sang for the English National Opera and Dusseldorf Opera, but later settled with his family in Milan, Italy.<sup>318</sup> Patricia van Graan, Abeeda Parker and Charles de Long left for the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia respectively. In 1980 both Ronald Theys and Sidwill Hartman joined the opera choir of the Cape Performing Arts Board as the first Coloured singers for this (till then) completely

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<sup>315</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 30 October 1980, p. 4. Eoan Archive, box 45, folder 352.

<sup>316</sup> Peter Voges, *Artistic Report*, p. 3.

<sup>317</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 30 October 1980, p. 3. Eoan Archive, box 45, folder 352.

<sup>318</sup> [http://saoperasingers.homestead.com/Joseph\\_Gabriels\\_Bio.html](http://saoperasingers.homestead.com/Joseph_Gabriels_Bio.html), accessed 15 January 2009.

White institution.<sup>319</sup> However, for many of Eoan's principle singers of the 1960s and 70s this relaxation of apartheid legislation came too late. By this time singers such as May Abrahamse, Ruth Goodwin and Winifried du Plessis were in their late forties, too late to start a professional singing career in what was still a racially unfriendly environment. In 1985 Gordon Jephtas worked on Broadway in New York. He accompanied former Eoan singer Sidwill Hartman, who at the time studied at the Julliard School of Music. Jephtas wrote to Ismail and Carmen Sydow (whom he addressed as 'pa Ismail' and 'ma Carmen') that Hartman struggled to get funds for studying and that the US government wouldn't allow him to work despite being 'super-talented'.<sup>320</sup> Hartman eventually settled in South Africa where he currently pursues a successful singing and teaching career. Jephtas's career in Europe was alleged to have been even more illustrious and it is said that he accompanied world renowned singers such as Luciano Pavarotti and Renate Tebaldi.<sup>321</sup>

On 10 October 1985 Joseph Manca, the main driving force behind Eoan's thirty years of formidable music and opera productions, passed away in Cape Town.

## 1985

A state of emergency is declared in South Africa.<sup>322</sup>

### 2.12 A new and different Eoan

The Eoan Group still exists today, operating from the Joseph Stone Theatre in Athlone. Their cultural activities have diminished considerably and the ever-changing political and social matrices in South Africa continually pose new challenges to the organization. Professional opportunities in the arts have become accessible to singers, musicians, actors

<sup>319</sup> [http://saoperasingers.homestead.com/Sidwill\\_Hartman\\_Bio.html](http://saoperasingers.homestead.com/Sidwill_Hartman_Bio.html), accessed 15 January 2009.

<sup>320</sup> Letter to Ismail and Carmen Sydow, 20 May 1985. Eoan Archive, box 37, folder 300.

<sup>321</sup> Unfortunately much of Jephtas's career outside South African borders remains in the domain of hearsay and the basic facts about his life and career in music have not been properly researched or documented yet.

<sup>322</sup> [http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC\\_Materials/ANC-history.htm](http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC_Materials/ANC-history.htm), accessed 20 July 2008.



and dancers of all backgrounds since the late-1980s and especially after the new political dispensation of 1994. Many formerly 'Whites-only' cultural institutions have trained opera singers of all race groups and produced indigenized forms of opera to great acclaim. With the removal of Apartheid legislation the institutionalized need for a separate cultural organization for Coloureds has disappeared and with it the special, albeit unjust, circumstances that made the Eoan Group what it was during its opera producing years.

However, even for the current Eoan Board obtaining funding for their cultural activities continues to be problematic and it is clear that up to this day Eoan has not been able to rid itself of the stigma it incurred when accepting funds from the Apartheid government. It was only in 1989 that the Group decided to discontinue their annual application for subsidies from the government. *The Argus* of 17 March 1989 reported the decision as follows:

**The Eoan Group will no longer accept finance from the State.**

The pioneering 50-year-old organisation decided at a recent meeting to 'free itself' from dependence on government aid and in the future not to apply for nor accept funding from the Department of Education and Culture (House of Representatives). The decision was made because the Eoan Group 'believes that its destiny coincides with that of the broadening democratic movement encompassing the majority of the people of South Africa.

Aligning itself 'firmly with non-racialism' in all spheres of life in the country, the group rejects apartheid 'which is very much still alive' and urges that all measures used to maintain it be removed.

Although the Eoan Group has a long history of cultural involvement with the people of Cape Town, according to a Press release 'this history has not always been one which the progressive community could support'.

For many years activities at the Joseph Stone complex had been boycotted by 'large sections of our communities' due to the perception that the group was 'closely aligned to the government and that its activities were designed to promote a divisive ethnic culture'.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Garth Verdal, 'Eoan Group will no longer accept aid from the State', *Tonight*, supplement to *The Argus*, 17 March 1989. Eoan Archive, box folder 494c.

## 1990

2 February: The ANC, SACP, PAC, COSATU and other political organisations are unbanned.<sup>324</sup>

11 February: Mandela is released from prison.<sup>325</sup>

## 1994

South Africa holds its first democratic elections and a new political era is inaugurated.

A decade later, in a 1998 funding proposal, Eoan's compromised historical position was articulated as follows:

Funding is the one aspect which has occasioned the Eoan the most trauma. The Group has always been funded by the State. In the first instance this funding was dramatically curtailed by the government of the day with the creation of the Performing Arts Councils, which from inception received the lion's share of arts funding. Even what little was received by the Group from time to time, was elicited only with some agitation. Secondly, during the apartheid years, the community viewed the receipt of state funding, however modest, as complicity with a repugnant regime, and declared the Group a pariah. Community support therefore virtually ground to a halt. In addition, the involvement of certain high profile politicians, during the same period, as executive members further incensed the community. It was a time of resistance politics and participation in any state sponsored structures was taboo. Undoubtedly, by this time the Group had become a political football.<sup>326</sup>

Rejected by their own people and effectively phased out of the White community, the artistic achievements of Manca and many of Eoan's singers, dancers and actors had come to a tragic end. Few efforts have since been made to revisit the achievements of this exceptional organization or to pay tribute to some of the individual artists. In 2000 a recording of Eoan's 1960 performance of *Rigoletto* was released by Donald Graham of G.S.E. Records. To this day it is the only commercial compact disc release of Eoan's operatic performances.<sup>327</sup> In 2004 Vera Gow received a National Order Award (the Order of Ikhamanga in Silver) from the South African government 'for her excellent contribution

<sup>324</sup> [http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC\\_Materials/ANC-history.htm](http://www.liberation.org.za/library/Library/ANC_Materials/ANC-history.htm), accessed 20 July 2008.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>326</sup> Author unknown, *Eoan Group Funding Proposal*, p. 5. The document is not dated, but is probably from early 1998 because there are referrals to plans for the second half of 1998. Eoan Archive, box 60, folder 494c.

<sup>327</sup> No author, 'Vergete opnames vir CD hermeester', *Die Burger*, 11 July 2000, <http://152.111.1.251/argief/berigte/dieburger/2000/07/11/4/6.html>, accessed 9 May 2008.

to the development of arts and culture in South Africa and sterling performance in the field of operatic music.<sup>328</sup> In 2005 May Abrahamse and Johaar Mosaval each received a gold Molteno medal from the Tricentenary Foundation for their life contribution to arts and culture,<sup>329</sup> and in 2007 May Abrahamse (aged 76) was awarded a Kanna from the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival for her life contribution to arts and culture.<sup>330</sup>

## 2.13 Conclusion

When the current writer started working on the Eoan Archive as part of a larger project run by the Documentation Centre for Music (DOMUS) my expectations were to find an instance of South African opera production not dominated by White notions of what opera should properly be. Of course this was an inherently racist assumption, taking as its premise the belief that people with a different skin colour would naturally adhere to a different aesthetics which could then be theorized as an example of indigenization in South African opera.

Although this chapter is predominantly based on the paper archive, now housed at the University of Stellenbosch,<sup>331</sup> it could not but be informed by the interviews the current writer had started as part of the oral history book project initiated by DOMUS. Whilst working with the paper archive it was possible to imagine Coloured identity as something entirely separate and culturally distinct from White South African identity. That this

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<sup>328</sup> <http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/orders/2004/gow.htm>, accessed 8 May 2008.

<sup>329</sup> No author, 'Vier kry Molteno-medalje vir bydrae tot kunste', *Die Burger* 18 November 2005, <http://152.111.1.251/argief/berigte/dieburger/2005/11/18/DB/14/maasstigting.html>, accessed 8 May 2008.

<sup>330</sup> Willem de Vries, 'Abrahamse snoer jare saam', *Die Burger*, 14 May 2007, <http://152.111.1.251/argief/berigte/dieburger/2007/05/14/SK/8/willemMAY.html>, accessed 8 May 2008.

<sup>331</sup> The collection was transferred to DOMUS in February 2008. The contract between the current Eoan Board and DOMUS stipulates that the collection will be kept at DOMUS on a 99 year loan agreement. DOMUS also has a contractual obligation towards the Eoan Board to publish a book on the organization and its history.

happened naturally in the case of the present writer bears testimony to the legacy of continuing apartheid narratives in the present South Africa.<sup>332</sup>

The interviews with former Eoan singers and group members ruptured this constructed notion of difference. Not only did many of these interviewees look like ‘whites’,<sup>333</sup> but it also became clear that the opera aesthetic of the Eoan Group aspired to European (more specifically Italian) ideals of opera. In other words exactly the opposite of the present writer’s expectations emerged as this historical narrative was constructed. It became clear that Apartheid’s insistence on racial distinctness prompted the Eoan Group, consciously or unconsciously, to disprove or undermine this distinctness by producing ‘universal’ opera. The startling conclusion is that, contrary to expectation, the adherence to European notions and aesthetics became the most effective local strategy of resistance to Apartheid’s alienating insistence on difference. This is not to say that Eoan’s opera productions were about resistance, the historical narrative constructed in this chapter, if anything, proves the opposite. Also, as this chapter makes clear, there are serious and unresolved issues about the agency, control and interaction between the Coloured casts and their White managers.

But the *acceptance* of Italian opera as a site of music making, self confirmation and shared humanity by May Abrahamse, Vera Gow, Gerald Samaai, Joseph Gabriels, Patricia van Graan, Phillip Swales, Gordon Jephtas and all those classified as Coloureds, made of Italian opera a South African genre without it needing to mutate or change into something ‘South African’. What this reveals about indigenization of opera in South Africa is that sometimes the process of indigenization is not marked by concrete change. If Eoan had performed ‘distinctly South African productions’ (locally composed operas, locally adapted sets or costumes, politically informed stagings, etc.) these would, as exceptions, arguably have remained protest texts confirming opera as a foreign genre. In enabling a history such as the one constructed in this chapter, Eoan made Italian opera an indigenized South African practise. The same cannot be said for the Italian opera produced by CAPAB or in the State Theatre, as these productions remain associated with Apartheid elitism and high culture. Through Eoan, *La Traviata*, *Il Trovatore*, *Rigoletto*, *La Boheme*, *Die*

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<sup>332</sup> This phenomenon is for example discussed in Jonathan Jansen’s book *Knowledge in the Blood* (published 2009) which deals with the issue of generational transfers of racial narratives among Afrikaners.

<sup>333</sup> During interviews conducted as part of the DOMUS book project, interviewees frequently mentioned how their parents pressured them not to apply for reclassification as whites.

*Fledermaus, Cavalleria Rusticana, Madam Butterfly, Carmen, L'Elisir D'Amore* and *Barber of Seville* thus became operas with SA performance histories. Ironically, given Apartheid's 'civilizing mission' and Euro-centric cultural chauvinism, this was not an achievement by South African Whites.

Indigenization, we are forced to consider, depends not only on concrete mutations, adaptations, changes and responses to local environments, but also on historical context. As the last chapter of this dissertation will show, this possibility of reading indigenization in opera is historically contingent. The casting of black opera singers in CTO productions in radically different political and social conditions in 2009, enacts a different dynamic of indigenization than the one discussed here.

### Chapter 3. White skin, black masks: the aesthetics of indigenization in *Masque*

In her article “‘An aesthetic of redemption’: Reading *Masque* as public culture’, Martina Viljoen writes that *Masque* ‘radically differs from other African-inspired works that are performed largely by white musicians trained in the Western classical tradition’.<sup>1</sup> Viljoen motivates this statement by contrasting Hans Huyssen’s 2005 opera to ‘the simplified representations of so-called “rainbow nationalism” or the narrowly defined essentialized categories that characterize some post-Apartheid scholarly work’.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, she cites a cast comprised of ‘singers and instrumentalists from the widely diverging fields of traditional African, Early European and also conventional “classical” music’,<sup>3</sup> a score that makes ‘provision for both European and African singers’,<sup>4</sup> where ‘performers are able to relate freely to their specific traditional backgrounds, as well as to different styles of contemporary expression’.<sup>5</sup>

Viljoen’s article on *Masque* is only a single instance of the varied discursive reception generated by the performance of the opera.<sup>6</sup> Yet, it is an important one, not to be compared with the reviews generated in local newspapers or the parochial and often ill-tempered debates characteristic of the new music scene in Cape Town.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, Viljoen’s article occupies a scholarly discursive space: one in which the impact and meaning of *Masque* in relation to the society in which it was performed is seriously investigated. Precisely

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<sup>1</sup> Martina Viljoen, “‘An aesthetic of redemption’: Reading *Masque* as public culture’, *Muziki* 3(1), 2006, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> The première took place in the Artscape Theatre in Cape Town on 28 October 2005, followed by three more performances on 1, 3 and 5 November 2005. Reviews and articles about the opera include the following: O.J. Brooks Spector, ‘Defining local opera in a way that balances tradition with the unusual’, *Sunday Independent*, 6 November 2005; Carl Fourie, ‘Giving opera a local flavour’, *The Argus*, 2 November 2005; Louis Heyneman, ‘Vernuwings is boustene van môre se musiek’, *Die Burger*, 7 November 2005; Hans Huyssen, ‘Boustene van musiek-toekoms moet nou verfynd word’, *Die Burger*, 16 November 2005; Deon Irish, ‘Music art of, for and by the people’, *Cape Times*, 3 November 2005; Gottfried Maas, ‘Nuwe opera bied heelwat, stel eise aan gehoor’, *Die Burger*, 2 November 2005; Brent Meersman, ‘Masque, Theatre Pick of the Week’, *Mail and Guardian*, 5 November 2005; Barry Smith, ‘Masque’ *Opera*, March 2006; Jörg Them, ‘Befreiung der Masken’, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, September/October 2006.

<sup>7</sup> See the newspaper articles by Maas, Heyneman en Huyssen in *Die Burger* as referenced in footnote 6. This debate is discussed in more detail on pp. 180-2.

because of this, her easy change in focus from *Masque* as a ‘tangible means by which actual, material “spaces” may be transformed’<sup>8</sup> to the conceptual opposites she presents, as quoted above, between the African and European components of the opera, makes her own critical reception look more like the kind of essentialized post-Apartheid scholarly work that she criticizes than the ‘enabling space’ that the opera represents.

It may be argued that this is a facile criticism, for how does one construct an idea of a complicated enabling transformational space in words without resorting to the kinds of essentialized concepts seemingly disbanded by this space? This is a seminal point of this article. The argument of *Masque* as a transformational space of aesthetic indigenization, in the opinion of this writer, cannot be made successfully on the same terms employed to discuss less serious and ambitious works probing the essence of a twenty-first century South African sound. In other words, if the hallmarks of simplified representation are easily identified binaries such as African/European, Western/traditional, ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ performance, as well as ‘truthful’ or ‘non-truthful’ means of expression, surely the idea of *Masque* as a transformational space (Viljoen’s description) is none of these things, or perhaps a unique combination of these things that erode the simple binary identity thereof. It is also clear that the way of approaching *Masque* as a ‘transitional space’ views the discourse of transformation or indigenization or hybridization – i.e. the whole meaning-generating structure of language applied to music – as an essential aesthetic component of the music. This means that the same discursive vocabulary and conceptual apparatus of simple oppositional binaries cannot be employed critically to probe what the opera means. So, if Viljoen’s way of (re)-presenting *Masque* in writing is somehow inadequate, is there a more adequate way to arrive at an estimation of the meaning and significance of this work as an example of aesthetic indigenization?

Viljoen is clearly sympathetic to the opera and appreciative of the composer’s intentions.<sup>9</sup> Consequently her argument is based primarily on information obtained from the composer as well as an examination of the score meant to find justification for the composer’s

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<sup>8</sup> Viljoen, p. 127.

<sup>9</sup> There exists a disturbing tendency in writing on South African music to privilege the composer’s voice to an unprecedented degree. Clearly, Viljoen (who is a colleague of Huyssen’s at the University of the Free State) took much of the information that supplies the premises of her study from the composer’s own views on the work. A number of statements in her article are taken verbatim (and unreferenced) from press releases written by the composer.

statements about the work. Not surprisingly then, her criticism is mainly directed towards newspaper critics whose ‘negative judgment points to a grave misreading of the libretto’s allegorical nature’<sup>10</sup> and who lament the absence of ‘emotionally laden arias’.<sup>11</sup> However, the research conducted by the present writer regarding the reception of this work by singers, instrumentalists, critics, the public and all who were involved in the staging and production of the opera contextualizes the intentions of the composer and evidence found in the score. This approach allows for more explorative avenues in the quest to reach a broader, more complex understanding of the impact and meaning of *Masque* in relation to the society in which it was performed and consequently this case-study’s specific view on aesthetic indigenization.

During the annual conference of the Musicological Society of Southern Africa<sup>12</sup> at the College of Music in Cape Town in August 2005 (two months before the première of *Masque*) the composer addressed delegates on the work, the process of getting it staged and the many problems he faced in that process. In words taken from the libretto, Huyssen said that ‘it takes an ear to give you a voice, it takes an eye to give you a face’.<sup>13</sup> He was not convinced that local audiences would have adequate perceptive awareness to understand the work. Disregarding the composer’s notion of a ‘correct understanding’ of the work, Huyssen’s remark proved remarkably sentient of the extraordinary lack of homogenous understanding and appreciation that characterized this specific production.

This chapter will argue that the composer’s aesthetic vision in *Masque* was not shared by the performance context responsible for its public reception, shifting the focus therefore from the composer’s vision (and manifestations thereof in the score) to the music’s reception by performers and audiences. This shift of focus will not mean that either the composer’s pronouncements about his work or the score became insignificant; only that these perspectives are usefully contextualized by other contexts. The argument in this chapter will unfold as follows. First an exposition of the composer’s vision for this work, a description of the libretto, the characterization, orchestration and the use of voice and

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<sup>10</sup> Viljoen, p. 129.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 130.

<sup>12</sup> During this conference the society changed its name to the South African Society for Research in Music (SASRIM), an example of how issues surrounding indigenization are played out in the academe as well.

<sup>13</sup> Act I Scene I, pp. 16-7 of the full score.



second a discussion of the performance and audience reception of the opera. The present writer followed the process of production since 11 October 2005 through to the last performance on 5 November 2005. During this time interviews were held with performers and important members of the production team including the composer and librettist. This will be discussed more fully later in this chapter.

### 3.1 **Imagining *Masque***

#### 3.1.1 *An opera of opposites*

*Masque* is presented on the programme cover as ‘an African Opera’, composed by Hans Huyssen, a white South African from German descent, born in Pretoria in 1964.<sup>14</sup> The composer initiated the production of the opera in November 2005 in Cape Town’s theatre complex, Artscape.<sup>15</sup> The casting in this opera specified seven African characters (five masks, the Griot and a street musician) to be sung by black singers and three European characters (the curator of the museum, a policeman and an anthropologist) to be sung by white singers. The choir comprised approximately twenty black singers. Besides a group of ballet dancers, the opera also involved three separate and specified orchestral groups: a group of indigenous African instruments representing ‘the African world’, a baroque ensemble representing the idea of origin and a contemporary orchestra representing the modern European world.

In this opera ‘reality’ is played out on two levels: on the one hand the European city where the material and rational are the only accepted realities, on the other hand the ‘truth’ of the mythical and imaginative world of the African masks.<sup>16</sup> These worlds alternate often and

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<sup>14</sup> Huyssen grew up in the German-speaking environment in Pretoria, exposed mainly to European culture. In the early eighties he studied cello and composition at the University of Stellenbosch. From 1986 to 2000 he was based in Germany where he furthered his skills as baroque cellist and composer.

<sup>15</sup> The composer was the sole driving force behind the production. It was evident from the fieldwork that without his personal determination the production of this opera would not have happened.

<sup>16</sup> During an interview on 26 October 2005, librettist Ilija Trojanow told the present writer that he knows from experience that African people have a different experience when they see a mask than Europeans. According to him the mask is a living symbol for them. In his view few Europeans understand this diversity of perception between African and European cultures.

seamlessly throughout the opera. At times they run concurrently and when this happens there are moments of blending, although moments of conflict occur more often. The composer consciously chose to accentuate clashes caused by lack of understanding between these two worlds in a rather crude or blatant way.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed Huyssen's vision for this opera was to create a musical conversation between two seemingly conflicting cultures. From the start he was adamant that his music is not a fusion of different cultural styles, but rather juxtaposition or a conversation on equal levels.<sup>18</sup> In this opera it was Huyssen's intention to emphasize the issue of difference between people of different cultures. In the bi-polar world of this opera, music and stories from Africa were treated on an equal level to music and stories from Europe. Indigenous African instruments were juxtaposed with European instruments and in the score equal importance was given to the separate instrument groups. For the composer it was of paramount importance that a musical conversation should be possible on stage, without condescension and with mutual respect, a conversation where the integrity of each culture is kept intact but separate.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, the opera was created with the intention of exploiting and presenting difference between Africa and Europe.<sup>20</sup> The narrative of the opera does not gloss over the severity of clashes caused by lack of understanding and even at the end of the opera, the plot negates a solution or the resolving of differences. Yet, the composer's statement in the programme notes to the production sounds strangely contradictory: 'Would one be able to

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<sup>17</sup> The construction of two worlds of reality or experience in an opera is not foreign to the genre. Some famous examples include Wagner's opera *Der Fliegende Holländer* where the material or outside world of Daland and Erik is set opposite the interior reality of Senta and the Holländer. Another example is *Tannhäuser*, where the sphere of the reactionary Wartburg is set opposite (or alongside) the more progressive world of the Venus mountain. These worlds are also reconstructed in Wagner's music. This is also the case with *Masque*.

<sup>18</sup> This was made clear to the present writer during many discussions with the composer and others in the run-up to the première. The composer also formulated it as such during a radio interview with Johan Botha on the programme *Dis Opera* on 23 October 2005. It was broadcast on the Afrikaans channel (*Radio Sonder Grense*) of the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

<sup>19</sup> See Huyssen's commentary on page 4 of the programme notes.

<sup>20</sup> In the course of the production, it became clear to the present writer that singers, musicians and critics have largely misunderstood this point. Most often the music was referred to as, e.g. 'a good mix between African singing and opera as a European art form'.

accommodate *contrasts, differences, contradictions and discrepancies*, yet create a *unified expression?*'<sup>21</sup> (My italics.)

One can argue that the composer's application of the terms 'Africa' and 'Europe' appears to be rather simplistic binaries, as he seems to imply fixed meanings to these worlds. It is however evident that the two continents represent a much more complex and hybrid content in the opera, so that trying to underpin these terms as stable opposing poles with fixed or congealed meanings is an underestimation of the complexity thereof. We are faced here with the interesting situation that the composer, in order to illustrate complex interrelatedness, is forced to adopt a simplistic binary model. This is all the more interesting because Huyssen's other collaborative projects, for instance *Fynbos Calling*, testify to a much more integrated and sophisticated intellectual approach to this issue.

A further issue of importance to the composer is the notion of 'musical context'. During his fourteen year stay in Germany, Huyssen trained amongst others with the renowned conductor and advocate of historically informed performance practice, Nicolaus Harnoncourt, and through this exposure became convinced of the importance and influence of contextual factors on the composition, performance and reception of music. Due to this awareness *Masque* was conceived as a manifestation of the issue of context in African music making. The composer's intention was to present African music on the 'artificial' stage of the genre of opera, as close as possible to his perception of how it was performed in the 'original cultural context'.

### 3.1.2 *Libretto*

The story of *Masque* goes as follows: Five African masks are housed in a European museum for many years. During these years they are studied and classified as admirable but lifeless objects by scholars and curators alike. One night they are called to life by the touch of a visiting African storyteller, the Griot. The masks wake up and decide to escape from the museum. On the streets of the city they meet other displaced African characters and through interaction with their mythic world, restore them to their original calling. But soon the masks are imprisoned again when they are arrested as illegal immigrants. Neither

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<sup>21</sup> See Huyssen's commentary on p. 5 of the programme notes.

the prison warden nor the curator of the museum seems to have any perception of the imaginative world of the African masks.

The programme notes for the October 2005 performance describe the story in more imaginative and poetic terms, and are worth quoting at length:

## ACT I

### Scene I

A traditional story-teller, the Griot, conjures up the busy station of an anonymous Western capital where we encounter a blind and homeless man, Sam. The Griot and the crowd become an internal voice, urging Sam to draw on the strength of his past. Sam, however is confused as to how to follow this voice. As if in answer, the Griot takes us back to before this story began, to the beginning of the world when God made the five elements ... Stone, Iron, Fire, Water and Air. Out of these elements, God fashions mankind. However, every time mankind becomes proud, God sends in succession the balancing forces of Blindness, Sleep, Sorrow and Death.

### Scene II

The Blind One, the Tired One, the Sad One and Death are on display. They are African masks in a museum and have become mere objects of artistic and historical value for the curator, Liebenberg, and his visiting colleagues. To the Griot the masks are very much alive. So vividly do they stir his imagination that he recollects their history and – by touching them one by one – dispels the curse that had cast them into lifeless figures. With their powers thus regained, the masks decide to follow prophecy by escaping and seeking a way home.

## ACT II

### Scene I

Blindness, personified by Nomfama, is waylaid by the ever-charming Sam. The encounter moves towards understanding with the mutual sharing of past woes. Finally, Nomfama urges Sam to act as his father, a Griot, taught him. Policemen rush in to arrest the ‘trouble-makers’.

### Scene II

Liebenberg, returning to the museum after a strike, is shattered to discover the disappearance of his beloved masks. He does not notice that the Griot has unveiled the final mask – Phakade, the Trickster of Eternal Change, the final balancing force – and in his despair he clutches at it. Once again, the curse is lifted and the mask comes to life. Torn between his usual logic and being confronted by a living mask, Liebenberg is traumatized. The police inform him that they have in custody four strange beings claiming to be masks from his museum.

### Scene III

The masks are once again confined, this time in a real prison. As they have been apprehended as suspicious foreign subjects, the looming threat of deportation promises their longed-for homeward journey. Liebenberg adamantly objects to this. But then Phakade unexpectedly intervenes, calling on forces that shift the focus of the debate to an altogether different level, finally clearing the way for a more appropriate and deeper perception of who and what the masks really are. Sam, now no longer blind, accepts his true calling by raising his voice as messenger and guardian.<sup>22</sup>

It should be mentioned that this production of the opera was a substantially shortened version of Huysen's original conception of the opera. By the time the work went into production, the composition of the middle section of the opera was not yet completed with the result that Act II was almost entirely cut. This not only shortened the opera from three acts to two acts, it also substantially disfigured the storyline of the opera. A number of concepts could not be developed in this production, and due to this, the plot may have come across as less convincing.<sup>23</sup> The producer, Geoffrey Hyland, additionally cut the last two scenes from the final act of the opera in order to adjust it to his idea of a 'more effective' ending. For the purpose of discussing the libretto in this chapter, it has proved useful to refer to certain sections from the omitted act. This fragmented, incomplete, almost hacked-apart character of the libretto will become an important factor in considering what kind of meanings are inherent in *Masque*, something that will only be addressed later in the chapter.

As mentioned earlier, 'reality' in the opera is played out on two levels: the European city where the material and rational are the accepted reality and the 'truth' of the mythical and imaginative world of the African masks. On the language level the libretto is written in two different styles to match these two 'realities', providing an additional structural prop for the material. These levels are constituted by prose for the imaginative world of the African masks and 'normal conversational language' for the world of material and rational reality. Much of the text sung by the masks and griot are therefore in prose. These sections are also richly allegorical, using a decidedly different frame of reference than the text of

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<sup>22</sup> See the programme notes, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> The composer viewed this production as 'incomplete' and his plans for a second production include all three acts.

the European characters. Nomfama (the mask of blindness) for example describes herself as follows:

I am the witch-woman / they say, that hides / the sun, at night / in her own womb.  
I am the tree / they say, that falls / on the assembly ground / to be grabbed by the hair / and pulled away.  
I am the witch-woman / they say. I confess / I have killed many rabbits / I have killed many moons.  
I have held the hand / of the woman, whose flesh / was eaten by the chief / I have cleansed her of all / that he left between her legs.<sup>24</sup>

It is significant that the two styles are occasionally mixed in ordinary conversations between the masks and characters from the material world, constituting a weakening or softening of the binary worlds otherwise dominating the conception of the opera. When this doesn't happen, though, these two styles are almost used as code language, identifying who belongs where. A small example will suffice to illustrate this. In one of the scenes that was omitted from the October 2005 production, Buthongwana (the mask of sleep) is in conversation with Sonia, a student waitress in a fast food restaurant. He speaks in allegorical prose, she reacts in confusion in conversational language. After some time though, she too starts speaking in rhyme, almost as a sign of entering 'his world', only to 'correct' herself quickly.

Seven days a week,  
as long as you pay.  
Shit, I've started,  
talking your way.<sup>25</sup>

One almost gets the sense from this passage that movement from one world to the other is prohibited, or in some way undesirable. It is almost as if the barriers are built into the style of the language, the latter not only reinforcing the idea of a bi-polar world where 'African' and 'European' are incompatible, but also leaving one with the feeling that the traditional African world is excluded from the material world, a fissure which cannot be bridged.

Changing the focus from the level of language to the level of plot, another interesting feature of the libretto not so much articulates itself clearly, as makes itself felt on the level

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<sup>24</sup> Act I Scene II.

<sup>25</sup> This part would have been Scene II of the middle act of the opera. In this production Scene I of this act was used as planned, Scenes II-IV were left out. The opera continued with Scene I of Act III, which became Scene II of Act II.

of a palpable moral subcurrent. Put in other words: the libretto moralizes at its audience. Part of this feeling has to do with the unarticulated premises that underlie the plot, for instance that the value system of the mythical world is somehow superior to that of the material world. Implied is a notion that the 'African world' is one close to nature, an environment where humanity's true calling can be lived. It suggests that these things have become forgotten dreams in the Western world; even stronger, that the material world has robbed the African masks of their true value by displaying them in a museum, rendering them lifeless objects of curiosity and study.

In Act I Scene II, for example, the curator and anthropologists discuss the masks in a scholarly fashion. Half way through this scene the Griot, who witnesses the discussion in the background of this scene, starts reflecting on what he hears, singing these words:

Man grew proud. What a strange pride possesses him.  
Man grew blind. What a strange blindness possesses him.  
Man grew sleepy. What a strange drowsiness possesses him.  
Man grew sad. What a strange sadness possesses him.  
Man didn't grow. Man had died.<sup>26</sup>

As the African story teller, the Griot represents a moral high ground, a person attributed with god-like characteristics such as the ability to infuse life into dead masks/people and restore them to their 'true calling'. It is therefore not difficult to register the suggestion that the Griot deems the curator, his friends and by implication their life's work and the Western world they represent as 'proud', 'blind', 'sleepy', 'sad' and 'dead'.

It is interesting that Viljoen's article on *Masque*, as has already been pointed out, stays very close to the composer's own conception of the work, and adopts a similar kind of moralistic tone when she discusses criticism directed at the opera. Her answer to a newspaper critic's description of the libretto as 'muddied with allegory and a cosmological lecture'<sup>27</sup> is that 'this negative judgment points to a grave misreading of the libretto' and that it 'not only implies an insensitivity to the nature of primitive ... art, but also an undervaluation of the more spiritualized dimensions of Trojanov's libretto'.<sup>28</sup> She further attributes moral value to the function of the libretto by stating that 'part of this vision is the representation of musical performance as an essentially redemptive activity in a confused

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<sup>26</sup> Act I Scene II, bars 131 to 183.

<sup>27</sup> Viljoen, p. 129

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 129.

and depraved world'.<sup>29</sup> One can easily read 'proud', 'blind', 'sleepy', 'sad' and 'dead' into Viljoen's view of the critic's opinion.

However, during the run-up to the first performance of the opera the composer was at pains to point out that his intention was quite the opposite. In his press release, he states that '[the opera's] aim is to create a situation where some of the deep-rooted values, motivations and differences will confront each other, yet be contextualized and treated in an unbiased manner'.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.1.3 Characterization

Characterization in *Masque* was achieved by a variety of means. Naturally aspects of each character are portrayed by the content of the words he/she sings, as well as costume and movement, but in this opera characterization was further enhanced by instrumental accompaniment. The composer chose a specific instrument to accompany each character, the sound almost playing the role of a 'signature tune', providing a kind of auditory 'visibility'. Each of the African roles was associated with a specific indigenous African instrument and, likewise, each of the European roles with a contemporary European instrument.

On deciding which instrument to assign to each of the African characters, Huyssen consulted Meki Nzewi, ethnomusicologist at the University of Pretoria. He enquired if guidelines existed within the African tradition that regulate which instruments should be associated with a specific individual depending on their social standing or the role they play in the hierarchy of their specific tribe. Nzewi admitted there were many such 'rules', but advised Huyssen to use his instinct as a composer when making these choices.<sup>31</sup> The following instruments were assigned to the main figures: the Griot is accompanied by the *uhadi*,<sup>32</sup> Nomfama (the mask of blindness) by the *umtshingo*,<sup>33</sup> Buthongwana (the mask of

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 130.

<sup>30</sup> Press release written by the composer.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Huyssen on 1 March 2006.

<sup>32</sup> A Xhosa bow instrument with a calabash. The sound is produced by striking the string with a light stick.

<sup>33</sup> A traditional Zulu instrument made of a single hollow pipe with a number of holes to alter the pitch. Sound is produced by blowing into the pipe. During the performance of the opera this instrument was replaced by an Indian flute as the *umtshingo* player could not manage the part



sleep) by the *akadinda*,<sup>34</sup> Ntsizi (the mask of sorrow) by the *umrhubhe*,<sup>35</sup> Nokufa (the mask of death) by the *mbira*,<sup>36</sup> Phakade (the mask of immortality or ‘eternal change’) by six kudu horns<sup>37</sup> and Sam (the blind singer) by the guitar. The museum curator, Marius Liebenberg, is accompanied by woodblocks. The cast also makes provision for five ballet dancers to portray the symbolic message of each of the five masks in dance, but during the performance this initiative was scuppered. As was noted earlier, the libretto treats the African and European characters differently; the former’s text is in prose whilst the latter’s text is ordinary speech. For the purpose of illustrating characterization in *Masque*, we turn to the Griot and the museum curator Marius Liebenberg, two characters from the seemingly opposing worlds of Africa and Europe.

Even before Liebenberg appears on stage, the woodblocks announce the coming of the curator. The evenly spaced fast moving quavers, a major ninth apart, simulate the precise and even ticking of the seconds hand of a clock, clean and sharp, driven by automation and never a split second out of time (see Example 1). Soon the curator appears, a small man in white overalls, pen and paper in white gloved hands. In great haste he sweeps his visitors (two anthropologists, both also gloved) through the museum, introducing them to the priceless masks. It is clear that the masks are of great value to Liebenberg, his life’s work, objects he has made his own through meticulous study.

The curator’s vocal line is composed for tenor and is characterized by short and repetitive notes (the sixteenth note being the most common note value), a new syllable assigned to each consecutive note. The music has a frenetic quality to it, the antithesis of flow or relaxation. The text portrays a character that holds the African masks in high esteem, but his one-dimensional scholarly perception of them is rather obvious when he introduces one to his colleagues:

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composed for her. The sound of the Indian flute approximated that of the *umtshingo* closely. As the orchestra was seated in the pit, this change was not visible to the public or critics.

<sup>34</sup> A Ugandan marimba played by two musicians standing on either side of the instrument.

<sup>35</sup> A traditional Xhosa bow instrument (without calabash). The sound is produced by striking the string with a light stick.

<sup>36</sup> A traditional Zimbabwean instrument also known as the thumb piano. Sound is produced by plucking strips of cane or metal which are fixed to a wooden surface.

<sup>37</sup> This ‘group instrument’ requires six musicians.

Exhibit B49/303, a master-piece in its own right, bearing witness, as is in evidence, of a visual hierarchy so typical of cosmological masks. The anthropomorphic superstructure, establishes a schematism of stupendous philosophical purity.<sup>38</sup>

**Example 1:** Act I Scene II, bars 37 to 46

The Griot’s character is sharply contrasted to that of the curator. The colourfully clad African, authoritative in his every movement, attracts centre-stage attention. His role is that of the story teller, keeping the memory of the African myth alive, infusing new life into dead masks, he holds a position highly regarded in the traditional African world. The Griot is primarily accompanied by the *uhadi*, an instrument of soft and almost vulnerable tone, rich in overtones.<sup>39</sup> The music composed for the *uhadi* can be described as a performance pattern, a two-beat figure comprising two triplets on C and B-flat alternatively, neither of which has the authority of a tonal resting point (see Example 2 below). Clear instructions are given to the musician in the score:

<sup>38</sup> Act I Scene II, bars 29 to 42.

<sup>39</sup> During the production the sound of the *uhadi* (and several other African instruments) had to be electronically amplified.

The *uhadi* should be played in the traditional style, with special attention to the resounding overtones with all resulting inflections, implied by the notated bass line.<sup>40</sup>

The content of the Griot's text also stands in sharp contrast to that of the curator. Above the performance pattern a florid and flowing vocal part appears for the Griot. Often his role is that of observer, the wise old man who reflects on the actions of others. His observations of the curator and his friends visiting and discussing the masks, are typical of this:

Man grew proud, what a strange pride, possesses him  
 Man grew blind, what a strange blindness possesses him  
 Man grew weary, what a strange drowsiness possesses him  
 Man grew sad, what a strange sorrow possesses him  
 Man didn't grow, man had died.<sup>41</sup>

**Example 2:** Act I Scene II, bars 175 to 182

175 *sempre dim. e poco rallentando*

Griot *Man did - 'nt grow. Man did - 'nt grow.*

Uhadi *sempre dim.*

Vc *dim.* *pp*

179 *pp*

Griot *Man did - 'nt grow. Man had died.*

Uhadi *sempre dim.*

It is clear enough that these examples of characterization also emphasize the binary thinking in which much of the opera has been conceived. As illustrated in the discussion of the vocal line, the accompanying music and the libretto, the griot and curator represent

<sup>40</sup> See p. 1 of the score.

<sup>41</sup> These words also correspond with the characteristics of the four masks: blindness, sleep, sorrow and death.

opposites in a number of ways. Despite the fact that the composer's aim was to portray fully rounded characters, in line with characters from operas by e.g. Mozart and Montiverdi,<sup>42</sup> the one-dimensional portrayal of these characters is exacerbated by the fixed social understandings of what an African story teller or a white scholarly curator might be imagined to be.

### 3.1.4 *Orchestration*

The orchestral score calls for three separate instrumental ensembles; a group of indigenous African instruments representing the mythical African world, a contemporary orchestral group representing the modern world and a group of period Baroque instruments representing the idea of 'origin'. The role and representative significance of each of these groups constitute an important part of *Masque*, not only in its conception, but also in the execution and, at times, the subversion of the intentions of the composer. The composer's press release states the following regarding the orchestration:

[The opera's] idiom will reflect the diversity of musical styles to be found in the culturally heterogeneous South African history, more specifically that of the Cape, given the participation of traditional Xhosa musicians. The cast will comprise of singers and instrumentalists from the fields of traditional African, Early European as well as conventional 'classical' music. Accordingly the score asks for traditional African, Period Baroque as well as contemporary Western instruments. As each group will make its contribution in a very specific musical idiom, the resulting 'soundscape' will be one of richly varied textures – giving expression to the contemporary South African experience, which, with its varied heritage finally begins to cherish the differences and strives to *orchestrate* them in a meaningful way, instead of calling for a fashionable but compromising cross-culture *mêlée*.<sup>43</sup>

In the above quote the composer refers to the contemporary orchestral group as 'conventional', possibly referring to its 'conventional' or familiar tone quality compared to the less familiar sounds produced by the other ensembles. However, it consists of an unconventional combination of sixteen instruments, one player per part: violin, viola, cello, double bass, acoustic guitar, electric bass guitar, flute, oboe, clarinet (plus bass clarinet), saxophone (alto and tenor), bassoon, horn, timpani, tam-tam, flexaphone and drum set. The indigenous African instruments are the *umtshingo*, *mbira*, *umrhubhe*,

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with the composer on 01 March 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Press release written by the composer. This document was obtained from the composer.

*akadinda, uhadi, djembe, igubu, umasenguane, dununba*, kudu horns, shakers, *hosho* and bells. Due to the natural soft timbre of these instruments, a number of them had to be amplified to enhance their audibility in the theatre during the performance. The Baroque orchestra consists of baroque violin, recorder, two cornetti, two trombones, bassoon and tambourine.

Huysen's music is composed in a free-tonal style, importing compositional techniques and styles from a variety of backgrounds. The styles are implemented in the score depending on the demands of the libretto. The creation myth in Act I Scene I, for example, is composed in the style of a baroque oratorio,<sup>44</sup> the music accompanying the blind street musician, Sam, is in the style of maskanda<sup>45</sup> and the interruption by the police of the festivities after Sam regained his voice and his sight (Act II Scene II) is strongly atonal.

Although the instrumental groups were conceptually divided to represent different worlds or ideas (to quote the composer: 'each group will make its contribution in a very specific musical idiom, the resulting "soundscape" will be one of richly varied textures'),<sup>46</sup> the aural experience of the orchestration by the present writer was more in the line of a unified mode of expression than a mode of contrast or variation. The desired 'richly varied textures', which the three ensembles of diverging sound qualities were intended to produce, was experienced rather as an expansion of the standard orchestral sound achieved through the addition of Baroque and African instruments, instead of a device creating contrast or variety. The binary construction underlying the libretto, characterization and the use of voice is not overtly audible in the orchestral music because the three groups often play at the same time and the music for the various ensembles overlaps. This leads to a lack of contrast, the thick consistent band of orchestral sound undermines the dramatic potential of the opera as the texture and intensity of the music stays more or less the same throughout. During the performance under discussion, all three ensembles were seated in the orchestra pit, thus being invisible to the audience and effectively exacerbating the lack of audible distinctiveness.

In the light of other compositions of Huysen's oeuvre, where he often combines traditional European instruments with traditional African instruments (for example *Fynbos*

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<sup>44</sup> Act I Scene I, bars 194 to 282, pp. 27-43 of score.

<sup>45</sup> See Viljoen, p. 117, footnote 9.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with the composer on 01 March 2006.

*Calling*), it is evident that Huyssen is a skilled composer in orchestrating these diverging soundscapes. One can argue that the aural experience of a unified soundscape is in fact reaching the politically stated goal, as quoted above, or as formulated differently in the programme notes: ‘Would one be able to accommodate contrasts, differences, contradictions and discrepancies, yet create a unified expression?’<sup>47</sup>

There is, however, another, less idealized and more convenient interpretation. During an interview with the composer some months after the performance,<sup>48</sup> Huyssen mentioned to the present writer that he realized that the differences in tone colour between the various orchestral ensembles did not come across to the audience as he had intended. He realized that this happened because the music for the separate orchestras overlapped too often. He further mentioned that should he ever be able to produce the opera again he plans to seat the African ensemble on stage visibly to enhance the distinctions between the orchestras. Yet again we are confronted with a work conceived in a binary framework, but this time accompanied by the admission that the intention remained unfulfilled in performance.

### 3.1.5 Voice

In *Masque* traditional Western singing techniques ideally had to give way to other conceptions of voice production. Huyssen expected from the singers singing the African roles a kind of sound closer to the tone quality of ‘singing in the kraal’ rather than the polished and cultivated tone quality they learn during their training. His vision was to create a sound ‘authentic’ to the spirit of indigenous African music and culture, based on the assumption that ‘African voice production’ as a separate aesthetic model would serve an ‘African’ opera in the best possible way. On a technical level, it meant a sound with as little as possible vibrato and, to quote the composer, ‘a sound which comes from the stomach, without any pretence and in the moment’.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See Huyssen’s commentary on p. 5 of the programme notes.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with the composer on 01 March 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with the composer on 1 March 2006. It is interesting to note that the composer was not able technically to explain his sound ideal in clearer or more accurate terms.

**Example 3: ‘Avant la Scène’, bars 1 to 28**

**1. Perform -**

*This whole section is to be prerecorded and played back, while the hall and stage are still dark.*

$\text{♩} = 69$

Uhadi tuned to Bb  
(Perform Pattern) continue with same rhythm  
*mf* (Uhadi should be played in the traditional style, with special attention to the resounding overtones with all resulting inflections, implied by the notated bass line.)

7

said I. 'It is, it is a ho - ly act,' said he. 'Perform'

13

my fa ther said. 'Per form as if..., as if..., as if no thing e xists. but through you, through yoursong and your word!' said he.

The opening scene of the opera<sup>50</sup> is an example of Huyssen’s quest for the so-called ‘African voice’. This scene is staged as follows: In the darkness a single beam lights up the colourfully clad Griot. His cloak is a flamboyantly red, orange, green and yellow, he stands with arms raised and rod in his hand. The Griot, an important mythical figure who awakens ‘dead’ masks, the storyteller who keeps the African spirit alive from generation to generation, is the embodiment of ‘authentic’ Africaness. The sound of the accompanying *uhadi* rises from the orchestra pit in anticipation. He sings:

Perform, my father said.  
Perform, as if it were a holy act? said I.  
It is, it is a holy act, said he.  
Perform, my father said,

<sup>50</sup> ‘Avant la Scène’, bars 1 to 28.

Perform as if, as if nothing exists but through you, through your song and your word! said he.<sup>51</sup>

The vocal line, composed for baritone, is characterized by a number of interval leaps in short succession, at times spanning a range of two octaves within four beats (see Example 3).<sup>52</sup> The tonality hovers around C. The melody provides no obvious formal structure and a number of seemingly unimportant words such as ‘he’ and ‘will’ are set to long melismas.<sup>53</sup> The melody therefore evokes a feeling of free movement and improvisation above the steady and repetitive motive of the accompanying uhadi.<sup>54</sup> Several written instructions in the score request of the singer legato singing, the application of crescendo’s and decrescendo’s as well as marcato accentuations. However, no mention is made of the quality of voice required.

Comparing the composer’s request for an African vocal sound to the way in which the Griot’s part is composed, raises questions. The vocal line is obviously technically demanding; it requires the singer to do a number of quick successive jumps as well as long melismas, it is composed in a free-tonal style and demands pitch and breath control. The question arises whether it is technically possible for a singer to sing this line and at the same time produce the tone quality Huyssen requests (as mentioned above, a sound with as little as possible vibrato and, ‘a sound which comes from the stomach, without any pretence and in the moment’).<sup>55</sup> Traditional African music is known for its relatively small melodic range, this characteristic being evident in the music composed for the African instruments that accompany the African characters in the opera. In other words, can one request an ‘African sound’ in a vocal line not composed in ‘typical African’ style? On the other hand, is this, in line with the experimental nature of the work, rather a question of experimenting with what has not yet been done, pushing the boundaries of what has traditionally been deemed impossible?

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> See bars 14 to 15.

<sup>53</sup> See bars 17 to 20 and 22 to 24.

<sup>54</sup> In pursuit of ‘authentic African music’ the incorporation of improvisation within the formal parameters of the opera was important to the composer. To achieve this, improvisation had to be ‘practiced’ to prepare the singers to be able to improvise on stage at specific points in the opera. For a more detailed description of one such section, see the description of sections 16 and 17 from Act II Scene I later on in this chapter.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with the composer on 1 March 2006.



Another example of the intentional use of ‘African voice’ as a separate aesthetic model is the *Griot’s Song* and *Apprehension* in Act II Scene I, sections 17 and 18.<sup>56</sup> These sections are also an example of the incorporation of improvisation into the opera. It is preceded by the scene where Nomfama (the mask of blindness) meets the blind street musician, Sam. She convinces him of his true calling and he regains his sight and his voice. This scene is intended as a celebration in ‘African style’. In the score this section is written out in two bars only, each consisting of a whole note rest with a fermata as illustrated in Example 4 below.

**Example 4:** Bars 465 to 466

16. Griot's Song  
465 traditional praise-song - African improvisation

17. Apprehension  
466 spontaneous audience reaction and participation to the praise-song - African improvisation; at the height of the party sudden interruption by the full orchestra

The composer’s instruction for bar 465 is as follows: ‘traditional praise song – African improvisation’, and bar 466 reads: ‘spontaneous audience reaction and partition to the praise song – African improvisation; at the height of the party sudden interruption by the full orchestra’.<sup>57</sup> During the performance under discussion here, the traditional praise song in this scene involved the main African characters, a traditional praise singer, the entire choir and the group of African instruments (in the orchestra pit). The intended audience participation did not happen during this performance.

As Nomfama sings the words ‘your father failed, your cousin strayed, you yourself were blinded and bound, but now is the moment to step onto your own ground’,<sup>58</sup> the praise singer rushes onto the scene and starts shouting an African praise song. Sam joins in, as does the choir and other masks with ululations, whistling and dancing. In the orchestra pit

<sup>56</sup> Bars 465 to 466.

<sup>57</sup> See p. 145 of the full score.

<sup>58</sup> Act II Scene I, bars 461 to 464.

the African instruments sound out at the same time as a scene of song and dance with intense energy unfolds. The praise singer and Sam sing their praises in an African language: shouting loud and, compared to polished European opera voice quality, crudely. After approximately one minute of festivity, the scene is interrupted by aggressive music from the contemporary orchestra and flashing lights as the police rush on stage to arrest the noisy trouble makers. This unusual and striking section lasts barely seventy seconds of the total duration of ninety minutes of the opera. Although this scene is in its entirety performed on instruction of the composer, the music itself consists of improvised traditional African music which has been rehearsed thoroughly during the weeks preceding the performance.

### **3.2 Reception**

As mentioned in the introduction, this chapter will argue that the composer's aesthetic vision in *Masque* was not shared by its public reception. The focus here is therefore redirected from the composer's vision (and manifestations thereof in the score and publication material surrounding the opera) to the music's reception. This does not render the score or composer's intentions less valuable – the current writer uses this material abundantly – but contextualizes them. Additionally the ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the present author will be used to read elements of *Masque* against the grain. The following section will discuss the reception of *Masque* by singers, instrumentalists, critics, the public and all who were involved in the staging and production of the opera. It will further highlight how the reception deviates from the composer's pronouncements about the work (and composer-based critiques like that of Viljoen) and how the performance context of the première proved inadequate to produce a work of this scale.

The present writer followed the process of production from 11 October 2005 through to the last performance on 5 November 2005. During this time ten rehearsals were attended, primarily as observer. In addition, interviews were held with performers and important members of the production team including the composer, librettist, the producer, his assistant and a number of singers. All four performances were attended, the first and last as a member of the audience, the intermittent performances as back-stage observer.

Interviews were also held with the composer four months before the production started as well as four months after the last performance. The project was approached as an ethnographic study in order to observe closely the actions, attitudes, discussions and interactions between the different role players amongst themselves and between them and the material of the opera. Consequently the writing in the following section will veer between the conventionally academic and the ethnographically descriptive. As stated earlier in this chapter, this approach allows for more explorative avenues in the quest to reach a broader, more complex understanding of the impact and meaning of *Masque* in relation to the society in which it was performed and consequently this case study's specific view on aesthetic indigenization. This will be informed by the discrepancies and lack of understanding between the composer's intentions and the artists' and public's experiences of the work, but also by the discontinuities between the composer's intentions and the realization of those intentions. The material will be structured by referring in turn to the use of voice, the role of the orchestra, reactions to the libretto, Huyssen's logistical problems in staging the performances and the performances themselves.

### 3.2.1 *The use of voice*

In the months preceding the première of *Masque*, Cape Town Opera provided Huyssen with a cast of three professional singers to sing the leading roles, of which two were black singers and one white, all of them previously trained at the University of Cape Town's Opera School. The rest of the cast (including the other five leading roles and the choir) consisted of students from the Opera School. Of this group two were white and the rest (about 20 singers) black.

The main character in the opera, the African story teller, was sung by Fikile Mvinjelwa. During the past few years, he had already established himself as a professional opera singer in South Africa, singing major roles in operas such as *Rigoletto*, *Nabucco*, *Tosca* and *Faust*. Mvinjelwa is also an advocate of new and local opera and has sung a number of roles in contemporary opera such as Enoch in Roelof Temmingh's opera *Enoch, Prophet of God* and also King Dinuzulu in *Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu* by Mzilikazi Khumalo. On introducing Mvinjelwa to Huyssen's idea of vocal sound for this production, the

composer explained that the singer was initially rather skeptical. After some individual rehearsals with the piano without clear progress on this issue, Huyssen took along the *uhadi* player who was to accompany the story teller throughout the opera. For Mvinjelwa this was the first time singing with the *uhadi* in an operatic context and, according to Huyssen, the ‘penny dropped’ with Mvinjelwa the moment he heard the sound of the *uhadi*. According to the composer, the singer immediately understood the context of Huyssen’s thinking and was able to make a sound approximating Huyssen’s idea. Mvinjelwa himself was rather careful in his own opinions, shying away from the emphasis on difference between European and African singing. In my interview with him, he said that he did not experience Huyssen’s idea of sound as a different way of singing:

There is no African versus European singing. In opera you have to project your voice, otherwise no one will hear you. I have done many different kinds of opera and have never used traditional shouting yet, but it is all opera.

However, Mvinjelwa was convinced of the merit of Huyssen’s thinking and assisted the composer in trying to convince and educate the rest of the cast in this regard.

The role of Sam, the blind musician, was sung by Skumbuzo Kunene. He hails from Swaziland and at the time of the production was a student of the well-known singing teacher Nellie du Toit. Kunene grew up in Swaziland, where he sang in the local choir and got to know opera by watching DVDs of Verdi’s operas. He fell in love with Verdi and singing this kind of opera has remained his career dream. Huyssen also clashed with Kunene’s teacher about the technique of singing required for the production, and Kunene felt that there was definitely a difference in the way Nellie du Toit taught him to sing and what was expected from him in *Masque*. According to Kunene, Huyssen wanted him to ‘shriek and shout’, which hurt his voice. The composer and singer nevertheless came to some kind of compromise and he did experience the opera as a good production.

On questioning one of the white singers, Arthur Swan, yet another point of view surfaced. Swan also did not like to focus on the differentiation between African and European voice production and said: ‘that would be a white man’s idea of what a black voice is’. According to him Huyssen also expected him to shout and shriek at times, but he negotiated with the composer, told him that he could not do that and Huyssen accepted his reasoning. Swan referred to Mvinjelwa’s actual singing as ‘shouting and shrieking at a

pitch'.<sup>59</sup> Referring to the opera on a compositional level, Swan was not convinced of the story as such and also did not know what to make of terminology such as 'indigenous opera'. He also mentioned that the voice parts were not composed in an accessible way with many difficult rhythms and leaps. The only white female singer in this production, Sophie Harmse (also an established singer in Cape Town), was outright negative about the opera and condemned the work as 'junk' and 'incoherent'.

What does one make of these diverging opinions? The fieldwork presented evidence of a certain ambivalence or reluctance amongst singers, white and black, to accept and fully engage with the concept of 'indigenous African singing' as a technique in the operatic arena. On the aesthetic level one may assume that the perceived reluctance derives in part from the all-too common skepticism towards any new music, a skepticism which was also prevalent in a number of reviews, especially those printed in *Die Burger*.

There is of course the matter of education. Again the composer had a clear opinion on this: he felt that singing education at South African institutions was insufficient and one-dimensional. According to him singers at the Cape Town Opera School are only taught to sing in the style of nineteenth-century Romantic opera, with Pavarotti and Domingo as role models.<sup>60</sup> Huyssen further explained that in Europe singers are exposed to a much wider frame of reference during their training and a good singer can produce any kind of sound when asked to do so. This seems fair enough, but would such a desired production of sound reflect 'an authentic African voice', or rather a highly cultivated European imagining of what an African voice may sound like? Perhaps Huyssen had in mind the kind of voice that could for example also perform *Sequenza* by Berio and one might be entitled to ask: is singing like an African man an approximation of 'authentic African voice', or just another technique in the repertoire of the twenty-first century's treasury of sound effects?

Perhaps most interesting though, it emerged that neither the composer nor the singers were able to describe in technical terms how to produce this African voice, in the same way that one can technically describe how to use European voice. The composer was not able to describe it in more accurate terms other than 'vibratoless singing', 'from the stomach' or

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<sup>59</sup> There is, incidentally, no hint in the notated music of this desired sound effect.

<sup>60</sup> Since the Cape Town Opera School's inception in 1920s, the school has been run predominantly by Italians.

‘in the moment’. One suspects that he assumed that the African singers would, with these words, understand what kind of sound he had in mind. He may have assumed that the sound of for instance the *uhadi* resembled that of a distant memory, called up by the association with the indigenous instrument. His experience with Mvinjelwa, who had some understanding of it after hearing the sound of the *uhadi*, indicates this. But, perhaps the appeal of African voice lies on the level of ‘origin myth’, so common in writing and thinking on South African music. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in a comment the composer made during the run-up to the première: ‘As a white composer in South Africa, I write an opera about indigenous African culture. I ask an African singer to sing like an African man, but he does not want to, he wants to sing like a white man.’<sup>61</sup>

### 3.2.2 *The orchestra*

As was evident from newspaper reviews and feedback from individuals, the use of African instruments in *Masque* was experienced by many as positive and innovative. During the intervals and after each performance members of the audience showed particular interest in the African instruments as the Todi Ensemble spontaneously improvised, entertaining the curious onlookers. The *Mail & Guardian* critic, Brent Meersman, even mentioned that the orchestras were ‘all unfortunately hidden away in the conventional orchestra pit. In Act II patrons shifted to the edges of their seats to glimpse the kudu horn ensemble.’<sup>62</sup> The use of African instruments simultaneously with instruments from the classical tradition is characteristic of Huysen’s oeuvre. However, the process of transferring indigenous African music to the artificial space of the opera house, proved to be much more difficult. As the composer stated in the programme notes:

Would it be possible to include traditional African music, without sacrificing its unassuming poetic qualities? Could one incorporate African instruments and closely bind them into an essentially dramatic form, yet do justice to their essentially non-dramatic idiom?<sup>63</sup>

However, the issues that caused the majority of immediate problems for the composer were technical rather than aesthetic. Notating African music in the Western idiom as well

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<sup>61</sup> Telephone conversation with the composer on 07 October 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Brent Meersman, ‘Masque’, *Mail and Guardian*, 5 November 2005.

<sup>63</sup> See programme notes, p. 4.

as tuning the instruments to even-tempered tuning was necessary in order for the three ensembles to play together and to play in tune. The African instruments also had to accompany the singers whose parts were composed in even-tempered notation. The *uhadi*, which partnered the griot, was for instance tuned in B-flat. Huysen personally took responsibility for tuning the instruments and explained that by the time he had finished tuning the last African instrument of the ensemble, the first one was out of tune again. Another technical problem was that many of the instruments were not available and had to be made on request. Due to circumstances the *akadinda*, for example, was only available one week before the first performance.<sup>64</sup>

According to the composer the biggest difficulty to overcome was to find African musicians to take part in the production. Huysen had previously collaborated with Dizu Plaatjies, a musician from the University of Cape Town who specializes in traditional African instruments. The initial plan was that Plaatjies would provide the musicians for this project, but he withdrew six months before the première. Huysen knew a number of African musicians who occasionally played together but were not formally engaging in African music-making. These musicians decided to form a group, the Todi Ensemble, specifically for the production of *Masque*. Further problems arose from this situation as the members of the Todi Ensemble were used to spontaneous music making, natural to traditional African music and few had any professional experience. A number of them could not read notation and the composer therefore started to teach them. Although they could play in the spontaneous environment, having to perform intricate African rhythms and melodies in the organized time structure of an opera proved to be an almost insurmountable obstacle. The kudu horn ensemble (six players) for instance managed to play correctly in time only once during the entire production process; at the third performance of the opera on 3 November 2005.

The present writer's first acquaintance with the Todi Ensemble was during a rehearsal on 11 October 2005 in one of the practicing rooms at the College of Music at the University of Cape Town. They were rehearsing the improvisational section of the 'Griot's Song', Act

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<sup>64</sup> The *akadinda* that was used for practicing was in a lower key. The result was that up until one week prior to the première, Buthongwane (the mask of sleep) continually had to transpose his part down and it was only one week before the première that the cast as a whole could hear the *akadinda* (and Buthongwane's part) in the right key.

II Scene I. This scene was intended to be a celebration in ‘African style’ after the blind musician Sam had found his voice and regained his sight. Huyssen composed no music for this section and negotiated with the musicians what kind of music should be played, continually pointing out that it should be ‘their own’ music and checking whether they identified with his suggestions. On enquiry I was told that all musicians grew up in the city and the townships; none were from rural areas. Huyssen requested music that should be ‘a celebration of joy when you have found your voice again’. As they practiced, the texts for the praise singer and Sam were worked out, the women were encouraged to ululate, and the rest of the group played their instruments and danced. At some stage during this rather intense rehearsal, the singer Skumbuzo Kunene dropped an aside: ‘You know, Hans is teaching me to be wild again!’<sup>65</sup>

Throughout the run-up to the première of the opera the professional demands on this group to perform in opera production continued to be particularly problematic. During tutti rehearsal Huyssen used every possible moment to rehearse with them.<sup>66</sup> The kudu horns (a group of six musicians) had to play a complex pattern where each horn blows a single note split seconds apart, a pattern which may have ‘come natural’ in the original performance context, but seemed very difficult when staged in the operatic environment. The leader of the Todi Ensemble, Kgaladi Thema, replied evasively: ‘The rhythms are difficult, but we are enjoying ourselves. The kudu horn is not that difficult to play but the embouchure needs to be exercised. But aah, they are stinking!’<sup>67</sup> (referring to the horns). As already mentioned, eventually the kudu horns performed their solo without mistakes only during the performance on 3 November.

Soon it emerged that the *umtshingo* was not technically able to manage the part composed for the instrument.<sup>68</sup> The composer decided to replace the sections for the *umtshingo* with the Indian flute which has a similar quality of sound. The part was then played by the flautist of the contemporary orchestra and on mentioning to the flautist that she always accompanied Nomfama (the mask of blindness), she replied: ‘O, I did not even notice, I

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<sup>65</sup> He later told the current writer that Swazi’s do not normally celebrate that loudly and wildly.

<sup>66</sup> It was evident that, due to the many logistical problems he had to sort out himself, Huyssen’s nerves were stretched to the limit and led to occasional outbursts during these rehearsals which included remarks such as ‘bad rehearsals make for good performances’.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Kgaladi Thema on 27 October 2005.

<sup>68</sup> It is not certain whether the problem stemmed from the instrument itself or if the musician could not manage the part.



just play the music in my score'.<sup>69</sup> The difference in sound was barely audible to the audience. A professional flautist from Stellenbosch who attended the performance on 1 November later enquired from the composer who played the prominent 'traditional flute solo', asking 'what kind of indigenous instrument it was'.<sup>70</sup>

It seemed as if Huyssen at this point in time experienced a degree of disillusionment or frustration with African musicians. Although he had done a number of projects where he collaborated closely with traditional African musicians, he directed strong critique towards them in the run-up to the première of *Masque*. During the annual conference of the Musicological Society of Southern Africa at the College of Music in Cape Town in August 2005, the composer introduced conference attendees to the pending première of *Masque* and, amongst others, said that:

Traditional African music [must] ... step out of its comfort zone, where it hides behind secrets and mysteries, to account for itself and to explain. To me that is the biggest underlying challenge. You only get to experience the real indigenous music once you are let into the inner circle of African indigenous musicians.

During an interview on national radio shortly before the première, Huyssen also mentioned that politicians and scientists bemoan the fact that much of Africa's cultural treasures are being lost, but that, in his experience, nothing is done to preserve or promote the little that there still is.<sup>71</sup>

One week before the première, the contemporary orchestra and the Baroque ensemble started attending rehearsals. The entire Baroque ensemble was flown in from Europe and most of the other musicians were members of the city orchestra with years of experience behind them. Obviously used to professional circumstances, these groups performed well, although a sense of apathy was prevalent. Besides a few comments about the composer's apparent lack of conducting skills, just one person dared an opinion on the opera itself, the timpani player Bill Holland. Holland is actually an American who has lived in South Africa for 25 years. His negative opinion was therefore surprising as he described the work

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<sup>69</sup> Short interview with flautist Bridget Rennie during the interval of the performance on 01 November 2005.

<sup>70</sup> Personal letter written to the composer by Stellenbosch flautist Marietjie Pauw.

<sup>71</sup> Radio interview with Johan Botha on the programme *Dis Opera* on 23 October 2005. It was broadcast on the Afrikaans channel (*Radio Sonder Grense*) of the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

as having a too complicated score with a composer who was not able to conduct. The underlying sentiment of the libretto obviously irritated him as he referred to it as an ‘Apartheid story’.<sup>72</sup>

### 3.2.3 *Logistical problems in getting the work staged*

A rather oblique picture emerged on investigating the logistic problems Huysen faced in order to stage the opera. The composer was the sole driving force behind this production and it was evident from the fieldwork that without his personal determination and tenacity the production of this opera would not have become a reality. The overall impression gleaned from fieldwork showed an insufficient infrastructure for the production of new music, exacerbated by a lack of support and co-operation from the existing authorities in this specific case study.

A contract for the production of four performances of *Masque* was signed with Cape Town Opera in October 2004 and provision was made for singers to take part in the production. However, no support was provided to help the composer with the ensemble of traditional African instruments. After Dizu Plaatjies withdrew from the project, Huysen claimed he received no help in finding alternative musicians, obtaining instruments for the production or teaching the Todi Ensemble to perform in circumstances which were new to them.<sup>73</sup> During an interview with the present writer, the producer of the opera, Geoffrey Hyland, shared the composer’s opinion that the management of Cape Town Opera did not do much to help iron out logistical difficulties. Furthermore, in July 2005 Cape Town Opera apparently informed the composer that the agreement of four performances was to be reduced to three. The composer refused to accept this and had to stand firm to retain the conditions of the original contract.<sup>74</sup>

Funding for the production proved to be another problem. There was no system providing support in this regard and Huysen had to find his own sponsors. He secured funding from The National Arts Council, Pro Helvetia and The Swiss Development Corporation for the

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<sup>72</sup> Interview held with Bill Holland on 01 November 2005.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with the composer on 15 July 2005.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

composition of the work as well as for the Todi Ensemble. Funds for the rental of the premises and payment of the singers, musicians and the production eventually came from Cape Town Opera, but Huyssen had to negotiate these grants in person and he felt that he received no support from the management of the company.<sup>75</sup>

By early 2005 Huyssen wanted to start rehearsing with singers in order to test his idea of voice production on singers and to see what kind of singers he would have for the production to further compose the parts. Already at this stage Huyssen was faced with huge problems, first in obtaining singers and secondly he immediately ran into conflict with the style and technique of singing that the students were taught. The singers were apparently only contracted by July of that year and according to the composer they had no idea of the kind of sound he wanted or how to produce it because they were mainly taught voice production for opera singing from the late Romantic period.

The agreement was made that the opera would be produced by students of the Opera School at the University of Cape Town's College of Music as well as a number of professional singers from Cape Town Opera. The cast eventually comprised three professional singers and the remaining 85% consisted of students. As the bulk of the cast was inexperienced, the composer found the technical standard of singing not sufficient and a professional attitude lacking. In this regard the director, Geoffrey Hyland, again supported Huyssen's sentiment and mentioned that he needed to work intensively with the students as they still had to learn how to move on stage.<sup>76</sup> He also mentioned that the students tired easily, forgot to eat before rehearsals and could not sing properly as they became hungry. Furthermore, students had to be transported by minibus from the university campus in Rondebosch to rehearsals at the Artscape Theatre (a drive of approximately 15 minutes). Apparently this was not well organized and it resulted in many late arrivals and absenteeism. According to the composer there was not a single rehearsal where all members of the choir were present. In an even worse situation, during the performance of the opera on 1 November, only one tenor of the choir showed up.

During an interview with the composer on 1 March 2006 Huyssen said: 'what was on stage [during the production] was not what I had in mind when I composed the work; my

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with composer on 1 March 2006.

<sup>76</sup> During the rehearsal on 13 October 2005, he encouraged the students to move convincingly and said: 'Learn it, practice it, otherwise you can only make CDs.'

intentions have failed'. One cannot but realize that it would have been different had the logistical circumstances been more favourable. Huysen also mentioned that he would never be able to stage the opera again in similar circumstances.

#### 3.2.4 *The performances*

*Opening night 28 October 2005. I am surprised to hear that the house is sold out. A sense of excitement fills the air, much German is spoken as Huysen's support network arrives in throngs. Although Cape Town Opera's professional cast includes a substantial number of black singers, not many black South Africans are expected in the audience as the traditional opera audience still seems predominantly European. However, a substantial number of black South Africans are attending.*

*The cast does their best during the performance, Fikile Mvinjelwa in the lead, singing a convincing Griot. During interval I move quietly between groups to catch the commentary. Cautious comments vary from 'the music does not do me much' to 'I don't really know; the choir sections are interesting' to 'if it wasn't for the visual spectacle and the text on the screen I would have struggled to follow'. Another voice adds that he can't get a grip on the style, 'it's such a mixture'. Nevertheless, I sense that the audience is intrigued albeit somewhat ambivalent about what to make of this out-of-the-ordinary opera. Having attended ten rehearsals during the three weeks prior to the première, the music and the story have grown on me, the opera has almost become familiar and my sense of 'first hearing' has long disappeared. As the curtain falls at the end of the opera the audience applauds long and loudly, acknowledging enjoyment and appreciation through a standing ovation. The Todi Ensemble adds a exuberant ten minutes of music and dancing in the orchestra pit, during which time admirers from the public come to the front to see the instruments and the traditional dresses.*

*The subsequent three performances on 1, 3, and 5 November are attended well by the public. The second performance, traditionally being the most difficult after the initial excitement of the première, frustrates the composer. Concentration and focus are lacking and Huysen is very unhappy about the standard of the performance. I sit behind the stage and observe the comings and goings of singers, dancers, choristers and support staff, once*

*again impressed by the technical staff who work like a well-oiled machine to stage an opera without hiccups. Afterwards I walk through the public in the parking area and snap up remnants of commentary. Once again it varies from an ecstatic 'fantastic' to a doubtful 'weird'. The third performance proves to be technically the most satisfying, including the one and only successful run by the kudu horn section. At the end of each performance the Todi Ensemble entertains the public with song, dance and celebration.*

Reviews appeared in the main newspapers of the Western Cape, *The Cape Times*, *The Argus* and *Die Burger*, as well as two national papers, *The Mail & Guardian* and *The Sunday Independent*, and the British journal, *Opera*.<sup>77</sup> A remarkable difference can be noticed in the attitude between the reviews from the Afrikaans and the English-speaking press.

The English press focused predominantly on the new perspectives *Masque* as new music in South Africa offered. Carl Fourie wrote in *The Argus* of 2 November that '*Masque* takes a solid step forward in the continuing search for a unique South African opera style' while Deon Irish of *The Cape Times* described it as 'an unremitting move towards an unquestionable African art form'.<sup>78</sup> Meersman of the *Mail & Guardian* went further by describing it as:

... a 21<sup>st</sup> Century piece – mankind moving closer to achieving a universal consciousness and a more equitable world order – based on understanding the historical interconnections of different traditions, rewriting victor's history and questioning prejudiced Western perceptions of other cultures.<sup>79</sup>

Further credit is given to the composer by Barry Smith, whose review was published in *Opera*:

That [Huyssen] was largely successful in overcoming many [...] problems is a tribute to the boldness of his vision in being prepared to tackle such a daunting task [...]. It is the kind of work that needed to be written despite the numerous artistic and financial risks involved. In this respect it proved an important stepping-stone if not a musical landmark.

The final result also proved to be something of a witch's brew: not many would have been convinced by the thought of the Cape Philharmonic Chamber Ensemble, an early music group (in this case the imported Marini Consort Innsbruck) and the Todi Ensemble (of African instruments) playing in tandem, nor would they completely understood the

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<sup>77</sup> A comprehensive list of reviews is referenced in footnote 6 of this chapter.

<sup>78</sup> Deon Irish, 'Music art of, for and by the people', *Cape Times*, 3 November 2005.

<sup>79</sup> Brent Meersman, 'Masque', *Mail and Guardian*, 5 November 2005.

seemingly bizarre amalgam of styles ranging from Baroque fugal and sequential effects, the ‘flat mournful trumpets’ effects of Purcell, music-hall, an on-stage guitarist, and plenty of atonal and African elements. But this was part of Huyssen’s daring experiment as he blazed some kind of trail in his quest to find a possible future for opera in South Africa.<sup>80</sup>

However, Smith had his reservations regarding the compositional aspects of the work:

The music, while certainly not lacking dramatic ideas and honest fervour for its inspiration, often seemed to have ‘too many notes’ (as the Emperor is reputed to have remarked to Mozart on one occasion). Part of the problem was its frenetic almost perpetually angst-ridden quality. One longed for a moment of repose, a lessening of intensity, a lightness of touch, perhaps even an occasional moment of lyricism. The scoring too often caused problems for some of the singers when their voices were simply overwhelmed by the density and volume of the scoring against which their voices were pitted.<sup>81</sup>

The critics writing for the Afrikaans press, Gottfried Maas and Louis Heyneman, approached the issue of new South African music from a different perspective. Both argued that the work was difficult to digest and would not be performed again soon. Under the heading ‘New opera offers much, makes demands on audience’,<sup>82</sup> Maas stated his personal preference:

For me, a layman to whom the European masters from the Baroque to the late Romantic are staple food, *Masque’s* mix is interesting rather than enjoyable. People who prefer memorable melodies and comfortable harmonies will have difficulty finding it here. Together with what can be seen on stage, the music can be digested. [...] The hour and forty five minutes (interval included) felt long enough.<sup>83</sup>

Heyneman, reflecting on *Masque* as well as a work by the South African composer Roelof Temmingh which was premièred shortly after *Masque*,<sup>84</sup> continued in similar fashion:

The reaction of the normal music lover was the same in both cases: the acquaintance was enough for now, thank you. Give us what we know, or at least, music which falls within our emotional frame of reference. [...] Both works are difficult to digest. Most music lovers do not have the framework to understand Huyssen’s complicated mix of musical language

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<sup>80</sup> Barry Smith, ‘Masque’, *Opera*, March 2006.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> The original heading in Afrikaans is: ‘Nuwe opera bied heelwat, stel eise aan gehoor’; translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.

<sup>83</sup> Gottfried Maas, *Die Burger*, 2 November 2005; translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.

<sup>84</sup> Roelof Temmingh’s *Concert Overture* was premièred by the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra on 4 November 2005 in the Cape Town City Hall. Louis Heyneman is the CEO of the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra.

and technique, and the absence of singable tunes and conventional harmonies makes the work simply inaccessible.<sup>85</sup>

He further expressed doubt about future performances of both works, but concluded by alluding that:

Both Temmingh and Huysen, although diverse in style, are part of the small tip of the pyramid without which there is no striving for refined art, no matter how much the normal music lover grumbles about it. Without the tip of the pyramid the broader substructure cannot exist.<sup>86</sup>

The negative and condescending tone of both these critics is difficult to miss. Neither of them seems concerned about new music in South Africa and how these works relate to the society of the day. No mention is made in either of the reviews of what the opera might endeavour to say about South Africa or the new music produced today. Their concern seems to be directed toward music as a strategic ploy which needs to sell seats and entertain the 'general' music lover. This negativity is all the more remarkable as the Afrikaans press in the Western Cape as a rule dedicates at least one A2 page per day to the arts, whilst English press generally only reviews opera or ballet (which is not daily) and coverage of chamber or orchestral music is often non-existent.

Several reactions were published in *Die Burger* following the reviews by Maas and Heyneman. One reader mentioned that:

[Heyneman's] use of generalization such as 'the reaction of the normal music lover was ... the acquaintance was enough for now, thank you', bothers me. With much excitement and apprehension did I attend the première of *Masque* and I was not disappointed. Yes, I do love the beautiful and gripping melodies of classical opera, but I was enchanted by this new creation from Africa.<sup>87</sup>

Stephanus Muller, musicologist and lecturer at the University of Stellenbosch wrote:

Whether these viewpoints from critics represent personal preferences or are pragmatic windsocks that register the so-called public preferences or disapprovals, is unsure. One or two untried members of the public who attended the opera voiced their discontent with the reviews, which suggests the possibility that the public may judge new music more graciously than those who write about it. What is evident however, is that new South African compositions and productions are seldom given the chance to be developed by

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<sup>85</sup> Louis Heyneman, *Die Burger*, 7 November 2005; translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Die Burger*, letters from the public, 16 November 2005.

repeat performances as the nucleus of an indigenous repertoire. Leaving aside the reasons for this or the particular composer and the quality of his work: this is a culturally impoverished state of affairs.<sup>88</sup>

Huyssen also added his voice in reply to Heynemann by writing:

It seems strange that a cultural impresario claims on behalf of the ‘general music lover’ that the ‘acquaintance (with new music) was enough for now’, whilst the same audience in actual fact showed enormous interest (proved by the almost sold-out performances of my opera *Masque*) and reacted overwhelmingly positively. Why criticize the success achieved by those who worked together to make (an indeed difficult) project work by claiming that it is nothing less than one’s moral obligation to sit through expensive and inaccessible works – for the vague gain of a potential increased appreciation by future generations? And why so hastily preach condemnation that neither works will be performed again soon?<sup>89</sup>

The composer shared with the present writer some of the feedback he had received from friends and colleagues. Most of them were positive, although criticism was also expressed. The Stellenbosch musicologist Winfried Lüdemann remarked that Huyssen’s use of traditional African instruments was an integral and self-evident part of the music, not an exotic flavour, complimenting the composer on the fact that compared to some other composers who try to compose similar music, he was more successful. However, agreeing with critics like Maas, Heyneman, Smith and Brooks Spector of the *Sunday Independent*, Lüdemann mentioned that he felt Huyssen should have given the general music lover some more ‘memorable musical moments’,<sup>90</sup> underlining the sentiment also expressed by Barry Smith. The poet and writer Antjie Krog summed up much of the effort that went into producing the opera: ‘... what an amazing event tonight was. I can’t even begin to think about the amount of planning, organizing, coordinating, energy, good will, begging, extortion, blackmailing and love that went into it all. Congratulations for an amazing product.’<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Stephanus Muller, *Die Burger*, 5 December 2005; translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.

<sup>89</sup> Hans Huyssen, *Die Burger*, 16 November 2005; translated from the Afrikaans by the present author.

<sup>90</sup> Personal letter from Winfried Lüdemann to Hans Huyssen, no date.

<sup>91</sup> Personal letter from Antjie Krog to Hans Huyssen, no date.



### 3.2.5 *The libretto*

The libretto evoked much criticism from newspaper critics and singers. In his review in the *Cape Times* of 3 November, Deon Irish's criticism was directed toward the one-dimensional portrayal of the European characters pitted against the more sympathetic depiction of the African roles, accentuating the underlying moralizing tendency of the libretto. This also struck the present writer during the rehearsals; the European characters were almost projected as caricatures, not only through the text they sing, but also in the way they were asked to act and pronounce their words. After interviewing the director Geoffrey Hyland, I realised that Hyland over-accentuated these latent characteristics of the European characters in order to achieve more contrast between the African and European characters.

Huyssen later explained that this was an unhappy result of circumstances as his intentions were rather the opposite.<sup>92</sup> Here again the fragmented, incomplete, almost hacked-apart character of the libretto proved disadvantageous to the overall message of the opera. As a result of the cutting of the entire middle section of the libretto, the development of the characters was severely curtailed. The composer was furthermore of the opinion that the singer who sang the role of the curator, Arthur Swan, did not have the artistic capacity to infuse the character with life and compassion. These sentiments were echoed by Barry Smith:

Both libretto (by the Bulgarian writer Ilija Trojanow) and music at times probably needed a touch of the blue pencil: the story is highly allegorical and convoluted ... obfuscated in highly prolix, often moralizing and philosophical terms and, frankly, often ludicrous language. 'My days of bleak were gone in a streak when he pampered me for a full whole week.' Enough said.<sup>93</sup>

The moralizing tendency of the libretto was picked up by more critics. Brent Meersman from the *Mail & Guardian* wrote:

The attempt to treat words (which have meaning) as the abstractions of musical sound is intellectually stimulating but emotionally – and I would therefore argue operatically – self-defeating. The bursts of straight recitative were a telling relief.

The libretto is the major problem. The story – and one cannot help but think of comparable failings with the Handspring Puppet Company's *Tall Horse* here – also a museum theme,

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with the composer on 01 March 2006.

<sup>93</sup> Barry Smith, 'Masque', *Opera*, March 2006.

roots in Malian culture, similar set – muddled in with an allegorical cosmological lecture – struggles to emerge and cannot hold our interest.<sup>94</sup>

The Sunday Independent published a review by J. Brooks Spector. He also found difficulty with the libretto, hinting at the lack of effective dramaticism picked up by Hyland:

However, the story line, as currently presented, has problematic elements. The conflict between the main protagonists, and thus in turn the conflict between the concept of masques as museum objects or authentic, embedded cultural engines, could be crisper. Thus adjusted, the audience would be drawn more closely to the raw edges of this conflict through the characters. The need for vivid conflict is important when the music, albeit interesting and subtle, operates within relatively narrow emotional bands.

This challenge actually confronts many recent works because contemporary composition style has relegated vocal roles from the centrality of their 18th and 19th century position to a circumstance where they have become just one more element in a greatly expanded orchestra. But the end of arias like *Au Fond du Temple Saint*, *Nessum Dorma* or *Un bel Di* means that the emotional cores of operatic characters become less accessible to audiences. As a result, something else must come forward to take up the slack so that the dramatic tensions in the story line are understandable and approachable.<sup>95</sup>

### 3.3 Conclusion

Brent Meersman's *Mail and Guardian*-review concluded as follows:

*Masque* is still a fresh and unstable work, somewhat like a wet oil painting that has already been framed and hung in a gallery before it has set. The music itself is the strongest element and Huyssen has resplendently achieved his stated aims.<sup>96</sup>

Meersman's use of the words 'fresh' and 'unstable' is striking. So is his connection of these words with a recently completed oil painting of which the paint is still wet, but which has been provided with a frame and exhibited for display in a gallery. Indeed, the expectations surrounding a work like *Masque* are similar to those of a painting on display. Audiences visit opera theatres to see completed, framed, aesthetic visions in a museum of listening conditioned by the nineteenth century. In the case of *Masque*, however, the 'freshness' and 'instability' that Meersman detected after a first hearing are in this chapter exposed to be more than just analogous to the 'unsettled' quality of wet paint, which

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<sup>94</sup> Brent Meersman, 'Masque, Theatre Pick of the Week'.

<sup>95</sup> O.J. Brooks Spector, 'Defining local opera in a way that balances tradition with the unusual'.

<sup>96</sup> Brent Meersman, 'Masque, Theatre Pick of the Week'.

implies that formal issues in the work have been resolved. In this chapter the writer has argued that the formal issues have not been resolved in *Masque*. The libretto was cut and adjusted for the specific run of performances in Cape Town. This was not done for aesthetic reasons alone, but ostensibly because of practical problems. Compromises had to be reached with regard to the composer's ideals of voice production and of orchestral integration.

Listening to the official recording of *Masque*, it is also clear that much of what the composer wrote was left unperformed or was wrongly or badly performed. What was heard in the Artscape Theatre Complex on 28 October, 1, 3 & 5 November 2005 was not a complete work as yet unsettled in its formal conception, but, I would argue, an incomplete artistic vision in which the tensions playing out in the musical and dramatic material resulted in an incomplete, experimental and fractured structure. Taking our cue from Adorno, we could articulate this dynamic as follows:

Of the same origin as the social process and ever and again laced through by its traces, what seems to be strictly the motion of the material itself moves in the same direction as does real society even where neither knows anything of the other and where each combats the other. Therefore the composer's struggle with the material is a struggle with society precisely to the extent that society has migrated into the work, and as such it is not pitted against the production as something purely external and heteronomous, as against a consumer or an opponent.<sup>97</sup>

Immediately following on from the passage on the 'tendency of musical material', Adorno uses the concept of 'immanent reciprocation'.<sup>98</sup> It is this process of tension and paradox and aesthetic yearning that characterizes *Masque* more than anything. Reading the score of the opera and taking the composer at his word leaves us short of an estimation of *Masque's* meaning as a representative text of aesthetic indigenization. Both text and composer's intent are bound to fall short to explain these ruptures, as both ideologically behold the idea of the opera.

It was only by studying the opera in rehearsal, in performance and in reception that the composer's struggle was seen not only as a struggle with material, but clearly also a struggle with society and the expectations and abilities of South African society to come to grips with this particular vision of an ideal society. This change of focus between what is

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<sup>97</sup> Theodore Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, Frankfurt Am Main 1976, p. 32.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

written in the score and what is heard, between what the composer intended and what people understood, between the dramatic fusion of opposites and the continued conceptual identification and separation of these opposites revealed *Masque* as an event or process that graphically illustrates aesthetic indigenization as a hugely problematic idea. The simpler, easier, more demonstrative the transformational gesture or rhetoric (such as quotation of black tunes, use of black rhythms or instruments), the more easily it is understood, appreciated and endorsed by performers and audiences. At the same time, such easily understood gestures are by definition powerless to change established ideas. They are, to use another Adornian term, already 'neutralized'. On the other hand, aesthetic attempts to represent the transformational space in more intellectually, musically performative ways – and it is being suggested the *Masque* does just that – will inevitably and even characteristically disrupt and fail to live up to societal expectations.

Perhaps then aesthetic indigenization is not so much a problematic idea but an arena for the working out of problems on the level of material; problems that are not exclusively or even primarily musical problems, but social problems. This would imply that aesthetic indigenization is always only a process, and one ill-served by scholarly or artistic demonstrations of successfully completed 'works' as instances of autonomous mirrors of society. When Muller writes that 'what is certain, is that new South African works and productions thereof are rarely given the opportunity to be performed regularly to develop the nucleus of an indigenous repertoire. Whatever the reasons for this and notwithstanding the composer and the work: this is an impoverished cultural situation',<sup>99</sup> he misses the point. Huyssen's *Masque* fails the test of a work that can be absorbed into the repertoire of the rarefied world of Cape Town Italianate opera. Because of this, it remains open and openly receptive to society and life. This could well be the ultimate condition for aesthetic indigenization in South African music to happen.

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<sup>99</sup> Stephanus Muller, 'Maak dié klank deel van kultuur', *Die Burger*, 5 December 2005.

## Chapter 4. Cape Town Opera: tradition and change as strategies of survival

### 4.1 Introduction

In his Master's thesis, *Composition in crisis: Case studies in South African Art Music 1980-2006*, Thomas Pooley discusses the crises local composition has been facing since the early 1980s due to a shift in paradigm caused by political changes in the country. He argues that 'the demise of Apartheid and the rise of democracy resulted in an institutional and aesthetic crisis for the field of composition, embodied in musical terms by a shift away from a Eurocentric paradigm to a cross-cultural one that embraced various "African elements" within a framework of modernism and discourse of accessibility'.<sup>1</sup> Exchanging the word 'composition' with 'opera production' this seems an apt description of the crises local opera production have had to deal with since the 1980s and the concomitant new course it has taken during the past two decades.

At first glance, the production of opera in South Africa today has changed significantly since the days of the four Performing Arts Councils (PACs), CAPAB, NAPAC, PACT and PACOFS. These councils were established by South Africa's Apartheid government and responsible for opera production in the country from 1963-1998.<sup>2</sup> During the existence of the Performing Arts Councils, opera production largely endeavoured to emulate the Western aesthetic and cultural models as closely as possible. Although government officials were not necessarily interested in opera production per se, Pooley describes the value of art music for the Apartheid government as that of 'symbolic capital'.<sup>3</sup> Art music symbolized European culture and because it was viewed to be of greater value than indigenous or local art,<sup>4</sup> it was heavily subsidised by government. The political structures

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Pooley, *Composition in Crisis: Case Studies in South African Art Music 1980-2006*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2008, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Opera production by the PACs flourished predominantly during the 1970s and 80s. CAPAB, however, continued to produce opera on large scale until the mid-1990s.

<sup>3</sup> Pooley, *Composition in Crisis: Case Studies in South African Art Music 1980-2006*, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> This attitude could also be found in the local classical music industry in the widespread and unqualified high appraisal of artists and music from abroad. The lack of confidence in home-grown talent (unless such talent had a career in Europe) and the subsequent lack of stature given to local artists has often been lamented by producers as a stumbling block in the development of local

underlying the country's cultural policy were not conducive to the exploration of Africa's indigenous cultures in the production of opera or any other cultural productions. However, due to the policies of the Apartheid government, widespread cultural boycotts by the international community resulted in the isolation of local arts production.<sup>5</sup> Thus, by the mid-1980s, opera in South Africa was not only cut off from international stimuli but also isolated from the creative possibilities of its own environment.

It is safe to assume that production trends will always change, but the social and political changes in South Africa during the past two decades have had an unprecedented and specific impact on the production of opera. With the change of political dispensation in 1994, the gates of creative possibility were flung wide open as producers had renewed artistic and intellectual access to the Western and African worlds. In theory, the new dispensation brought with it a freedom of association and the possibility to develop local opera production and composition into something new and unique. In practice, however, it was clear that opera production in South Africa was forced on a new course during which it had to face major practical challenges. The substantial government subsidies the PACs depended on in previous years were almost completely withdrawn<sup>6</sup> and continuing to produce opera was just one of many immediate crises these formerly heavily subsidized institutions had to deal with. Thus, on a logistical level, realizing these new artistic possibilities proved to be very difficult.

The new era brought a host of challenges and opportunities, many of which can be traced in the stipulations of the *White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage* as published by the ANC government in June 1996.<sup>7</sup> The practical implications of the policy advocated in the White Paper exposed South African composers and musicians working in the European classical idiom to increased structural pressures to reflect the indigenous cultures of their environment in their work. Subsidies for opera production were being increasingly granted

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opera production. It was clear that, due to Apartheid, the authority of the 'European experience' had kept South African production and its audiences in a 'colonial condition'. In the 1980s, the film critic Barry Ronge coined this tendency 'overseazure'.

<sup>5</sup> The cultural boycott is discussed on pp. 52-3 in Chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup> No author, Programme notes: *Cape Town Opera, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Concert*, 19 April 2009. No page numbers.

<sup>7</sup> This document has been partly referred to in Chapter 1 and will be quoted from and discussed in more detail during the course of this chapter.

on condition that greater demographic representation takes place in productions as well as audiences.

The challenges that faced opera production by the mid-1990s were not limited to political issues only. The artistic, managerial and aesthetic aspects of opera production were also uncharted territory. By 1990 some of the PACs had started to restructure their organizations to include all racial and culture groups,<sup>8</sup> and a growing number of African opera singers made their presence felt. Angelo Gobbato mentions that by the early 1990s,

the existence of large numbers of exceptional operatic vocal talent among the black community could no longer be denied. What became a pressing artistic issue, however, was the creation of a suitable operatic repertoire for these singers and the possible adaptation of the production styles of the standard repertoire to create novel dramatic possibilities and credibilities, given the sudden transformation of operatic casts from being 98% white to casts being 98% black'.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the effect of the new funding structures forced opera companies to become privatized organizations responsible for generating their own income. Opera companies now had to create viable business models along which they could operate and survive.

Fifteen years into democracy, opera in South Africa seems to have consolidated, and in some cases presenting itself as an invigorated form of art. In 2009 four companies had been producing opera in the country for a number of years. They are Cape Town Opera<sup>10</sup> and Isango Portabello (or Dimpho Di Kopane),<sup>11</sup> both situated in Cape Town, and Opera Africa<sup>12</sup> and the Black Tie Ensemble,<sup>13</sup> situated in Johannesburg and Pretoria respectively. All of these organizations operate as private companies and are dependent on subsidies in some or other way. The artistic directors of three of the four companies, Cape Town Opera (CTO),<sup>14</sup> Opera Africa (OA)<sup>15</sup> and the Black Tie Ensemble (BTE),<sup>16</sup> have all worked in

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<sup>8</sup> Pooley, *Composition in Crisis: Case Studies in South African Art Music 1980-2006*, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Angelo Gobbato, 'History', <http://www.capetownopera.co.za/htm/history2008.html>, accessed 25 July 2009.

<sup>10</sup> See website on [www.capetownopera.co.za](http://www.capetownopera.co.za).

<sup>11</sup> This company also operates as Dimpho Di Kopane and produces film, theatre and opera. See website on [www.ddk.etonship.co.za](http://www.ddk.etonship.co.za), or <http://www.portobellopictures.com/About/Isango-Portobello>.

<sup>12</sup> See website on [www.operaafrica.co.za](http://www.operaafrica.co.za).

<sup>13</sup> See their website on [www.blackties.co.za](http://www.blackties.co.za).

<sup>14</sup> CTO's current artistic director, Christine Crouse, was CAPAB's last opera director.

<sup>15</sup> OA's current director, Sandra de Villiers, was closely involved with opera at NAPAC in Durban.

similar positions under the previous dispensation. Isango Portabello's director, Mark Donford-May, hails from the United Kingdom.

Reflecting on South Africa's fifteen years of democracy has also revealed that, contrary to expectations and despite the changes brought about since the ANC has come to power, much in South Africa has stayed the same. This chapter will explore how a local opera house negotiates the continuation of a tradition with the 'new set of rules' that have governed opera production in South Africa since 1994. My choice for a case study has fallen on Cape Town Opera (CTO). This company not only reflects the pressing demands for change so pervasive in South African society as a whole, but also displays the signs of an ongoing tradition. Most of its artistic top management are individuals who held similar positions in the pre-1994 dispensation. Furthermore, the very core of the product they deliver, opera, is an art form rooted in European tradition. This chapter will investigate the dynamic between the opposing and complementary forces of change and tradition as practised by Cape Town Opera today. This includes the demands of sponsors, artists, managers and audiences, but also considers how the company operates in a multi-cultural environment in order to reflect its social realities. In exploring this dialectic between tradition and change, it is hoped that a hitherto unexplored aspect of opera indigenization will be revealed.

## 4.2 Tradition and change

South Africans have come to assume that the new dispensation ushered in by the ANC government of 1994 changed all aspects of daily life. Although it did so in a variety of spheres, reflecting on politics as well as cultural activities of the past fifteen years, it is clear that despite new policies and a number of substantial changes, the new governing structures often resemble their pre-1994 counterparts, resulting in far less change than anticipated and sometimes assumed. R.W. Johnson illustrates at length in his book *South Africa's Brave New World*,<sup>17</sup> how policies aimed at restructuring and addressing past

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<sup>16</sup> This company has been active since 1999 and was set up by former manager of PACT Opera, Neels Hansen and South Africa soprano Mimi Coertse.

<sup>17</sup> R.W. Johnson, *South Africa's Brave New World*, London, 2009.



inequalities have not rendered the results of growth and development as anticipated and in many cases perpetuated power imbalances, poverty and corruption. The intensity of the nationwide demonstrations and strikes by organisations on grassroots level in the months following the 2009 elections are a demonstration of the frustrated expectations of previously disadvantaged communities after fifteen years of democracy.

On the other hand, it is also clear that policies implemented by the ANC government – of which most are based on ideological premises that are different to those of the previous dispensation – cannot be held accountable for all changes, or the lack thereof. The fact that Cape Town Opera's singing corps consists mostly of black singers, for example is not solely due to a change of policy forced onto CTO by the requirements of the White Paper of 1996. The emergence of substantial numbers of black singers in the field of opera and their subsequent dominance in South African opera houses have also been driven by forces other than politics. Although the phenomenon has been aided by changes in the political system in terms of making opera accessible to black people in an environment previously dominated by whites, it has had a history of its own and speaks rather powerfully to the issue of the indigenization of opera in South Africa. In this chapter I argue that many traditions particular to opera production that have been practised for many years, continue to be practised in South Africa, despite the sweeping political changes introduced to our society after 1994. What then, if any, is the role of politics in the drive to achieve change in cultural spheres? Furthermore, with specific reference to opera in South Africa, what is the meaning of and the relationship between 'tradition', 'change' and 'indigenization'?

The term 'tradition' has often been positioned as polarized to 'change' or 'progress'; it has been associated with that which is 'past' while change has been associated with 'present'. In popular sociology the term has generally been used to describe a phenomenon that impedes change.<sup>18</sup> However, in other fields of the academy, for instance that of cultural anthropology – of which the field of study includes traditional cultures and their preservation – the term has been viewed in a more favourable light. A neutral stance towards the term 'tradition' is advocated by Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison in their book *Music and Social Movements* when they write that 'it is sometimes observed, by those who have looked into particular traditions, that it only takes two generations to make

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<sup>18</sup> Ron Eyerman & Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements*, Cambridge, 1998, p. 26.

anything traditional: naturally enough, since that is the sense of tradition as active process'.<sup>19</sup> The notion of tradition is here described as a coexistence of past and present in which tradition is 'whatever is persistent or recurrent through transmission'.<sup>20</sup> The words 'active process' are pivotal to understanding this notion, especially with regard to music and musicians. Eyerman and Jamison elaborate on the process-component of tradition as follows:

A tradition, for us, is a process of connecting a selected or 'usable' past with the present – with ongoing, contemporary life. In music [...] the tradition can be considered a kind of grammar, or basic language, within which a particular song or piece of music is constructed. The musician, songwriter, or composer must first learn the notation and the melodic and rhythmic procedures of the tradition in order to make music; otherwise it could not be passed on. But, at the same time, artistic creation requires that those rules be broken, or at least amended, so that the tradition can be rejuvenated by adding something new to it, and by becoming embedded in an individual or collective performance. It is important to recognize, however, that there is a tension, or, better, an extremely fine line, between the dogmatic following of tradition, and, with it, the collection of the traditional, and the creative embodiment of tradition, or what might be termed innovation within tradition. But no artistic expression would be possible without a tradition to inform it, or enclose it.<sup>21</sup>

Drawing on the idea that embedded in tradition, especially in the arts, one will always find a degree of change, I am proposing to investigate Cape Town Opera's activities through the lens of a 'mutating tradition'. Important issues in this regard are, for instance, in what areas of CTO as an organization has change manifested itself? What has changed and why? Who drives these changes? More importantly, have changes been motivated by political, ideological, artistic, cultural or economic considerations? Which activities have been carried over unchanged from the previous generation and why? Are certain unaltered practises dogmatically defended and consciously kept in their 'unaltered state', and if so, why? How do artists, audiences and sponsors perceive these changes and how do they react to them?

The ANC government's drive to ensure demographic representation at all levels of economic engagement in our society is clearly driven by political imperatives. An instance of imposing politically inspired motives on artistic endeavours is illustrated in the opening

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<sup>19</sup> Raymond Williams as quoted in Eyerman & Jamison, *Music and Social Movements*, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Shils as quoted in Eyerman & Jamison, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> Eyerman & Jamison, *Music and Social Movements*, p. 29.

paragraphs of the pre-amble to the White Paper of 1996. Here Dr Ben Ngubane, then Minister of Arts and Culture, writes that,

South African society has been undergoing fundamental transformation over the last two years. In accordance with the principles of justice, democracy, non-racism and non-sexism, every sector of our society is facing change. While this may be unsettling for some, for many, it brings hope that their needs, views and aspirations will now also become part of the mainstream. South Africa's first democratically elected Government has contributed to this process by creating our first Ministry of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. South Africa is indeed on the brink of experiencing a cultural Renaissance.

The arts, culture and heritage cannot be an exception in this transformation process, since they too were overtly affected by the mal-distribution of skills, resources and infrastructure during the Apartheid era. In fact, given that the arts are premised on freedom of expression and critical thought, transformation in this area is crucial to empowering creative voices throughout the country, and is thus integral to the success of the democratic project.<sup>22</sup>

The drive is termed 'transformation' and because it is associated with rectifying inequalities created during the Apartheid era, its overtly political motivation is unmistakable. Although this dissertation investigates the indigenization of opera, 'transformation' in this context could be regarded a political articulation of a desire to achieve indigenization, making it relevant to this discussion. What has become known as 'affirmative action' is an institutionalized pressure to employ individuals from 'previously disadvantaged backgrounds' into empowering positions at all levels of society. The range of this study does not justify a discussion of the merits and/or limits of this system. Suffice to say that by 2009, the effects of the uncritical enforcement of quota systems have been noted in some spheres of South Africa's society (notably sports) and subsequently abolished.<sup>23</sup>

The performing arts have not emerged unscathed in this regard. In a discourse that confuses politically and artistically motivated change, Cape Town Opera (CTO) was recently publically accused of parading transformation. Michael Arendse<sup>24</sup> launched his

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<sup>22</sup> Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. *White Papers on Arts, Culture and Heritage*, June 1996, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> South Africa's Minister of Sport and Recreation, Makhenkesi (Mike) Stofile, who is also a member on Board of the SA Rugby Association, has recently publicly defended the abolishment of the quota system in rugby. He argues that players who are selected on this basis feel that they are not selected on merit, but on skin colour. They are therefore placed under unfair pressure. <http://152.111.1.87/argief/berigte/dieburger/2009/07/29/SK/26/SNSTOFILE-SK.html>, accessed 30 July 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Arendse is the nephew of Dulcie September, an anti-Apartheid activist who was presumed to have been killed by Apartheid forces in Paris in 1988. Arendse now works for ESP Africa who

attack on CTO in an article published in *The Cape Times*, entitled ‘Plodding to a fine transformation tune in Cape Town’. He pointed out, quite rightly, that by 2007 ‘every major performing arts organization and venue in Cape Town is still headed by whites’.<sup>25</sup> Although he admitted that ‘there are black and coloured actors, singers, dancers, technical and middle management staff’, he argued that there are no ‘suitably trained and qualified people to fill particularly senior posts due to the lack of formal training available in these disciplines.’<sup>26</sup>

In his reply, CTO General Manager, Michael Williams, answered to Arendse with arguments that position CTO’s attempts at transformation as both politically and artistically informed. He stated that:

The opera projects undertaken over the past 17 years [...] were all done in the name of transformation. Everyone working at CTO was swept up with the idea that what we were doing was a process by which the previously disenfranchised majority could enter into the mainstream of public life. Transformation does not mean the mere replacement of white with black at the top of an organisation.<sup>27</sup>

Admittedly, training senior management staff and opera directors is a costly endeavour, can take many years and retaining such staff proves to be even more difficult.<sup>28</sup> However, Williams responded to the hidden threat in Arendse’s critique that his job was on the line when he wrote that, ‘what should happen to those “whites” who are in leadership positions and who have played a major role in transforming the arts and kept their companies producing quality performances over some very difficult years?’<sup>29</sup>

It is clear that the current management at CTO have successfully reshaped the company and pulled it through difficult times and, in doing so, have fared very well in comparison to other local institutions who practise the classical arts. Williams continued his reply to

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organizes the Cape Town Jazz Festival.

<http://www.dac.gov.za/speeches/dminister/2009/27Mar09.htm>, accessed 29 July 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Arendse, ‘Plodding to a fine transformation tune in Cape Town’, *The Cape Times*, 10 April 2007.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Michael Williams, ‘Singing the praises of Cape Town Opera’, *The Cape Times*, 8 May 2007.

<sup>28</sup> The black opera singer, Marcus Desando, has been staff director for CTO since 1999 and was directing opera on a freelance basis for some time. He was offered employment in Pretoria in 2008 and has been directing opera productions for TUT since.

<http://www.capetownopera.co.za/htm/news/article.php?r=/view/capetownopera/1451>, accessed 14 August 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Williams, ‘Singing the praises of Cape Town Opera’, 8 May 2007.

Arendse by highlighting the many black singers that have been trained by CTO. He described the company's pursuit of high artistic standards (which implies that the singers receive first class training), their success on national and international levels and concluded with his vision for the company:

CTO is not a state-run institution and though we are mindful of our public responsibility and proud of our transformation record, our main priority is the highest artistic standards, regardless of whether the singer, director, conductor is black or white. Opera requires the alchemist's ability in creating the full force of its power. [...]

My vision for CTO is to transform the operatic aesthetic in South Africa. By this I mean that CTO will continue to train and develop South African singers, to encourage directors, designers and composers to respond to opera as Africans, and to build an audience that loves the work we do.<sup>30</sup>

From the above it is clear that CTO, like many other companies past and present – in their discourse at least – adheres to the rules set out by the current political environment. If they don't, they will never be able to rid themselves of the image of opera as an art form symbolizing legislated privilege under the previous dispensation that accepted and enforced European supremacy. In 2007 CTO even boasted a Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) compliance rate of 97%.<sup>31</sup> Indicative of the pervasive influence of politics on the South African environment in general, CTO is probably the only opera company in the world boasting such a strong BEE rating. But, Williams also touched on another dimension of indigenization, CTO's drive to 'transform the operatic aesthetic in South Africa'.<sup>32</sup> The influence of the paradigm shift towards 'Africa-ness' on the decision-making process of opera directors and management will be further discussed under the section entitled 'Artistic Management'.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) has been legislated by the Mbeki administration of the ANC. The objective of this policy is to stimulate the racial transformation of the business sector. Companies officially declare the percentage of black empowerment that has taken place in their company as well as the company's job creation track record.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

### 4.3 The Company

On 19 April 2009, CTO celebrated its tenth anniversary with a gala concert held at the Artscape Theatre Complex. The company's considerable vocal talent was on display during this glittering event and the programme consisted of solo, choral and orchestral excerpts from operas by Wagner, Verdi, Gounod, Glinka, Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky and the South African composer Mzilikazi Khumalo. CTO not only showed off its soloists, but also presented an opera chorus consisting of 120 singers accompanied by the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra.<sup>33</sup>

It is surely significant that the closing item on the programme was the last movement from Beethoven's Choral Symphony. Signalling a message to the world that, just as Beethoven 'intended his Symphony No. 9 to be a powerful ethical statement',<sup>34</sup> CTO was practising good cultural ethics, celebrating a multi-racial brotherhood among artists and experiencing the joy of opera as a form of art by all. The programme notes for this celebratory event specifically mentioned that,

In a concert in Berlin in 1989, to celebrate the destruction of the wall, Leonard Bernstein changed the word Freude (joy) to Freiheit (freedom), claiming that 'Beethoven would have given us his blessing in this heaven-sent moment'.<sup>35</sup>

The concept of a Cape Town-based privatized opera company was born in 1995 when the PACs were informed that government subsidies, through which professional opera production had been made possible from 1963 onwards, would be gradually phased out over a period of three years, coming to a complete halt in 1998. Michael Williams, current General Manager of CTO, remembers that 'CAPAB Opera was faced with an ultimatum: sink or sing!'<sup>36</sup> Williams described the ensuing panic amongst CAPAB Opera's management and other opera enthusiasts:

I vividly remember the emergency meeting held at Angelo Gobbato's home in 1996 when members of the Friends of the Opera and others interested in the idea of opera gathered to discuss a future beyond the sinking ships of the arts councils. The lounge might have been too small to accommodate the many people who gathered there, but no room would have

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<sup>33</sup>Programme notes: *Cape Town Opera, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Concert*, 19 April 2009.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.* Notes on the concert programme were written by Albert Horne, CTO's chorus master.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.* Address by CTO's General Manager, Michael Williams.

been big enough for the passionate and forceful declaration that opera *must* survive in Cape Town. No one felt more strongly about this crisis than Angelo Gobbato, who spoke at length about the trajectory of the history of opera singing in South Africa and its contribution to the city's cultural identity.<sup>37</sup>

Under the direction of Jan Kaminski and with the backing of several opera-loving business people, CTO was launched as a Section 21 Non-Profit organization in 1998, offering employment to the entire staff of the opera section of the former CAPAB.<sup>38</sup> Gobbato later wrote that compared to the other PAC's, CAPAB's opera section experienced the smoothest transition to a private company of all and could start operations in 1999 with a production of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*.<sup>39</sup>

In CTO's decade long existence, the company has left no stone unturned in its bid to uphold its status as South Africa's foremost opera company. From 1999 onwards the company produced approximately eight productions per year of which two productions were usually choral performances and an average of one new production per year. The repertoire largely featured the standard fare that has been presented to Cape Town's audiences for decades and operas by Verdi, Puccini, Mozart and Bizet featured most often, although less frequently performed operas such as Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* and Kern's *Showboat* have been firm favourites as well. Lesser known operas by Händel, Monteverdi, Britten and Purcell have also been performed.<sup>40</sup> From 2005 CTO has been able to tour abroad annually and since then Norway, Sweden, Germany and Kenya have been visited. In October 2009 the company once again travelled to Europe to perform Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* in Wales and Scotland. During these ten years CTO also staged twelve productions featuring local composers, including works by Michael Williams, Thomas Rajna, Allan Stephenson, Martin Phipps, Mokale Koapeng, Peter Louis van Dijk and Hans Huyssen.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Angelo Gobbato, <http://www.capetownopera.co.za/html/history2008.html>, accessed 28 July 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Programme notes: *Cape Town Opera, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Concert*, 19 April 2009.

<sup>40</sup> The 2008 production of Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* was received well by critics and public.

<sup>41</sup> Programme notes: *Cape Town Opera, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Concert*, 19 April 2009. The works listed are Michael Williams's *By the River* and *Orphans of Qumbu*, Thomas Rajna's *Amarantha* and *Valley Song*, Denzil Weale's *Love and Green Onions*, Hans Huyssen's *Masque* as well as an opera written by Martin Phipps, Mokale Koapeng and Peter Louis van Dijk, *Earthdiving*.

The advantages of co-operating with other production houses have not gone unnoticed and CTO has benefitted artistically and financially from co-productions locally and abroad. The company regularly joins forces with local institutions such as the UCT Opera School,<sup>42</sup> Spier, Artscape, the Eoan Group and the V&A Waterfront. It has also collaborated with the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees in Oudtshoorn and the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. Since 2005 it co-operates with opera houses in Europe, amongst others Staatstheater Nürnberg (Germany), Den Norske Opera (Norway), Norrlands Operan (Sweden), Fondation d'Enterprise SPHERE (France), Malmö Opera (Sweden) and the Deutsche Oper Berlin (Germany).

CTO currently employs 54 full time staff of which 31 are singers, 14 artistic staff (management and trainers) and the remaining nine staff members deal with either finance, marketing or related administrative tasks. Of the 54 staff members, 34 are black, coloured and Indian and 20 are white.<sup>43</sup> The General Manager, Artistic Director and Finance Manager are all white, whilst the Marketing Manager and Outreach Coordinator are black. Compared to other companies currently producing opera in South Africa, CTO has the highest number of staff as well as the highest annual turnover of productions which usually comprises of a minimum of four full length operas and four other productions in the form of operatic concerts or choral productions. The Black Tie Ensemble in Pretoria manages two productions a year which are both often in the form of operatic concerts<sup>44</sup> whilst Opera Africa's turnover is one production per year.<sup>45</sup> Isango Portobello, previously known as Dimpho di Kopane, manages approximately one or two productions per year. However, the latter company's productions are highly original and strongly indigenized as can be seen by their famous productions of *uCarmen eKhayalitsha* in 2006 and *The Magic Flute* in 2007. Both productions have received international accolades.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The support of the UCT Opera School, through which a continuous stream of able opera singers are passed on to CTO cannot be underestimated. This collaboration dates from the inception of CAPAB in 1963.

<sup>43</sup> Adriaan Fuchs, *Marketing Plan: Cape Town Opera*, Unpublished assignment, UCT Graduate School of Business, UCT, June 2009, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> [http://www.blackties.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=23&Itemid=74](http://www.blackties.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=23&Itemid=74), accessed 10 August 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Christine Crouse, 25 August 2009.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.portobellopictures.com/About/Isango-Portobello>, accessed 10 August 2009.



#### 4.4 The rise of the black opera singer

The twenty years spanning 1980 to 2000 saw a remarkable transformation with regard to the vocal forces involved in South African opera production – not only in Cape Town, but at all the opera centres in the country. In 1980, at the height of the Apartheid era, no singers of colour were to be found on South Africa's opera stages. By 2000, 85% of all singers employed at opera houses were black singers. By 2009 this trend has shown no signs of declining.<sup>47</sup> The dominance of black singers in local opera houses will most likely continue as local opera schools, such as the UCT Opera School and CTO's in-house training units, The Voice of the Nation Studio and The Voice of the Nation Ensemble, continue to annually admit many aspiring black opera singers.<sup>48</sup> Between 1999 and 2007 CTO has trained 53 black singers of whom 80% have become professional singers.<sup>49</sup> A number of black opera singers currently pursue successful careers at opera houses abroad or are the recipients of study opportunities in the West. Three of CTO's principal singers, for instance, have recently been offered performing and training opportunities abroad. The baritone Fikile Mvinjelwa is currently singing with the Metropolitan Opera House in New York for their 2009-2010 season and soprano Golda Schulz will be studying at the Julliard School for Music from September 2009 onwards.<sup>50</sup> In July 2009 the soprano Pretty Yende won first prize in all four categories of the International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition in Vienna after which she was contracted to sing for La Scala in Milan for two years.<sup>51</sup>

Angelo Gobbato has been synonymous with opera production in the Western Cape for almost forty years.<sup>52</sup> His reputation rests, amongst others, on the fact that he was responsible for training scores of opera singers at the UCT Opera School whilst also

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Angelo Gobbato, 12 August 2009.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Annaleigh Vallie, 'Soul of opera is on SA's stage', *Business Day*, 19 August 2007. By 2008 this number had grown to 61. See also *Cape Town Opera, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Concert*, 19 April 2009. No page numbers.

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.capetownopera.co.za/htm/newsletterJul09.html>, accessed 10 August 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Murray La Vita, 'Twee jong operasterre verlaat SA', *Die Burger*, 15 August 2009, p. 3. It is the first time in the history of this competition that one singer has walked away with all four prizes. <http://www.mio.co.za/article/pretty-yende-makes-sa-proud-2009-07-07>, accessed 18 August 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Gobbato retired from CTO in 2005 (and from the UCT Opera School in 2009). However, when speaking about him, most staff at CTO still says 'Angelo Gobbato is Cape Town Opera'.

directing opera for CAPAB and later CTO. From the mid-1980s he openly advocated the potential of black opera singers in Cape Town's townships. Together with the then chorus master Vetta Wise and composer Michael Williams, he developed CAPAB's choral programmes through which they gained access to black singers from 1988 onwards.<sup>53</sup> His vision for opera in Cape Town included making opera accessible for people living in the townships. Michael Williams recalls how Gobbato instructed him when he joined CAPAB Opera as assistant director in 1989: 'Create African operas, take them into the townships of Cape Town and turn young people on to the idea of opera'.<sup>54</sup>

In an interview with the present writer Gobbato explained that he was always convinced of great singing talent among black people in the townships because of the strong choral tradition that had existed there for many years. Furthermore, he was of the opinion that the existence of the Eoan Group and their popularity as an opera company during the early Apartheid years proved that opera appealed to the indigenous people of South Africa. However, gaining access to the black community in the 1980s was not easy. The political tensions of the day polarised the black and white communities and made intercultural exchange very difficult. Access was facilitated with the appointment of Vetta Wise as chorus master at CAPAB, as she was acquainted with a network of black choral directors at the time. In 1988 CAPAB started a choral collaboration project with schools in the townships. Entering the townships as an opera company – and representing an art form which was associated with the Apartheid government – was not a risk-free undertaking at the time.<sup>55</sup> Gobbato recounts how they negotiated with the headmasters of a number of schools who allowed CAPAB to visit their schools. The agreement was that the staff at the township school would not prevent them from doing opera programmes, but they would also not encourage them or protect them in the event of an attack.<sup>56</sup> Although the choral

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<sup>53</sup> According to Gobbato, James Conrad from NAPAC in Durban was the first person at any of the PACs to train and employ black opera singers. Conrad and his wife, Rosely Hunt, did so from the early 1980s onwards. The circumstances in Natal were more conducive to this initiative due to the strong choral tradition among the Zulu people and the generally more liberal politics practised in Natal at the time. Interview with Angelo Gobbato, 12 August 2009.

<sup>54</sup> Williams, 'Singing the praises of Cape Town Opera', 8 May 2007.

<sup>55</sup> Gobbato explained that although the PACs were funded by national government and had to report to them directly, those employed at the PACs were not necessarily government supporters. Interview with Angelo Gobbato, 12 August 2009.

<sup>56</sup> During this interview Gobbato expressed his admiration for former Eoan singers who joined CAPAB in those years. Civil unrest against white institutions was so strong that singers Virginia Davids, Ronald Theys and Sidwell Hartman risked their cars being petrol bombed or tires slashed

programme functioned for some years, the resistance from the black community in Cape Town towards opera training at the traditional white universities remained strong until the end of 1990. From 1981-1990 Gobbato trained approximately 50 singers at the UCT Opera School of which only two were black. With the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, this changed overnight. Gobbato described it as follows: ‘The floodgates opened, literally! Within two years 120 black opera students enrolled at the UCT Opera School’.<sup>57</sup>

The UCT Opera School has always provided CAPAB and later CTO with a steady stream of singers, providing employment and exposure for singers. In 1992 alone four singers enrolled who later became lead singers at CTO before moving on to other opportunities: Abel Motsoadi, Fikile Mvinjelwa, Marcus Desonda and Sibongile Mngoma. Motsoadi went on to study at Julliard and sang at the Metropolitan in New York, Mvinjelwa has been CTO’s lead baritone for ten years and is currently singing at the Metropolitan, Desonda developed into an opera director and recently took up employment in this field in Pretoria, and Mngoma enjoys an illustrious career in the country. In 2009 Mngoma was appointed to CTO’s Board of Directors.<sup>58</sup> Similar career scenarios for others black singers have become reality since.

Much has been made of the so-called talent or natural aptitude of black students for opera singing. Gobbato is of the opinion that there is no difference between the racial groups and the only reason why there are more black singers on South African opera stages than white, is because there are more black people in the country than white.<sup>59</sup> He does however concede that the singer’s cultural background can make an impact on the development of an opera singer. A number of characteristics of black culture are perceived to support development in opera training. The Xhosa language is for instance particularly suitable for the pronunciation of the Italian language. Kamal Khan, current head of the UCT Opera School, confirms this by saying that ‘local singers are adept at singing in the Romance

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because they sang opera and were branded as ‘sell outs’. Interview with Angelo Gobbato, 12 August 2009.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> No author, *Cape Town Opera Annual Review 2008/2009*, p. 16.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

languages, especially Italian. Many of the indigenous languages, particularly Xhosa, share the same vowels and consonants as Italian.<sup>60</sup>

With regard to acting abilities and movement on stage, Gobbato explains that many white singers will stand still with their arms straight whilst they sing because they have been trained to control their physical movements in a social environment. Black people from the townships are generally more prone to using their bodies in expressing themselves in all sorts of social situations and thus find it natural to move on stage whilst singing. In his experience some of his black students have learnt in one year what some white students learnt in four years.<sup>61</sup>

Telling stories in music is said to be part of township culture, a trend which translates easily into opera performance. This may also point towards an answer to the much rehearsed question of why opera is popular with black singers in South Africa, despite the art form's historical links with Apartheid and subsequent colonial associations. 'Opera as a large scale musical expression appeals to the black population of our country', says Gobbato.<sup>62</sup> Pauline Malefane, a former trainee at the UCT Opera School who shot to fame with her rendition of the title role in the 2006 production of *uCarmen eKhayelitsha*<sup>63</sup> explained that,

It's very much part of our African tradition to tell stories in music. [...] That's what I love about opera. The stories and characters are universal. They are about how people live, how they communicate, how they go about their lives – and it remains relevant today. We have a song for everything, whether it's marriage, a child's birth or a boy's initiation.<sup>64</sup>

Former UCT Vice-Chancellor and current patron of CTO, Dr Mamphela Ramphele confirms that 'Africans have always engaged in their praise singing – a similar means of expression. Both contain the same qualities, in that they tell a story through singing and performance'.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Annaleigh Vallie, 'Soul of opera is on SA's stage', 19 August 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Angelo Gobbato, 12 August 2009.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *uCarmen eKhayelitsh* won the Golden Bear award in Berlin in 2006.

<sup>64</sup> No author, 'The Olympics of Singing', *Skyways*, October 2006, pp. 54-6.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* It is no co-incidence that the African opera, *Masque*, incorporated praise singing. See the section 'Voice' in Chapter 3 of this dissertation for a discussion of this.

In my interview with him, Gobbato further explained that, in his opinion, people from the townships live in conditions that are intensely dramatic and that opera is popular because black singers identify with the melodrama of opera. According to him the unstable social circumstances within which Verdi lived and composed in nineteenth-century Italy often resemble the living circumstances of townships today.<sup>66</sup> This further contributes, in his opinion, to the difference between singers from South Africa and those from Europe: 'In Europe everyone is polite, in social circles you're not allowed to speak out loud or shout. It's all very democratic, everybody sings well, but they all sound the same. African singers still have that wild primal force which makes you the king on stage.'<sup>67</sup> The American opera and theatre producer, Chuck Hudson, adds that 'Black South African's [...] acting is exciting and passionate, stripping away the reserve and preciousness often apparent in European performances'.<sup>68</sup>

CTO's current artistic director, Christine Crouse, argues along similar lines, although for her the timbre of the 'African voice' distinguishes itself from the European voice. She is of the opinion that 'we might not always have the musical polish or the sophisticated musicology behind [the voice] that the European company might have, but there is a lot of passion, a lot of exceptional voices that you will not find in Europe'.<sup>69</sup> Crouse is also quite specific about the vocal timbre of the 'black voice':

The kind of colour and vibrant voice in [our] chorus is unheard of overseas. These people have bigger voices, it's more resonant. They make a huge sound that blows away the overseas audiences because they are not used to hearing that. The sound is fairly unique; you don't find this colour of sound amongst the white [singers] of Europe.<sup>70</sup>

On enquiring what exactly constitutes the uniqueness of the African voice, Crouse continued to describe it as 'a fatter voice, rich and creamy and vibrant' while she contrasted it to the European voice which is often 'small and slim'. After providing this description, she did admit that this might not be true in all cases.<sup>71</sup> She concedes that the difference in sound quality might not necessarily be caused by a genetic difference because

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Angelo Gobbato, 12 August 2009.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* In the same interview Gobbato said that Scandinavian singers spend much time during their training learning to loosen up and open their mouths in order to produce volume.

<sup>68</sup> Annaleigh Vallie, 'Soul of opera is on SA's stage', 19 August 2007.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Christine Crouse, 25 August 2009.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

‘black people grow up singing, if they are sad they sing, if they are happy they sing, and yes, they have a certain energy and vibrancy that they bring to a production.’<sup>72</sup> According to Crouse, this ‘energy’ at times also impedes on a production when that is not the kind of sound that she as artistic director wants. Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*, which CTO produced earlier in 2009, was for instance a stylised production with geishas and the forcefulness had to be toned down.<sup>73</sup>

Taking Grant Olwage’s writings on the racialization of voice into consideration – he discusses how the sonic identity of choral voices has been classified in terms of race<sup>74</sup> – the issue articulated here seems somewhat different. What Gobbato and Crouse seems to be saying is not that one can hear a particular ‘race’ in the quality of the sound of the voice, but that one can (also) hear a particular social experience in the interpretation of classical operatic works by African opera singers. It appears that the sense of otherness or uniqueness of the voice coming from South Africa (a voice that has been trained for operatic singing) and especially the black African voice, lies not so much in matters technical, but in the timbre of the voice and specifically in the so-called spirit that lies within the performance, a spirit which is regarded as ‘born from the African experience’, or as Gobbato perhaps naively put it ‘filled with a wild primal force’.<sup>75</sup>

These opinions leave one feeling slightly uncomfortable, illustrating as they do the extent to which the African operatic voice feeds into well-documented notions of the exotic. It is furthermore clear that the African operatic voice, as described above, is viewed as the embodiment of a ‘nationalist’ or ‘South African’ experience and is therefore attributed with characteristics that have their origin in political nationalism rather than in music. This kind of discourse is not unfamiliar to opera. The patriotism that can be detected here was widespread during the Apartheid years when singers like Mimi Coertse, Cecilia Wessels and Gé Korsten were icons of Afrikaner national pride. Coertse’s latest biography, published in 2007, is for instance entitled *’n Stem vir Suid-Afrika (A Voice for South Africa)* and, similar to other books written about her, portrays her as having a unique voice

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Grant Olwage, ‘The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre’, *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 13 (2), November 2004, pp. 203-26.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Angelo Gobbato, 12 August 2009.

that did the country proud.<sup>76</sup> These trends are also present in writings by musicologists who have for decades occupied the space of the political left. In her review on Grant Olwage's recently published book *Composing Apartheid*, Carina Venter has pointed out how the voice is attributed national importance in Christine Lucia's discussion of black choral singing. Venter notes that 'the unmotivated importance that Lucia attaches to voice is particularly interesting in the context of this book, for the strange reason that it echoes the views of white musicologists who supported the Afrikaner nationalist project.'<sup>77</sup>

Attributing nationalist values to the operatic voice is of course not entirely new to opera or to South Africa. Victoria Johnson has argued convincingly in her book *Backstage at the Revolution* that Paris Opera survived the French Revolution because, during the century preceding the Revolution, French opera was marketed as a *national* asset.<sup>78</sup> With regard to the African operatic voice this trend seems to be a continuation of a tradition which, in this case, disregards race. It may therefore be that the notion of the 'black voice' is less politically contingent and racially determined, than is discursively inevitable when talking 'opera'.

#### 4.5 Artistic management

CTO's former and current artist directors, Angelo Gobbato, Christine Crouse and Michael Williams,<sup>79</sup> have all supported Africanized interpretations of operas from the standard canon. New operas by local composers, aiming at the exploration of Africa as a subject in opera, have also been commissioned.<sup>80</sup> As is the case with 'the rise of the black opera

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<sup>76</sup> Mimi Coertse, *'n Stem vir Suid-Afrika, my storie soos vertel aan Ian Raper*, Litera Publikasies, 2007.

<sup>77</sup> Carina Venter, Review on 'Composing Apartheid', to be published in the next edition of *Muziki* which was not yet available at the time of writing.

<sup>78</sup> Johnson, Victoria, *Backstage at the Revolution*, University of Chicago Press, 2008.

<sup>79</sup> Williams is officially CTO's General Manager, but is also a composer and frequently directs CTO's opera productions. He was assistant artistic director to Gobbato during CAPAB's years.

<sup>80</sup> Among these are Roelof Temmingh's three operas which were performed in the 1990s (see Appendix for list), works by Peter Louis van Dijk, Mokale Koapeng and Allan Stephenson as well as the opera *Five:20* which has been commissioned from five South African composers, Hendrik Hofmeyr, Peter Klatzow, Bongani Ndodana-Breen, Allan Stephenson and Martin Watt. *Five:20* will be performed in 2010.

singer', 'Africanization' as a technique in directing opera as well as a theme in local opera composition can be seen as a politically and/or culturally motivated drive for change.

Of the 101 productions listed in CTO's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary brochure that have been performed between 1999 and 2008, twelve have been categorized as 'indigenous works' – approximately 12% of their total output.<sup>81</sup> The remaining 89 productions not labelled as 'indigenous', have nevertheless been subjected to varying degrees of indigenization. The 2007 production of Mozart's *Zauberflöte*, for instance, directed by the internationally acclaimed South African artist, William Kentridge, did not use CTO's black singing corps. Although he explored a number of issues specific to the South African environment, for example the notion of colonialism, Kentridge seemed to prefer the exploration of the esoteric aspects of Mozart's opera as images relating to the political and social realities of the country.<sup>82</sup>

For CTO's former artistic director, Angelo Gobbato, the drive to indigenize – or Africanize – is a problematic notion. Although he regards it as an important issue that will determine the future of opera in the country, he does not lend it unqualified support and feels that the choice of repertoire should be made on the basis of the kind of voices one has at one's disposal and not because of the skin colour of the singers. 'Indigenization should serve the junction of the best of your talent with the available repertoire.'<sup>83</sup> Gobbato argues that Africanization that results from a so-called 'national character' of opera production is Zeitgeist-bound because 'history has proven that the exploration of national interests in opera is a temporary initiative'.<sup>84</sup> He is also apprehensive about the Africanization of standard works as 'it changes the meaning of the work'.<sup>85</sup> Gobbato seems to prefer African

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<sup>81</sup> *Cape Town Opera, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Concert*, 19 April 2009. CTO's 2004 production of Eric Chisholm's operas *Dark Sonnet* and *The Pardoner's Tale* have not been included in their list of 'indigenous works', despite the fact that both operas were composed on South African soil. The fact that these operas do not per se address some kind of African theme may have been the reasoning behind this exclusion. This further feeds into the debate on what is seen by whom as indigenous.

<sup>82</sup> This production was initially commissioned by Theatre de la Monnaie in Brussels and premiered in April 2005. It has since then toured to Lille, Tel Aviv, Naples, New York, Johannesburg and Cape Town. The latter was a co-production with CTO in 2007. In the local press this production has widely been advertised as 'Kentridge's Magic Flute' with a lesser focus on Mozart as the creator of this work. See also: Bronwyn Law-Viljoen, (ed.), *Flute*, Krut Publishing, 2007.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Angelo Gobbato, 12 August 2009.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*



trends in new works rather than the adaptation of existing works into an African context. In 1998, just before CAPAB Opera closed its doors and transformed into CTO, the company produced a strongly Africanized version of Puccini's *La Boheme*, renaming it *La Boheme Noir*. At the time of this production, Gobbato was not fully supportive of the initiative, but felt he had to give it a chance. According to Gobbato, a much more sensible Africanization project was the performance of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* at Spier in 2002. This was a 'dance opera' where the music of large parts of the original dance sections had been lost and the interpolation of African dance by African musicians (under the direction of Dizu Plaatjies) into the opera was, according to Gobbato, a natural development. For Gobbato the adoption of African themes and myths into the opera transformed *Dido and Aeneas* into a new composition and thus made it more meaningful from a creative point of view.<sup>86</sup>

Due to the racial composition of CTO's singing corps, Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* has been a favourite of the company as the opera is set for Afro-Americans and calls for black singers. The work has been performed by CTO locally and abroad for several years. According to Gobbato the choice was not because the singers were African per se, but 'it does help if you don't have to paint everybody black'.<sup>87</sup> For the same reason CTO has produced Scott Joplin's 'ragtime' opera *Treemonisha* in 2006, a work which is seldom performed because, like *Porgy and Bess*, the opera is about black people in America.<sup>88</sup> In 2008 CTO took the *Porgy and Bess* production on tour to Berlin and decided not to provide it with an African adaptation, but to do an American interpretation. Later this year the company will again travel with this production, this time to the United Kingdom. For this tour CTO's current artistic director, Christine Crouse, decided to imbue the opera with a stronger South African character. It will be set in the Soweto of the 1950s and, reflecting current social realities, Crouse highlights the issue of buildings that are invaded by Africans in Johannesburg.<sup>89</sup> Indigenous instruments like the penny whistle and mouth organ will also be used. Crouse hopes to show case the company's characteristic exuberance, stating that 'for the overseas audience we are concentrating again on our

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> The story of the opera champions education as the only way to self-realization, a theme which is relevant in South Africa as well.

<sup>89</sup> In *Porgy and Bess* the characters live in a former aristocratic mansion which they have illegally invaded.

strengths – that our local singers are rhythmical and love to sing and dance and have this wonderful passion and spirit.’<sup>90</sup>

CTO has also commissioned artistic directors from outside the company to do productions. In one of its more adventurous productions, Verdi’s *Macbeth* in 2001, CTO acquired the skills of theatre producer and playwright Brett Bailey, known for his provocative and avant garde work in theatre, and South African composer Peter Louis van Dijk. The production resulted in a shortened version of the original opera with a text that highlighted a post-colonial message. Sections of the music were adapted for alto-saxophone, djembe and marimba and the opera was staged in a guerrilla war in Sierra-Leone.<sup>91</sup> The production was repeated in 2007, its content further updated to current local politics and the opera was renamed *macbEth: the opera*. The result was a production so out of the ordinary that the newspaper heading ‘Macbeth as you’ve never seen it’ if anything underplays the extent to which the work had been indigenized. A review stated that:

This is not the *Macbeth* that European audiences have come to expect. Bailey and Van Dijk have adapted and interpreted Verdi's opera of ambition, corruption and witchcraft into the idiom of contemporary and mythological Africa. Against a backdrop of super-power politics, occult practices and Chinese imports, an African general and his European wife murder their king, unleashing atrocities on the crumbling African state they seize.<sup>92</sup>

The degree to which this production had been adapted also blurred the line between existing opera and new opera composition. Verdi’s *Macbeth* was subsequently listed by CTO as the performance of an ‘indigenous work’<sup>93</sup> and the composer responsible for the musical adaptation, Peter Louis van Dijk, listed it as a new work on his own list of works.<sup>94</sup>

However, the profile of CTO’s audience base has had a substantial influence on the degree to which the company has ventured into non-traditional interpretations of standard operas or the presentation of new operas. As is the case with all South African opera companies,

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<sup>90</sup> <http://www.capetownopera.co.za/htm/newsletterJul09.html>, accessed 10 August 2009.

<sup>91</sup> Herman Wasserman. ‘Opera, ‘n onredbare Eurosentriese kunsvorm?’, Litnet, <http://www.oulitnet.co.za/klank/09opera.asp>, accessed 17 August 2009. Although this internet review is not dated, the article suggests that it refers to the 2001 production.

<sup>92</sup> No author, ‘Macbeth as you’ve never seen it’. <http://www.southafrica.info/news/arts/macbeth-bunfight.htm>, accessed 17 August 2009.

<sup>93</sup> *Cape Town Opera, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Concert*, 19 April 2009.

<sup>94</sup> [www.plvandijk.co.za/list\\_of\\_works.htm#StageWorks](http://www.plvandijk.co.za/list_of_works.htm#StageWorks), accessed 17 August 2009.

CTO is to a large extent financially dependent on audience approval and public image. This reveals something of the vulnerability of opera production in the country.<sup>95</sup> Not having the artistic freedom resulting from full state subsidies (as for example the Berlin Opera which is owned and fully funded by the German State),<sup>96</sup> CTO also does not have a large enough audience base to financially support artistically adventurous undertakings (as for instance opera production in New York). The bulk of CTO's artistic output over the past decade has therefore been rather traditional.

Crouse is of the opinion that 'indigenizing a piece just for the sake of indigenizing is wrong' and emphatically declared that 'we don't do that.'<sup>97</sup> Reflecting social realities does however have an influence on the choice of repertoire as well as the decision to set productions in a certain style. In October 2009, CTO will for example produce the American contemporary opera by Jake Heggie, *Dead Man Walking*. The promotional material on the production states that the opera is 'telling an extraordinary true story that is extremely relevant to contemporary South Africa where public opinion is overwhelmingly in favour of a reinstatement of the death penalty.'<sup>98</sup> The events leading up to the death penalty in this specific story – that of rape and murder – are furthermore particularly relevant social issues in South Africa today.

Opera's power to entertain and its ability to provide a few hours of escape from often depressing realities, remain a criterion for CTO's management decisions on repertoire and presentation. Crouse feels that South Africans are sometimes tired of indigenized interpretations and come to the opera to escape because 'people want to leave reality and go to a land where they can enjoy themselves'.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Audience numbers and its financial stake in CTO will be discussed in the section 'Finance and Marketing' of this chapter.

<sup>96</sup> Berlin-based musicologist, Nepomuk Nitschke, explained to the current writer that because Berlin Opera is state owned, the German public expects the company to perform work that reflects the reality of the social surroundings. In Germany this trend has been coined 'Realtheater'. Nitschke, Nepomuk. Personal e-mail correspondence, 18 August 2009.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Christine Crouse, 25 August 2009.

<sup>98</sup> Promotional material: *CTO Opera Season October – November 2009*.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Christine Crouse, 25 August 2009.

## 4.6 Finance and Marketing

The survival of opera as an artistic and political structure in South Africa during and after the extensive political changes around 1994 finds an interesting parallel in France in the survival of the Paris Opera during and after the French Revolution. Despite playing out more than two centuries earlier and in a context entirely different from the South African situation, Paris Opera faced much the same criticism from social and cultural activists at the time. A royal institution par excellence, steeped in financial privileges and draped in elitist splendour, the institution was associated with the tyranny of the French Royal House and during the Revolution Paris Opera became a prime target for the reforming zeal of revolutionaries. However, after surviving the volatile years between the French Revolution and the reign of Napoleon, the institution regained its former status and, for reasons of its own (which will be discussed further in the penultimate section of this chapter), the French state continued to subsidise Paris Opera.<sup>100</sup>

Opera in South Africa was not that lucky. The financial structures that enabled opera production through the PACs from 1963 onwards were subject to radical change after 1994. In 1996 all four PACs were informed that the existing structures would be replaced by a National Arts Council (NAC) and that by 1998, all funding channels instated by the pre-1994 government would cease to function.<sup>101</sup> This decision came at no small cost to the Ministry of Arts and Culture of the new government. Addressing the issue of the (re)distribution of state funds via the PACs, whose legacy was the practise of (almost) exclusively European art forms, is articulated in the White Paper of 1996 as follows: ‘The activities of these institutions, their continued access to State monies, and their putative transformation, has created more controversy than any other issue facing the Ministry.’<sup>102</sup> However, the practical implications resulting from the new policy regarding state funding as stipulated in the White Paper meant that an application for financial assistance by an opera company would be regarded on the same level as any other cultural group who wished to apply for funds.

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<sup>100</sup> Victoria Johnson, *Backstage at the Revolution*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>101</sup> *White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage*, Chapter 4, par. 1.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* Chapter 4, par. 11.

On a structural level, the transition from CAPAB to CTO therefore resulted in a complete change. The management structure of the former PACs was based on the German model whereby government owned the organization and fully subsidised the arts. The internal structures of the PACs were managed by artists who reported directly to government.<sup>103</sup> When the new funding structures came into being, CTO essentially became part of the free market and its only option was privatization. Having chosen this model, privatization enforced a business model on the company that made it heavily dependent on marketing and fundraising. Although opera companies have been managed as private businesses in places like the USA for many years,<sup>104</sup> the privatization of a professional opera company was unprecedented in South Africa at the time.

Gobbato relates how initially, CTO received almost no funding from the NAC and by 2008 ‘after many applications and evidence of job creation for underprivileged communities, Cape Town Opera receives an amount of less than 5% of its total annual budget from national sources’.<sup>105</sup> Tellingly, during the first years after the formation of CTO, the provincial government of the Western Cape continued financial support of CTO. Governance in Cape Town on the provincial level was at the time still in the hands of the National Party (which had been in power since 1948)<sup>106</sup> and felt that Cape Town should have an opera company. However, financial support from the provincial government has steadily been declining and by 2009 their contribution was less than 2% of CTO annual turnover.<sup>107</sup>

CTO’s current fundraiser, Adriaan Fuchs, explained that the policy driving public sector (i.e. the state or government) funding focuses on social development issues such as education, training, skills development and job creation and when writing funding applications, he predominantly showcases how CTO excels in these areas. According to him the public sector funding structures (on provincial and national levels) are not interested in the art of opera itself. CTO’s choice of repertoire, for instance, makes no difference to the decision made by officials whether to grant subsidies to CTO or not.

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Angelo Gobbato, 12 August 2009.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> <http://www.capetownopera.co.za/htm/history2008.html>, accessed 27 July 2008.

<sup>106</sup> At the 1994 elections, the National Party which governed the country since 1948, lost control in all provinces except the Western Cape.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Adriaan Fuchs, 25 August 2009.

Although he would elaborate on repertoire in an application, what really counts are the statistics showing how many jobs have been created, what kinds of skills have been taught and how economic empowerment of the previously disadvantaged has taken place.<sup>108</sup>

During the past ten years, CTO has received funds from the public sector channelled through the Department of Labour, the National Lottery, the Department of Arts and Culture, the NAC as well as the Provincial Government of the Western Cape.<sup>109</sup>

The legislation on Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) that has been introduced by the Mbeki administration also contributes to CTO's income, albeit in an indirect way and on a smaller scale. Private companies can earn points on their own BEE score card if they sponsor organizations or incentives that are targeted at the development of skills of previously disadvantaged communities or when they sponsor companies that have a good BEE rating. Due to CTO's high percentage of black singers as well as their demonstrable education and training efforts (which will be discussed in the next section), the company has a high BEE rating, which in turn makes CTO a favourable candidate for sponsoring. Although these donations are not plentiful, Fuchs has for instance been able to secure discount on shipping fares for CTO's international tours.<sup>110</sup> Private companies are further eligible for a tax reduction on these donations under Section 18A of the Income Tax Act.<sup>111</sup>

Fuchs was appointed at CTO in November 2006 with the aim to improve the company's fundraising and donor relations. Bearing testimony to his keen understanding of the system and his skill at 'playing the game', the percentage of donated income received by CTO for the financial year ending March 2009 has increased by 24% compared to the previous fiscal year. For the first time in CTO's existence, the NAC approved a R1,000,000 subsidy to the company.<sup>112</sup> The public sector contribution comprises 63% of the total donated income, accounting for approximately 15% of CTO's total annual income.<sup>113</sup> Added to

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Angelo Gobbato, 12 August 2009.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Adriaan Fuchs, 25 August 2009.

<sup>111</sup> *Cape Town Opera, Annual Review 2008/2009*, p. 20.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20. The present writer has not been able to determine what percentage of CTO's total income is sourced from ticket sales to the South African public. Due to irregular reporting and transfer of funds from Computicket to CTO, data presented in financial statements are unfortunately unreliable.

this, CTO's successful tours to Germany and Norway during this financial term resulted in a 42% increase in CTO's total annual turnover.<sup>114</sup>

Being reliant on a sound business plan, CTO realized the importance of a competitive marketing strategy, as this plays an important role in creating revenue in the short and long terms. Fuchs comments that:

Marketing an art form such as opera in today's world is an extremely challenging task that poses unique problems to the marketing manager. Opera is and always will be marginal within the broader context of most modern societies. [...] Central to the dilemma is how to go about marketing an art form that is largely viewed as 'outdated', catering to an elitist, predominantly European audience. Within the South African context, opera is laden with political, social and economic connotations and represents a time in our country's history during which many people were excluded from the opportunity to watch or enjoy opera. Any marketing campaign that hopes to promote opera, should therefore strive to change such perceptions, to address imbalances and to be inclusive, while demystifying the art form and making performances more accessible.<sup>115</sup>

However, trying to change the public's perception about opera has turned out to be harder than anticipated and securing media coverage for opera production continues to be a struggle.<sup>116</sup> Developing new audiences, especially in the townships as well as the higher income sectors of the public who traditionally do not go to the opera is, as Christine Crouse put it, 'a nut we haven't cracked yet'.<sup>117</sup> The latest Annual Review states that approximately 5% of CTO's expenditure has been spent on marketing.<sup>118</sup> The company has put various schemes in place to lower the financial and artistic threshold for lower income groups by organizing transport and lowering prices. Higher income groups are targeted by making 'going to the opera' a more prestigious affair and visitors to the opera house are these days introduced to the building through a red carpet, literally rolled out to welcome them.<sup>119</sup> The most important marketing challenge facing CTO is to achieve a mind shift with the public at large; to change the idea that opera is synonymous with 'white' culture and to overcome the notion that opera was an important stakeholder in the previous dispensation's cultural capital.<sup>120</sup> During 2008 the company performed to

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Fuchs, *Marketing Plan: Cape Town Opera*, p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> *Cape Town Opera, Annual Review 2008/2009*, p. 8.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Christine Crouse, 25 August 2009.

<sup>118</sup> *Cape Town Opera, Annual Review 2008/2009*, p. 29.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Adriaan Fuchs, 22 July 2009.

approximately 95,000 individuals during 112 performances.<sup>121</sup> These figures include the performances during their tours to Sweden, Germany and Norway, which comprised almost 50% of their total performances for the year.<sup>122</sup>

Crouse is of the opinion that financially, CTO has come a long way since the days of CAPAB. Referring to the previous dispensation, Crouse twice repeated to the current writer that ‘a lot of money was spent in those days’ and that, in contrast, the financial burdens of a privatized company today ‘can at times be consuming’.<sup>123</sup>

#### **4.7 Education and Training**

Drawing a comparison between Paris Opera and CTO also renders other informative insights. In her book *Backstage at the Revolution*, Victoria Johnson argues that the answer to the survival of Paris Opera – an institution notorious for its privileged position for more than a century – during and after the French Revolution, can be found in its founding principles. The entrepreneurial instincts of its founder, Pierre Perrin, lead to the founding of this organisation in 1667 on two principles. Perrin’s intention was on the one hand to develop French opera into a national asset and on the other, to link Paris Opera to the royal house by setting it up as an academy. The strengths of this organizational model carried Paris Opera through the tumultuous social and political changes of the French Revolution because first, it had a well developed academy as a teaching unit and second, a century after its founding Paris Opera was indeed seen as a national asset of the French people rather than of any particular social class.<sup>124</sup>

I should like to argue that the same two principles – albeit in completely different circumstances and played out in different modes – have predominantly contributed to the survival of opera in South Africa. Compared to other forms of classical music practised in the country, opera has become a thriving cultural activity with a promising future. Admittedly, opera is not regarded as a ‘national asset’ by South Africa’s government or by

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<sup>121</sup> Fuchs, *Marketing Plan: Cape Town Opera*. p. 91.

<sup>122</sup> *Cape Town Opera, Annual Review 2008/2009*, p. 11.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Christine Crouse, 25 August 2009.

<sup>124</sup> Victoria Johnson, *Backstage at the Revolution*, pp. 1-14.



society at large, but as illustrated earlier in this chapter, the voice of the black opera singer has been ascribed the values of a ‘national asset’ by opera directors and academics. These values guarantee a place for ‘the black voice’ or ‘the African voice’ and thus for opera within the framework of what is regarded as part of the South African collective. These values furthermore play a pivotal role in the survival of opera in the country because within the ‘black voice’ lies the legitimation of African opera. The future of the production and creation of opera in South Africa is inconceivable without the notion of African opera, which in turn cannot hold its own without a sizeable contribution by ‘the black opera singer’. Furthermore, as black opera singers continue to achieve by winning international competitions or accolades, or by singing to great acclaim at first-class opera houses abroad, their status as opera celebrities and ‘national assets’ is increasingly taken up in the local media and, if not admired by the country as a whole, certainly supported by those in the field.<sup>125</sup>

The second principle that contributed to the survival of the Paris Opera was the existence of the royal academy. Louis XIV legislated and owned the academy and, as Johnson illustrates, the academy at the Paris Opera not only stimulated discussion around opera – a trend that was the norm at the time in any of Louis XIV’s other royal academies – but also trained singers. The composer Lully, who was personally very close to the king, was reported to be a great teacher. Through strict training and instruction he managed to develop his own opera compositions and thus established French opera during the fifteen years he was at the helm of this institution.<sup>126</sup> Translated to the South African scenario, the strong emphasis on education and training that has been part of opera production in the Cape since 1952, has certainly contributed to its survival.

Johnson further elaborates on her theory of the impact of founding principles on long term survival, saying that they ‘are, of course, themselves profoundly influenced by the particular time and place in which they are conjured up, as well as by the particular social position and individual disposition of the entrepreneur’.<sup>127</sup> With this in mind, it is telling to

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<sup>125</sup> Pretty Yende has earned much media attention by winning the Hans Grober Singing Competition in Vienna. Not only have her performances been shown on national television, she is also the first black opera star to earn a full A3 page in a local Afrikaans newspaper. See Murray de la Vita, ‘Pretty Yende, sopraan met ‘n singende hart’, *Die Burger*, 21 August 2009, p. 19.

<sup>126</sup> Victoria Johnson, *Backstage at the Revolution*, pp. 119- 47.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

note that the mission statements of CTO, Opera Africa and the Black Tie Ensemble all view the issue of education and training on par with their intention to perform quality opera. This trend may be interpreted as an answer to the explicit discussion of the inequality of education possibilities for black singers in the previous dispensation in the *White Paper on the Arts and Culture* of 1996. However, it cannot be ignored that by the time that these opera companies were being founded, huge numbers of talented black opera singers had already come to the fore. The importance of training them into capable singers to further their potential contribution to the survival of opera production may have been foremost in mind when these mission statements were written. The CTO's mission statement explains that 'Cape Town Opera is committed to the continued performance and development of opera, operetta and musical theatre in South Africa striving for the optimal employment and development of the required artists from all our communities'.<sup>128</sup>

The value of in-house training and its impact on sustained production is not novel to opera production in Cape Town and this aspect of the company can be viewed as an ongoing tradition. Local opera production has been familiar with this concept since the inception of the UCT Opera School in 1952 by Erik Chisholm, the Scottish composer and Dean of the College of Music at the University of Cape Town. In the years preceding the establishment of the PACs, opera in Cape Town was mainly produced by the UCT Opera School and the Eoan Group. The latter also trained their singers, albeit under difficult and politically compromised circumstances.<sup>129</sup> After CAPAB was established in 1963 the staff and students of the UCT Opera School were closely associated with opera production at CAPAB. For many years Angelo Gobbato was head of the Opera School and at the same time director of CAPAB Opera which later became CTO.<sup>130</sup> When Apartheid legislation started thawing in the early 1980s some of Eoan's members also joined CAPAB.<sup>131</sup> In-house training has made, and continues to make, an invaluable contribution to the continued existence of opera in South Africa.

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<sup>128</sup> <http://www.capetownopera.co.za/htm/about2008.html>, accessed 10 August 2009.

<sup>129</sup> This issue is discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>130</sup> A position which he described in his retirement as 'of great contribution to the survival opera, but it also killed me'. Gobbato retired from all opera activity in Cape Town early in 2009. Interview with Angelo Gobbato, 12 August 2009.

<sup>131</sup> Virginia Davids, for instance, currently professor in vocal training at the UCT Opera School, used to sing with the Eoan Group in the 1970s. From 1984-88 she received further vocal training at the University of Stellenbosch and enjoyed an illustrious career in the country after that. Prof. Davids has taught many upcoming black opera singers, amongst others Pretty Yende.

CTO currently offers three training schemes to would-be opera stars as well as singers who want to take part in opera production on a non-professional basis. Funds for these initiatives are independently sought and sponsors currently include the UCT College of Music, the Mellon Foundation, Standard Bank and the government training fund MAPPP-SETA.<sup>132</sup> The incentive for in-house training comes from management's realization that 'vocal training and skills development form the backbone of CTO's performance groups'.<sup>133</sup> However, these training initiatives serve CTO on the financial front as well; as described elsewhere in this chapter, training initiatives are vital in the bid to obtain funding from the public sector and CTO has been demonstrably successful in this regard.

The first of these training schemes, the Voice of the Nation Opera Studio, offers opportunities for opera singers who have had accredited training but need further assistance in building a professional solo career. In this course 'up to ten young singers with exceptional voices and an identified potential for soloist careers'<sup>134</sup> are trained. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, 56 singers had been trained in this way by 2008. Singers who are accepted into the Opera Studio receive monthly stipends, instruction in staging and opportunities to sing in two professional operatic productions in the year of their enrolment. They also have access to master classes from visiting artists.<sup>135</sup>

Singers who have had some vocal training but do not intend to become professional soloists can get further training at the Voice of the Nation Ensemble, the second training scheme. This facility also admits singers who have not had access to professional training at tertiary education centres, but would like to become professional choristers. Singers are auditioned for this course and the ability to read staff notation – which is not necessarily the norm in local circumstances – is a prerequisite for entry. The Voice of the Nation Ensemble has become CTO's residential chorus, singing the chorus parts in opera productions and forming the backbone of CTO's other choral productions. This group also takes part in CTO's educational outreach programmes and community concerts. Opera choruses from the standard canon are often translated into Xhosa for these concerts. Individuals trained in this programme receive a monthly stipend, vocal coaching and

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<sup>132</sup> *Cape Town Opera Annual Review 2008/2009*, p. 14.

<sup>133</sup> Programme notes: *Cape Town Opera, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Concert*, 19 April 2009. See section under 'Training and Development'.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

acting classes. During CTO's tenth anniversary celebration, the 120-strong chorus was showcased extensively.

CTO's third training scheme is the Choral Training Program which is 'geared towards singers with an identified talent, but who lack access to formal music education programmes'.<sup>136</sup> This 'lack of access' is often due to the fact that singers do not meet the minimum requirements to be accepted at the UCT Opera School. In practice this means that those entering this programme do not read staff notation and do not have adequate theoretical training to be accepted into tertiary education. All roles are therefore learned by rote. Participants in this programme often take part in CTO choral productions and are specifically used in their outreach programmes.

According to Crouse the huge numbers of black opera students who continue to present themselves at training institutions also poses an ethical problem: 'The UCT Opera School is full, but after they've been trained, where do they go? We don't have enough places for these people to perform'.<sup>137</sup> In financial terminology this can be described as too much supply in a situation where there is too little demand. It is clear that the challenge of stimulating a culture of 'going to the opera' amongst the public at large and tapping into the younger generation of would-be opera lovers still lies ahead. In this regard opera has not become a 'national asset' as yet.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

Returning to the accusation, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, that CTO was parading transformation,<sup>138</sup> the difficulty (if not inability) to achieve change in the arts through an argument driven and measured by political means only is well illustrated here. This is a limitation already hinted at in Chapter 1, where constructing indigenization in opera as (historical) process pointed towards the difficulties in imagining it as a vehicle to politically 'transform' opera into an indigenous art form. In his attack, Arendse stated that 'at CTO, there is no formal succession strategy, no one is designated to drive the

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<sup>136</sup> *Cape Town Opera Annual Review 2008/2009*, p. 14.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Christine Crouse, 25 August 2009.

<sup>138</sup> Michael Arendse, 'Plodding to a fine transformation tune in Cape Town', 10 April 2007.

transformation process, there is no ad hoc or subcommittee at board level dealing with transformation and the company has no transformation charter'.<sup>139</sup> Arendse further commented that although 'CTO offers internships on the marketing, financial and artistic sides of the organization, there is no training on the management side.'<sup>140</sup> CTO's general manager, Michael Williams, rebutted these accusations by saying that 'the CTO board does not deal with this important matter in a subcommittee. Transformation of the company at all levels has been a board priority since inception, and all members are responsible for and participate in it'.<sup>141</sup>

Although this public spat illustrates that little is achieved through a debate that negates the important distinctions between arts and politics where both sides choose their own (different) rules of engagement, it is a telling example of the harshness of a performance and artistic environment that is still heavily informed by the Apartheid past. It is also a salutary reminder that in South Africa the arts ignore the imperatives of politics at their own peril. It would be particularly opportunistic of this writer to slate CTO's political pragmatism in the light of Chapter 2 of this dissertation. The Eoan Group, as has been shown, was a striking example of a South African opera company that tried to ignore politics. Indeed, Joseph Manca is reputed to have said: 'politics is a dirty word'.<sup>142</sup> Politics had its revenge for being thus spurned.

Despite the development of encouraging numbers of black South African singers that points towards the emergence of a what one might call a home-grown, institutionalized 'South African operatic culture', Angelo Gobbato remains mindful of the limitations of the local situation. Indigenization, according to Gobbato, focuses on the manifestation of opera in a specific country and is therefore informed by notions of nationalism in music. Gobbato argues that the emergence of the 'folk-like' or 'folk-style' in various countries in the past and the concomitant rise of a national operatic tradition in such countries, have typically resulted from political shifts. This trend can be traced in Italy, Germany and France in the nineteenth century, followed by countries in Eastern Europe and Russia.<sup>143</sup> Gobbato makes the thought-provoking point that the notion of 'South African opera', more

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Michael Williams, 'Singing the praises of Cape Town Opera', 8 May 2007.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with former Eoan singer, Patricia van Graan on 21 November 2008.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Angelo Gobbato on 12 August 2009.

than a hundred years after these developments, is out of phase with what is happening elsewhere in the world and out of sync with what the world expects and understands as opera today. What used to be ‘national’ in opera abroad has been replaced with an aspiration towards the ‘international’, where everybody sings all kinds of opera. Furthermore, Gobbato is concerned that the ‘strong-spirited singing’ of African singers may be out of tune, so to speak, with the aesthetically polished performances typically required by opera houses abroad.<sup>144</sup>

What Gobbato does not remark on, is the possibility that opera in South Africa is very much *in phase* and *in sync* with local social and political conditions, which have seen Afrikaner nationalism replaced by the African nationalism that has made such an indelible mark on all art music production in South Africa since the early 1990s, including opera. It is this context that finds CTO responding to its context in the ways described in this chapter. To apply the term ‘indigenization’ to what was recorded here as a crisis management of Cape Town opera in the late nineties which has continued to this day, may seem exaggerated. And yet it is no different to saying, as was said in Chapter 1, that the influence of Afrikaans translations and National Party support for opera have been important forces in shaping what it understood by the term in South Africa today. The rise of the black opera singer, local interpretations of operas from the standard canon and the composition of new opera have all been discussed in this chapter as institutional strategies for (political) survival, as well as factors in the indigenization of opera. Allowing for changes in degree rather than principle, this kind of developmental trajectory is probably true for all remaining opera companies in South Africa.

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

## Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis I mentioned the work on indigenization done by Carol Babiracki and Amy Stillman, indicating that the strategies of indigenization explored here might profitably be informed by their use and conceptualization of the term. Returning to Babiracki's description of indigenized church music in India as containing 'subtle traces of Western church music',<sup>1</sup> opera production in the Western Cape by comparison seems to have remained predominantly European. However, Amy Stillman's model describing the five stages of indigenization in church music in Polynesia could perhaps be applied more instructively to this dissertation. Stillman's study provides a framework that can be used to measure something that may still be emerging and that is not yet overtly visible (or audible). In short, her model follows a trajectory of 1) the survival of indigenous music, 2) the coexistence of indigenous and the 'introduced' music (in this discussion 'introduced music' refers to opera), 3) the appropriation of material between indigenous and 'introduced' music, 4) the emergence of new musical idioms, and 5) the absorption of these idioms into a new musical framework.<sup>2</sup>

The production of opera from the standard canon and new opera composition in much of Cape Town as well as the structural considerations of an opera company such as Cape Town Opera could be placed at approximately stage three on Stillman's scale (referring to the 'appropriation of material'). However, stage one on Stillman's scale, referring to the 'survival of indigenous music' in South Africa, cannot be taken for granted as the status and popularity of 'indigenous African music' today seem more precarious than ever. It is likely that new opera composition could pave the way to further stages of indigenization according to this model. Arguably Huyssen's opera *Masque* could be seen as probing towards the emergence of a new musical idiom, although the composer himself advocates the viewpoint of coexistence (level two of Stillman's model). Placing an indigenous African music group next to a standard Western orchestra *on the same stage and within the same production*, each playing 'their own' music, could be viewed as the emergence of a

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Babiracki. 1985. 'Indigenizers', in *The Western Impact on World Music, Change, Adaptation and Survival*, ed. Bruno Nettl, Schirmer Books p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Amy Ku'uileialoha Stillman. 1993. 'Prelude to a Comparative Investigation of Protestant Hymnody in Polynesia', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Volume 25, pp. 89-99.

new musical idiom and not the mere coexistence of different musical practises. An investigation into other newly composed operas by local composers will most likely produce different results than the current study. Operas such as Mzilikazi Khumalo's opera *Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu*, a Zulu opera described as 'a celebration of the life and music making traditions of the indigenous people of KwaZulu Natal'<sup>3</sup> may well present other avenues towards a new musical idiom. Furthermore, the productions by Cape Town's other opera company, Isango Portabello, known for their strongly indigenized adaptations, could also provide different results to the ones presented here. In this regard it is interesting to note that Portabello's artistic manager, Mark Donford-May, comes from the UK and seems to be less concerned with the 'traditional' in opera production than CTO's management who have been producing opera in Cape Town for decades.

However, it is important to note that Stillman's model cannot be applied to opera without reservation. Her model is based on the indigenization of congregational music, which implies a music that is designed with completely different purposes in mind than opera. Not only is congregational music meant for use by mostly non-professional musicians, the impulse towards indigenization in these musical practices is very different. In missiology music forms an important part of demonstrating the new convert's distinctiveness from the unconverted.<sup>4</sup> In current opera production in South Africa, distinctiveness from the dominant culture may be a less than desirable outcome. Closing the gap between 'the West' and 'Africa' seems to be the goal towards which local opera strives through indigenization, as distinctiveness is inevitably informed by the perceived elitism of opera as an art form. Furthermore, the danger of losing social and political relevance for Christian missions in e.g. India, Africa or Polynesia had been a pressing issue much earlier in history than for opera in South Africa. Babiracki notes that the battle against indigenization of church music in Africa was waged and lost in the early twentieth century already.<sup>5</sup> In South Africa the battle for indigenization in opera is waging as I write this dissertation.

In the introduction to this dissertation I argued that the indigenization of (classical) music predominantly differentiates itself from exoticism in (classical) music in respect of the

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.operafrica.co.za/princess\\_magogo.htm](http://www.operafrica.co.za/princess_magogo.htm), accessed 19 March 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Babiracki, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



circumstances within which these ‘techniques’ are used. Exoticism generally occurs when artists, working in the language of the West, borrow music from other cultures and where these new musical products are considered part of a society where the West is the dominant culture. The indigenization of Western classical music differs from exoticism in the sense that the dominant cultural context is not Western, but where the art form has been introduced in the recent past by settlers from the West and where it is under pressure to survive. Indigenization therefore assumes an aura of necessity not necessarily present in the more voyeuristic impulses of exoticism. When the Provincial Arts Councils faced disbandment in 1996, Michael Williams, current general manager of Cape Town Opera, was reported to have said: ‘sink or sing’!<sup>6</sup> Following this argument, one would expect that the outcome of indigenization in musical works, performances or institutional structures would sound (or look) different to exoticism. Indigenization suggests more invasive or destabilising changes than those prompted by exoticism. If this hypothesis is accepted, how does indigenized opera sound?

Chapter 1 (presenting a historical overview of opera in South Africa) illustrates that indigenization took place long before questions regarding the reflection of societal and political realities in opera became pertinent. Although traces of indigenization are less pronounced in productions before 1994, the translation of opera into Afrikaans, for instance, was driven by overt political aims and can be seen as a bid to increase the social relevance of opera amongst Afrikaans speakers. Chapter 1 also suggests that the influence of politics on the shaping of opera production, which in turn has an impact on indigenization, cannot be underestimated. This is confirmed throughout the dissertation. Although the influence of politics on opera production is a dominant theme in Chapter 2’s presentation of the Eoan Group history, this chapter reveals a more complex side of musical indigenization. Apartheid policy was based on an insistence on difference between racial groups. In accepting and performing Italian opera according to ‘traditional Italian styles’, Eoan resisted these claims. Eoan ensured that opera in the Western Cape could no longer be seen as a ‘white’ or ‘European’ affair. It was, primarily, Coloured and therefore indigenized.

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<sup>6</sup> Programme notes: *Cape Town Opera, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Concert*, address by CTO’s General Manager, Michael Williams. 19 April 2009.

The second half of the dissertation discusses Cape Town Opera as a company (Chapter 4) and the production of Hans Huysen's *Masque*, produced under the auspices of this company (Chapter 3). Indicative perhaps of boundary-shifting creative work, Chapter 3 shows that only a small portion of the public and CTO's singers, instrumentalists or management were ready to accept Huysen's vision of 'an African opera'. Despite reservations about some of the composer's ideas, the technical and artistic means through which he tried to accomplish the production of 'an African opera', it clearly challenged accepted notions of opera production. Chapter 4 illustrates that anachronistic conventional notions of opera practice are still very much dominant in Cape Town, despite the radically changed racial constitution of the singing corps within CTO. In fact, changes in demographic representation seem to have had little impact on the content of opera production in terms of indigenization and have rather been used by CTO's management as political arguments in their continued bids to secure funding. Although a degree of indigenization may have occurred on the structural level of this company, notions that threaten 'traditional ideas' about opera practice and composition are clearly viewed with suspicion.

As the above makes clear, the emergence of Italian opera practice as a dominant aesthetic in the Western Cape is perhaps one of the most unexpected continuities emerging from the critical perspectives contained in this dissertation. It connects the past and the present, and the aspirations of white, black and coloured South Africans. Whereas Italian opera is regarded as central to local opera tastes and performance, it is ironic that indigenous African music in opera is viewed by many as an exotic fad rather than an intrinsic part of local cultural heritage. What this tells us about indigenization in local opera production is not as simple as might be thought. On the one hand it would be possible to argue that the dominance of Italian opera practice be viewed as an inhibiting force in the drive towards indigenization, a classic instance of a performance 'tradition' becoming what Pierre Bourdieu called *habitus*. As illustrated in Chapter 1, Italian opera historically dominated the repertoire choices of local opera companies, especially since the inception of the Provincial Arts Councils in 1963. In 1988, when the four Provincial Arts Councils celebrated their twenty-fifth anniversaries, an article in the local arts magazine, *Scenario*, stated that 75% of all opera performed in the country was from the standard Italian

repertoire, with German opera in second place and Bizet's *Carmen* an annual favourite.<sup>7</sup> In Cape Town this trend continues to this day (see Chapter 4) despite the major political and economic changes that affect opera production in the country; changes that have seriously questioned the political, social and cultural relevance of opera in South Africa today. The brochure published to commemorate Cape Town Opera's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2009 lists all productions given by this company since its inception, and confirms that repertoire choices have not changed much from before 1994.<sup>8</sup> So-called 'indigenous works', which admittedly never occurred before 1994, are listed on a separate page and comprise twelve items of which two are repeat productions.<sup>9</sup> The placing of these works on a separate page and under a separate heading is a clear indication that 'indigenous works' are still viewed by CTO's management as 'other' in relation to traditional opera repertoire and are also marketed to the concert-going public as such.

Why is this the case, one might well ask. As stated before, many individuals who were active as managers and producers of opera before 1994 continue to hold such positions in South Africa and have also been training their successors. This is not to say that such individuals are sabotaging local opera production, quite the contrary, but artistic agendas have remained conservative. Audience preferences and the need of the private opera company to make a profit also clearly influence decisions about repertoire. Furthermore, as illustrated in Chapter 4, the current South African government is less interested in the choice of repertoire than in economically empowering 'previously disadvantaged' singers, regardless of the music they sing.

Chapters 3 and 4 illustrate that the aesthetics of voice production in Cape Town is heavily influenced by Italianate ideals. This can be linked to the training of most local singers by Italian nationals since the early twentieth century. For many years Cape Town was the only centre in the country offering training in opera. This started at the South African College of Music in 1926, managed by the Italian-born Giuseppe Paganelli. In 1954 the Cape Town Opera School was inaugurated, with another Italian, Gregorio Fiasconaro, as director. In later years Angelo Gobbato, who emigrated from Italy with his parents in 1950, took over this post only to retire in 2009 after which the first ever non-Italian, Kamal

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<sup>7</sup> See page 56.

<sup>8</sup> Cape Town Opera, *10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Concert*, 19 April 2009, no page numbers.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Khan,<sup>10</sup> was appointed as director of this school. As discussed in Chapter 4, Gobbato made an enormous and in many ways positive impact on opera in Cape Town during a career spanning more than forty years. He was also instrumental in the survival of opera in Cape Town after 1994. Other vocal trainers that have made major contributions towards educating local singers as well as producing many operas, especially during the Apartheid years, were Joseph Manca, Alessandro Rota and Olga Magnoni, all of Italian descent.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 bear testimony to the popularity of Italian opera amongst opera singers indigenous to South Africa. During fieldwork done for Chapter 3, the singer Skumbuzo Kunene, for instance, mentioned to the current writer that he fell in love with Verdi and Italian opera by watching DVD's of Italian opera and that singing this kind of opera remains his career dream. This indicates that the easy access to Italian opera via the media further contributes to its popularity. Gobbato later explained his understanding of Verdi's appeal to black singers when he said that people from the townships live in conditions that are intensely dramatic and singers therefore identify with the melodrama of opera. According to him the unstable social circumstances within which Verdi lived and composed in nineteenth-century Italy resemble the living conditions of townships today.<sup>11</sup> The apparent unqualified support for Italian opera repertoire and Italian models of voice production by black and coloured South African opera singers, complicates the argument that the dominance of Italian opera practice be viewed as an inhibiting force in the drive towards indigenization. It suggests that indigenization in music could have less to do with the music itself and more with the people making the music.

Of course it is perfectly reasonable to argue that Italian opera repertoire is standard for most opera companies worldwide and that the situation of opera in Cape Town in this regard is nothing unusual. The article in *Scenario* referred to above, also mentions that the South African statistics of the time were in line with those of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York.<sup>12</sup> A cursory glance at contemporary programming of major opera houses in the West today confirms this trend. In this dissertation it is evident that for many in the industry in South Africa, opera – and specifically Italian opera – presents a gateway

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<sup>10</sup> Khan hails from the United States.

<sup>11</sup> See page 206.

<sup>12</sup> See footnote 171 on page 56.

to a different life from one in the townships, life as a ‘second-rate citizen’ during the Apartheid era or a life dominated by political violence, crime or poverty.

In the historical overview of the development of opera in the country (Chapter 1) I noted that ‘opera seems to require the stable infrastructure and population density of a relatively powerful economic metropolis in order to exist as a living practice’.<sup>13</sup> The influence of economic and political power centres on the development and content of opera in the West is well documented and, as illustrated in this dissertation, opera practice in Cape Town is no exception to this rule. Although smaller in scale than other opera centres in many first world countries and negligible in terms of global companies who today control the dissemination of recorded music, within the context of South Africa Cape Town is a significant centre of opera production if only because it is the oldest Western settlement in South Africa. The considerable importance of Italian opera in the Western Cape, although not extended in this dissertation to other centres like Durban or Johannesburg, emerges as a significant conclusion potentially also of importance for opera production in the rest of the country.

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<sup>13</sup> See p. 24.

## Appendix: List of South African operas and operettas

The list below records operas and operettas composed on South African soil that the present writer could find during the course of this research. The list also includes operas by composers who were born or lived in South Africa, but were residing outside the country at the time when the listed works were composed.

Date	Composer	Title	Genre
1814	Lemming, Carl Frederick	<i>Sapho</i> <sup>14</sup>	Ballet-opera
1890	Searelle, Luscombe	<i>Black Rover</i> <sup>15</sup>	Opera
1891	Von Booth, Karl Edmund Otto	<i>Prizes and blanks</i> <sup>16</sup>	Operetta
1896	Searelle, Luscombe	<i>Kisses of Circe</i> <sup>17</sup>	Opera
1899	Searelle, Luscombe	<i>Evalina</i> <sup>18</sup>	Opera
1914	Bell, William Henry	<i>Hippolytus</i> <sup>19</sup>	Opera
1924	Bell, William Henry	<i>Isabeau</i> <sup>20</sup>	Opera
1928	Bell, William Henry	<i>The mousetrap</i> <sup>21</sup>	Opera
1930	Bell, William Henry	<i>Doctor Love</i> <sup>22</sup>	Opera
1932	Manca, Joseph Salvatore	<i>San Maratto</i> <sup>23</sup>	Operetta
1934	Bell, William Henry	<i>The wandering scholar</i> <sup>24</sup>	Opera
1934	Wegelin, Arthur Willem	<i>Avenant</i> <sup>25</sup>	Operetta
1935	Endler, Hans	<i>Pa se dogter</i> <sup>26</sup>	Operetta

<sup>14</sup> The score of this work is considered lost. Jan Bouws, *Solank daar musiek is...*, Tafelberg, 1982, p. 30. See also Jan Bouws. 'Lemming, Frederik Carl', *South African Music Encyclopedia (SAME)*, ed. J.P. Malan, Cape Town, 1979-1986, Volume 3, pp. 152-4.

<sup>15</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Searelle, Luscombe', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 223-5.

<sup>16</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Von Booth, Karl Edmund Otto', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 453-6.

<sup>17</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Searelle, Luscombe', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 223-5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Hubert van der Spuy, 'Bell, William Henry', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 152-160.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Manca, Joseph Salvatore', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 192-4.

<sup>24</sup> Hubert van der Spuy, 'Bell, William Henry', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 152-160.

<sup>25</sup> J.H. Potgieter, 'Wegelin, Arthur Willem', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 465-9.

<sup>26</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Endler, Hans', *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 18-22.

<b>1938</b>	Endler, Hans	<i>In old Vienna</i> <sup>27</sup>	Operetta
<b>1938</b>	Swanson, Walter Donald	<i>Robbie Burns</i> <sup>28</sup>	Radio operetta
<b>1939</b>	Bell, William Henry	<i>The duenna</i> <sup>29</sup>	Opera
<b>1939</b>	Bell, William Henry	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> <sup>30</sup>	Opera
<b>1941</b>	Swanson, Walter Donald	<i>Cocao for two</i> <sup>31</sup>	Radio operetta
<b>1941</b>	Swanson, Walter Donald	<i>The Amulet</i> <sup>32</sup>	Radio operetta
<b>No date</b>	Swanson, Walter Donald	<i>Die beertjie met die gelapte broekie</i> <sup>33</sup>	Children's operetta
<b>No date</b>	Swanson, Walter Donald	<i>The little stock exchange</i> <sup>34</sup>	Children's operetta
<b>No date</b>	Swanson, Walter Donald	<i>Once upon a leap year</i> <sup>35</sup>	Children's operetta
<b>No date</b>	Swanson, Walter Donald	<i>Rip van Winkel</i> <sup>36</sup>	Children's operetta
<b>No date</b>	Swanson, Walter Donald	<i>Rough Diamond</i> <sup>37</sup>	Children's operetta
<b>No date</b>	Swanson, Walter Donald	<i>Zoe's Dream</i> <sup>38</sup>	Children's operetta
<b>1942</b>	Pohl, Jan Luyt	<i>In 'n skewe straatjie</i> <sup>39</sup>	Operetta
<b>1943</b>	Hallis, Adolph	<i>Jakaranda</i> <sup>40</sup>	Radio operetta
<b>1943</b>	Hallis, Adolph	<i>Port of call</i> <sup>41</sup>	Radio operetta
<b>1943</b>	Kirby, Percival Robson	<i>Open or shut</i> <sup>42</sup>	Opera
<b>1946</b>	Pohl, Jan Luyt	<i>Heksekinders</i> <sup>43</sup>	Radio operetta
<b>1946</b>	Hallis, Adolph	<i>Love of gold</i> <sup>44</sup>	Radio operetta
<b>No date</b>	Hallis, Adolph	<i>A bowl of Constantia Red</i> <sup>45</sup>	Operetta
<b>No date</b>	Hirschland, Heinz	<i>Johannesburg – Park Station</i> <sup>46</sup>	Opera

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Swanson, Walter', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 311-4.

<sup>29</sup> Hubert van der Spuy, 'Bell, William Henry', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 152-160.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Swanson, Walter', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 311-4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Pohl, Jan Luyt', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 81-3.

<sup>40</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Hallis, Adolph', *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 158-160.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Kirby, Percival Robson', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 102-9.

<sup>43</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Pohl, Jan Luyt', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 81-3.

<sup>44</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Hallis, Adolph', *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 158-160.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Lily Wolpowitz, 'Hirschland, Heinz' *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 233-5.

No date	Pickerill, William Joseph	<i>The mill of youth</i> <sup>47</sup>	Operetta
1948	Coates, Albert	<i>The boy David</i> <sup>48</sup>	Opera
1949	Pohl, Jan Luyt	<i>Nooi van Vleifontein</i> <sup>49</sup>	Radio operetta
1950	Coates, Albert	<i>The Duel</i> <sup>50</sup>	Operetta
1950	De Kock, Lourens Bosman	<i>Potjierol</i> <sup>51</sup>	Children's operetta
1950	De Kock, Lourens Bosman	<i>Soetkoek</i> <sup>52</sup>	Children's operetta
1951	Chisholm, Erik	<i>The Inland Woman</i> <sup>53</sup>	Opera
1951	Myburgh, Dirk Petrus	<i>Die jag</i> <sup>54</sup>	Operetta
1951	De Kock, Lourens Bosman	<i>Willemien</i> <sup>55</sup>	Operetta
1952	Coates, Albert	<i>Van Huncks and the Devil</i> <sup>56</sup>	Opera
1952	Kirby, Percival Robson	<i>A maid of Amsterdam</i> <sup>57</sup>	Radio operetta
1952	Bon, Gerrit	<i>Jarraigo</i> <sup>58</sup>	Opera
1953	Chisholm, Erik	<i>Murder in Three Keys</i> <sup>59</sup>	Opera
1953	Joubert, John	<i>Antigone</i> <sup>60</sup>	Radio operetta
1954	Malan, Jacques Pierre	<i>Ridders van die Swartwoud</i> <sup>61</sup>	School operetta
1954	Malan, Jacques Pierre	<i>Die towenaar van Drakenstein</i> <sup>62</sup>	School operetta
1954	Uys, Johanna Elizabeth	<i>Die goue hart</i> <sup>63</sup>	School operetta
1956	Joubert, John	<i>In the Drought</i> <sup>64</sup>	Opera
1956	Rorke, Peter	<i>Die nuwe dominee</i> <sup>65</sup>	Comic opera

<sup>47</sup> Walter Swanson, 'Pickerill, William Joseph', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 59-61.

<sup>48</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Coates, Albert, Erik', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 281-3.

<sup>49</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Pohl, Jan Luyt', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 81-3.

<sup>50</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Coates, Albert, Erik', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 281-3.

<sup>51</sup> De Kock also translated seven operas from the standard Western canon into Afrikaans. J.P. Malan, 'De Kock, Lourens Bosman', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 327-8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Chisholm, Erik', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 271-5.

<sup>54</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Myburgh, Dirk Petrus', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 271-2.

<sup>55</sup> This work was commissioned by the SABC. J.P. Malan, 'De Kock, Lourens Bosman', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 327-8.

<sup>56</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Coates, Albert, Erik', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 281-3.

<sup>57</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Kirby, Percival Robson', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 102-9.

<sup>58</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Bon, Gerrit', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 205-8. See also Johnson, Alexander. [http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Bonn\\_Gerrit.html](http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Bonn_Gerrit.html), accessed 24 June 2009.

<sup>59</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Chisholm, Erik', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 271-5.

<sup>60</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Joubert, John Pierre Herman', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 58-67. See also Alexander Johnson. [http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Joubert\\_John.html](http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Joubert_John.html), accessed 24 June 2009.

<sup>61</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Malan, Jacques Pierre', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 190-2.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Uys, Johanna Elizabeth', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 395-6.

<sup>64</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Joubert, John Pierre Herman', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 58-67.

<sup>65</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Rorke, Peter', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 193-5.



<b>1956</b>	Pohl, Jan Luyt	<i>Skermelodie</i> <sup>66</sup>	Radio operetta
<b>No date</b>	Pohl, Jan Luyt	<i>Rowerkaptein</i> <sup>67</sup>	Radio operetta
<b>1957</b>	Badings, Henk	<i>Asterion</i> <sup>68</sup>	Television opera
<b>1957</b>	Andresen, Hans Olaf	<i>Die heidenooientjie</i> <sup>69</sup>	Operetta
<b>1957</b>	Faul, Lourens Abram	<i>Prins van Monakato</i> <sup>70</sup>	School operetta
<b>1957</b>	Malan, Jacques Pierre	<i>Die Minnesangers</i> <sup>71</sup>	School operetta
<b>1958</b>	Uys, Johanna Elizabeth	<i>Sneeulandlegende</i> <sup>72</sup>	School operetta
<b>1960</b>	Faul, Lourens Abram	<i>Skoenmaker Stillewater</i> <sup>73</sup>	School operetta
<b>1960</b>	Andresen, Hans Olaf	<i>Die drie astertjies</i> <sup>74</sup>	Operetta
<b>1960</b>	Andresen, Hans Olaf	<i>Die mieliefeitjie</i> <sup>75</sup>	Operetta
<b>1961</b>	Chisholm, Erik	<i>The Midnight Court</i> <sup>76</sup>	Opera
<b>1961</b>	Joubert, John	<i>Silas Marner</i> <sup>77</sup>	Opera
<b>1961</b>	Mocke, Veretia	<i>Klasie die vlakhasie</i> <sup>78</sup>	School operetta
<b>1961</b>	Pienaar, Rachel Elizabeth	<i>Skrikkeljanie</i> <sup>79</sup>	Operetta
<b>1961</b>	Van der Westhuizen, Hercules Pieter	<i>Anneke van die Kasteel</i> <sup>80</sup>	Operetta
<b>1962</b>	Chisholm, Erik	<i>Canterbury Tales</i> <sup>81</sup>	Comic opera
<b>1962</b>	Mocke, Veretia	<i>Die onvoltooide aria</i> <sup>82</sup>	Operetta
<b>1962</b>	Faul, Lourens Abram	<i>Die seemeeu roep</i> <sup>83</sup>	School operetta
<b>1962</b>	Malan, Jacques Pierre	<i>Lodilla</i> <sup>84</sup>	School operetta
<b>1963</b>	Chisholm, Erik	<i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i> <sup>85</sup>	Opera
<b>1963</b>	Chisholm, Erik	<i>The importance of being</i>	Comic opera

<sup>66</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Pohl, Jan Luyt', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 81-3.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Muller, Stephanus. *Sounding Margins: Musical Representations of White South Africa*. Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, 2000, p.81.

<sup>69</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Andresen, Hans Olaf', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 40-5.

<sup>70</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Faul, Lourens Abram', Erik', *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 57-9.

<sup>71</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Malan, Jacques Pierre', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 190-2.

<sup>72</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Uys, Johanna Elizabeth', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 395-6.

<sup>73</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Faul, Lourens Abram', Erik', *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 57-9.

<sup>74</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Andresen, Hans Olaf', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 40-5.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Chisholm, Erik', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 271-5.

<sup>77</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Joubert, John Pierre Herman', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 58-67.

<sup>78</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Mocke, Veretia', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 247-8.

<sup>79</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Pienaar, Rachel Elizabeth', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 62-3.

<sup>80</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Van der Westhuizen, Hercules Pieter', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 414-6.

<sup>81</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Chisholm, Erik', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 271-5.

<sup>82</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Mocke, Veretia', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 247-8.

<sup>83</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Faul, Lourens Abram', Erik', *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 57-9.

<sup>84</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Malan, Jacques Pierre', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 190-2.

<sup>85</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Chisholm, Erik', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 271-5.

<i>Earnest</i> <sup>86</sup>			
<b>1963</b>	Chisholm, Erik	<i>The Life and Loves of Robert Burns</i> <sup>87</sup>	Folk opera
<b>1963</b>	Mocke, Veretia	<i>Alleen in die wêreld</i> <sup>88</sup>	Operetta
<b>1963</b>	Wegelin, Arthur Willem	<i>Die kortsluiting</i> <sup>89</sup>	Opera sketch
<b>1964</b>	Temmingh, Roelof (snr.)	<i>Die Nagtegaal</i> <sup>90</sup>	Operetta
<b>1964</b>	Faul, Lourens Abram	<i>Mooifontein se meisies</i> <sup>91</sup>	School operetta
<b>1964</b>	Uys, Johanna Elizabeth	<i>Manewales by Mooidrif</i> <sup>92</sup>	School operetta
<b>1964</b>	Bezzio, Luigi	<i>Il Grande Viaggio</i> <sup>93</sup>	Opera
<b>No date</b>	Bezzio, Luigi	<i>Pirimpaya</i> <sup>94</sup>	Operetta
<b>No date</b>	O'Reilly, Stephen	<i>The coming of the Butterflies</i> <sup>95</sup>	Radio opera
<b>1965</b>	Faul, Lourens Abram	<i>Ons vir jou</i> <sup>96</sup>	School operetta
<b>1965</b>	Temmingh, Roelof (snr.)	<i>En jy ly skade aan jou siel</i> <sup>97</sup>	Operetta
<b>1967</b>	Harvey, Eva Noel	<i>Yugao</i> <sup>98</sup>	Opera
<b>1967</b>	Eversen, Cromwell	<i>Klutaimnestra</i> <sup>99</sup>	Opera
<b>1967</b>	Joubert, John	<i>The Quarry</i> <sup>100</sup>	Opera
<b>1968</b>	Joubert, John	<i>Under western eyes</i> <sup>101</sup>	Opera
<b>1968</b>	Melman, Ivan Michael	<i>The last of the just</i> <sup>102</sup>	Opera
<b>1968</b>	Rorke, Peter	<i>The reluctant corpse</i> <sup>103</sup>	Television opera
<b>1968</b>	Van der Mark, Huigrina	<i>Volund</i> <sup>104</sup>	Opera

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Mocke, Veretia', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 247-8.

<sup>89</sup> J.H. Potgieter, 'Wegelin, Arthur Willem', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp.465-9. See also Alexander Johnson. [http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficom/Wegelin,\\_Arthur.html](http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficom/Wegelin,_Arthur.html), accessed 24 June 2009.

<sup>90</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Temmingh, Roelof Willem', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 326-7.

<sup>91</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Faul, Lourens Abram', Erik', *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 57-9.

<sup>92</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Uys, Johanna Elizabeth', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 395-6.

<sup>93</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Bezzio, Luigi', *SAME*, Volume 1, pp. 166-7.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> J.P. Malan, 'O'Reilly, Stephen', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 315-7.

<sup>96</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Faul, Lourens Abram', *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 57-9.

<sup>97</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Temmingh, Roelof Willem', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 326-7.

<sup>98</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Harvey, Eva Noel', *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 177-8.

<sup>99</sup> This is the first serious opera with an Afrikaans libretto. Everson used serial techniques in this composition. Jan Bouws, *Solank daar musiek is...*, 1982, p. 190.

<sup>100</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Joubert, John Pierre Herman', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 58-67.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Melman, Ivan Michael', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 225-6.

<sup>103</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Rorke, Peter', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 193-5.

<sup>104</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Van der Mark, Huigrina', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 407-410.

1969	Harvey, Eva Noel	<i>Esther</i> <sup>105</sup>	Grand opera
1969	Harvey, Eva Noel	<i>Ruth and Naomi</i> <sup>106</sup>	Opera
1969	Faul, Lourens Abram	<i>Legend of the Last Miracle</i> <sup>107</sup>	Opera
1969	Wessels, Maria Johanna	<i>Kom tog, Klaasvokie</i> <sup>108</sup>	School operetta
1969	Wessels, Maria Johanna	<i>Pampoenkopland</i> <sup>109</sup>	School operetta
1970	Wessels, Maria Johanna	<i>My besondere lied</i> <sup>110</sup>	School operetta
1970	Wessels, Maria Johanna	<i>Speel tog B-mol</i> <sup>111</sup>	School operetta
1970	Malan, Jacques Pierre	<i>My Suiderland</i> <sup>112</sup>	School operetta
1970	Malan, Jacques Pierre	<i>Die silwer sambreeltjie</i> <sup>113</sup>	School operetta
1970	Malan, Jacques Pierre	<i>Die goue hert</i> <sup>114</sup>	School operetta
1971	Malan, Jacques Pierre	<i>Freule Marieke</i> <sup>115</sup>	School operetta
1971	Malan, Jacques Pierre	<i>Prys vir 'n meisie</i> <sup>116</sup>	School operetta
1971	Wessels, Maria Johanna	<i>Laps</i> <sup>117</sup>	School operetta
1971	Faul, Lourens Abram	<i>Lekkerleefland</i> <sup>118</sup>	Musical comedy
1972	Joubert, John	<i>The prisoner</i> <sup>119</sup>	School operetta
1973	Malan, Jacques Pierre	<i>Boomvolgies</i> <sup>120</sup>	School operetta
1974	Faul, Lourens Abram	<i>Ponkie en sy donkie</i> <sup>121</sup>	School operetta
1974	Mocke, Veretia	<i>Die Goue Toorstokkie</i> <sup>122</sup>	Operetta
1974	Wessels, Maria Johanna	<i>Ek is 'n prins</i> <sup>123</sup>	School operetta
1975	Van Dijk, Peter Louis	<i>Die noodsein</i> <sup>124</sup>	Opera
1975	Mocke, Veretia	<i>Blou, blou, waar is jy nou?</i> <sup>125</sup>	Operetta

<sup>105</sup> J.P.Malan, 'Harvey, Eva Noel', *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 177-8.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> J.P.Malan, 'Faul, Lourens Abram', *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 57-9.

<sup>108</sup> J.P.Malan, 'Wessels, Maria Johanna', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 483-4.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> J.P.Malan, 'Malan, Jacques Pierre', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 190-2.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> J.P.Malan, 'Wessels, Maria Johanna', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp 483-4.

<sup>118</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Faul, Lourens Abram', *Erik*, *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 57-9.

<sup>119</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Joubert, John Pierre Herman', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 58-67.

<sup>120</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Malan, Jacques Pierre', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 190-2.

<sup>121</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Faul, Lourens Abram', *SAME*, Volume 2, pp. 57-9.

<sup>122</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Mocke, Veretia', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 247-8.

<sup>123</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Wessels, Maria Johanna', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 483-4.

<sup>124</sup> Kapp, Pieter. 'Die akademie en opera', *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, March 2008: 3. See also [http://www.plvandijk.co.za/list\\_of\\_works.htm](http://www.plvandijk.co.za/list_of_works.htm), accessed 24/06/2009.

<sup>125</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Mocke, Veretia', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 247-8.

<b>1975</b>	Mocke, Veretia	<i>Bim die stoute beertjie</i> <sup>126</sup>	Operetta
<b>No date</b>	Mocke, Veretia	<i>Jan Wappies</i> <sup>127</sup>	Operetta
<b>No date</b>	Mocke, Veretia	<i>Lindie se wens</i> <sup>128</sup>	Operetta
<b>No date</b>	Mocke, Veretia	<i>Paddastrofes of Strandrots</i> <sup>129</sup>	Operetta
<b>No date</b>	Mocke, Veretia	<i>Die troue in die poppekas</i> <sup>130</sup>	Operetta
<b>1976</b>	Van Wyk, Carl Albert	<i>Die sirkusbeer</i> <sup>131</sup>	School operetta
<b>1978</b>	Temmingh, Hendrik	<i>Die lyding van Mattewis Viljee</i> <sup>132</sup>	Opera
<b>1979</b>	Zaidel-Rudolph, Jeanne	<i>Animal Farm</i> <sup>133</sup>	Opera
<b>1979</b>	Pienaar, Rachel Elizabeth	<i>Die skat van Vergelegen</i> <sup>134</sup>	Operetta
<b>1980</b>	Mocke, Veretia	<i>Moffie Muis</i> <sup>135</sup>	Operetta
<b>1983</b>	Zaidel-Rudolph, Jeanne	<i>A Rage in a Cage</i> <sup>136</sup>	Rock opera
<b>1987</b>	Hofmeyr, Hendrik	<i>The Fall of the House of Usher</i> <sup>137</sup>	Chamber opera
<b>1990</b>	Hofmeyr, Hendrik	<i>The land of Heart's Desire</i> <sup>138</sup>	Opera
<b>1990</b>	Volans, Kevin	<i>Correspondences</i> <sup>139</sup>	Dance opera
<b>1990</b>	Van Wyk, Carl	<i>Fiela se kind</i> <sup>140</sup>	Opera
<b>1993</b>	Volans, Kevin	<i>The Man with Footsoles of Wind</i> <sup>141</sup>	Chamber opera
<b>1994</b>	Temmingh, Roelof (jnr.)	<i>Enoch, prophet of God</i> <sup>142</sup>	Opera

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Van Wyk, Carl Albert', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 438-441.

<sup>132</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Temmingh, Hendrik', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 325-6.

<sup>133</sup> This work is incomplete. J.P. Malan, 'Zaidel-Rudolph, Jeanne', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 516-8. The opera is omitted from this composer's list of works on Alexander Johnson's website on South African composers. See [http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Zaidel-Rudolph,\\_Jeanne.html](http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Zaidel-Rudolph,_Jeanne.html), accessed 24 June 2009.

<sup>134</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Pienaar, Rachel Elizabeth', *SAME*, Volume 4, pp. 62-3.

<sup>135</sup> J.P. Malan, 'Mocke, Veretia', *SAME*, Volume 3, pp. 247-8.

<sup>136</sup> Johnson, Alexander. [http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Zaidel-Rudolph,\\_Jeanne.html](http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Zaidel-Rudolph,_Jeanne.html), accessed 24 June 2009.

<sup>137</sup> Hilde Roos, *Hendrik Hofmeyr: lewe en werk 1957-1998*. Unpublished master's thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2000, p. 90.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>139</sup> [www.kevinvolans.com](http://www.kevinvolans.com), accessed 24 June 2009.

<sup>140</sup> Mary Rorich in conversation with Carl van Wyk about his new opera 'Fiela se kind', *SABC Sound Archives*, Catalogue no. TM 8707.

<sup>141</sup> [www.kevinvolans.com](http://www.kevinvolans.com), accessed 24 June 2009.

<sup>142</sup> Alexander Johnson, [http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Temmingh,\\_Roelof.html](http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Temmingh,_Roelof.html), accessed 24 June 2009.

<b>1996</b>	Hofmeyr, Hendrik	<i>Lumukanda</i> <sup>143</sup>	Opera
<b>1996</b>	Ndodana-Breen, Bongani	<i>Themba and Seliba</i> <sup>144</sup>	Chamber opera
<b>1997</b>	Temmingh, Roelof (jnr.)	<i>Sacred Bones</i> <sup>145</sup>	Chamber opera
<b>1998</b>	Temmingh, Roelof (jnr.)	<i>Buchuland</i> <sup>146</sup>	Opera
<b>1998</b>	Ndodana-Breen, Bongani	<i>Uhambo – The Pilgrimage</i> <sup>147</sup>	Opera-oratorio
<b>2000</b>	Rajna, Thomas	<i>Amarantha</i> <sup>148</sup>	Opera
<b>2001</b>	Volans, Kevin	<i>Zeno at 4am</i> <sup>149</sup>	Opera
<b>2001</b>	Hofmeyr, Hendrik	<i>Die laaste aand</i> <sup>150</sup>	Chamber opera
<b>2001</b>	Ndodana-Breen, Bongani	<i>Umuntu: ‘Threnody and Dances’</i> <sup>151</sup>	Monodrama
<b>2001</b>	Weale, Denzil	<i>Love and Green Onions</i> <sup>152</sup>	Jazz opera
<b>2001</b>	Van Dijk, Peter Louis; Verdi, Guiseppe	<i>Macbeth</i> <sup>153</sup>	Opera
<b>No date</b>	Williams, Michael	<i>The Milkbird</i> <sup>154</sup>	Children’s opera
<b>No date</b>	Williams, Michael	<i>The Seven Headed Snake</i> <sup>155</sup>	Children’s opera
<b>No date</b>	Williams, Michael	<i>Child of the Moon</i> <sup>156</sup>	Children’s opera
<b>2002</b>	Khumalo, Mzilikazi	<i>Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu</i> <sup>157</sup>	Opera
<b>2003</b>	Phipps, Martin;	<i>Earthdiving</i> <sup>158</sup>	Opera

<sup>143</sup> Hilde Roos, *Hendrik Hofmeyr: lewe en werk 1957-1998*. p. 91.

<sup>144</sup> Alexander Johnson, [http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Ndodana\\_Bongani.html](http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Ndodana_Bongani.html), accessed 24 June 2009.

<sup>145</sup> Alexander Johnson, [http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Temmingh\\_Roelof.html](http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Temmingh_Roelof.html), accessed 24 June 2009.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Alexander Johnson, [http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Ndodana\\_Bongani.html](http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Ndodana_Bongani.html), accessed 24 June 2009.

<sup>148</sup> Thys Odendaal, ‘Fugard se ‘Valley Song’ word opera’, *Die Burger*, 14 December 2002.

<sup>149</sup> [www.kevinvolans.com](http://www.kevinvolans.com), accessed 24 June 2009.

<sup>150</sup> Alexander Johnson, [http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Hofmeyr\\_Hendrik.html](http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Hofmeyr_Hendrik.html), accessed 24 June 2009.

<sup>151</sup> Alexander Johnson, [http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Ndodana\\_Bongani.html](http://www.africancomposers.co.za/Aficomp/Ndodana_Bongani.html), accessed 24 June 2009.

<sup>152</sup> No author, Programme notes: *Cape Town Opera, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Concert*, 19 April 2009. No page numbers.

<sup>153</sup> No Author, *Cape Town Opera, the Voice of the Nation*, 2004 Annual report, p. 5. The decision to add Van Dijk’s adaptation of Verdi’s *Macbeth* to the list is based on the fact that the work was substantially ‘reinvented’. Van Dijk also lists the opera as a new work on his list of works. See [http://www.plvandijk.co.za/list\\_of\\_works](http://www.plvandijk.co.za/list_of_works), accessed 17 August 2009.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Diane de Beer, <http://africlassical.blogspot.com/2009/03/mzilikazi-khumalos-opera-princess.html>, accessed 7 October 2009.

<sup>158</sup> No author, Programme notes: *Cape Town Opera, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Concert*, 19 April 2009. No page numbers.

	Koapeng, Mokale; Van Dijk, Peter Louis		
<b>2005</b>	Rajna, Thomas	<i>Valley Song</i> <sup>159</sup>	Opera
<b>2005</b>	Huysen, Hans	<i>Masque</i> <sup>160</sup>	Opera
<b>2007</b>	Ndodana-Breen, Bongani	<i>The Passion of Winnie (Part I)</i> <sup>161</sup>	Opera
<b>2007</b>	Williams, Michael; Stephenson, Allen	<i>The Orphans of Qumbu</i> <sup>162</sup>	Children's opera
<b>2008</b>	Gothe, Mats Larsson	<i>The Poet &amp; Prophetess</i> <sup>163</sup>	Opera
<b>2009</b>	Stephenson, Allan	<i>Miracle Boy</i> <sup>164</sup>	Children's opera
<b>2004-9</b>	Michael Blake	<i>Searching for Salome</i> <sup>165</sup>	Opera
<b>2010</b>	Martin Watt; Peter Louis van Dijk; Peter Klatzow; Bongani Ndodana-Breen; Hendrik Hofmeyr	<i>Five:20</i> <sup>166</sup>	Opera

<sup>159</sup> Gotfried Maas, 'Valley Song' klink met Karoo-ritmes', *Die Burger*, 5 Maart 2005.

<sup>160</sup> Martina Viljoen, "'An aesthetic of redemption": Reading *Masque* as public culture'. *Muziki* 3(1), 2006, pp. 114-133.

<sup>161</sup> John Terauds, 'A life tailor-made for an opera', *The Star*, 3 June 2007.  
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<sup>162</sup> Kobus van der Merwe, 'Suid-Afrikaanse kinderoopera verrykend', *Die Burger*, 12 July 2009. See also: No Author. *Cape Town Opera, the Voice of the Nation*, 2004 Annual report, p. 5.

<sup>163</sup> Wayne Muller, 'Fees van operas wag op Kapenaars in 2008', *Die Burger*, 2 February 2009.

<sup>164</sup> No Author. *Cape Town Opera, 2008-2009 Annual Review*, p 10.

<sup>165</sup> <http://www.michaelblake.co.za/works.html#Stage>, accessed 8 November 2010.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* This work comprises five operas of 20 minutes each by five different South African composers. Each opera will address a specifically South African social phenomenon, e.g. Xenophobia, HIV/Aids, etc. Interview with Michael Williams, 25 August 2009.

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