

## Between Realism and Re-enactment: Navigating Dramatic and Musical ‘Problems’ in *Voyage to the Moon*

Joseph Browning, University of Oxford  
Jane W. Davidson, University of Melbourne

### Synopsis

How do practitioners understand the relationship between performance, history and emotion in Western art music? Based on an ethnographic study of a contemporary pasticcio opera, we take the rehearsal room as an important, yet often overlooked, site in which creative artists imagine and perform different relationships with their musical and cultural heritage. Focussing on the interplay between two performative modes, which we call realism and re-enactment, we describe how the creative team navigated various dramatic and musical challenges associated with the opera, generating a final production that was ambiguous and multi-layered in its emotional registers and attitudes towards the past.<sup>1</sup>

### Main Text

#### Day 8: Starting Work on Aria 16, A Question Emerges

As people arrive at Victorian Opera for the morning rehearsals, Horti Hall gradually fills with talk and activity. Soon we take our normal places in the large rehearsal room: the singers occupy the central stage-like space; we (the authors and researchers) sit at a long desk in front along with the stage manager and director; the covers (understudies) watch from one side. It is Day 8 of the *Voyage to the Moon* rehearsals and attention turns, for the first time, to Aria 16, in which Astolfo challenges Orlando to, as the title puts it, ‘Stand and fight’. As work begins, Michael Gow, the director and librettist, comments ‘For me it’s the weirdest thing in the whole show, because why doesn’t he open the box?’ (His reference is to the box containing Orlando’s sanity: Orlando is crazed and violent, so why doesn’t Astolfo restore his friend’s sanity immediately, rather than start a fight?) Gow and Sally-Anne Russell, the mezzo soprano playing the part of Astolfo, joke that perhaps Astolfo is simply unable to open the box, maybe because it is locked. Putting the problem aside temporarily, they start work on ‘the music’ for the aria. Phoebe Briggs, Musical Director for the production, accompanies Russell on piano as she sings through, then they discuss details of timing, diction and variations for the repeat of the A section.

After the break, they are joined by Emma Matthews, the soprano playing the part of Orlando, and set about ‘blocking’ the previous aria, number 15, titled ‘As Strong as an Army’. Gow’s idea is that Orlando enters stage left, resting his sword on his shoulder, then circles around to centre stage – looking ‘crazed, like a polar bear pacing in a cage’ – to begin the A section of the aria. This leaves space in the bridge to the B section for what he calls a ‘musical joke’: Orlando should stalk past the onstage orchestra (located upstage centre), sweeping his sword at them as if in provocation. From this starting point, Matthews tries fragments of the aria, experimenting with

---

<sup>1</sup> Our warm thanks to the artists and staff at Victorian Opera and Musica Viva, especially those discussed in this article, for participating in our research. We are also grateful to the editors of this Special Issue, the *Parergon* general editor, and the journal’s anonymous reviewers for their much-valued input. This research was supported by the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions.

gestures and movement in the space. In the da capo (repeat of the A section opening), she adds emphasis to the high notes in her vocal part by stabbing her sword upwards into the air. Gow adds further details, suggesting that Orlando should sing as if threatening the audience. They run the whole aria to consolidate the ideas, then break for lunch.

## **The *Voyage to the Moon* Rehearsals: Context, Problems and Performances**

This vignette briefly sketches just a few hours of work, but it introduces many features that characterised the 17 days of rehearsals for *Voyage to the Moon*. The large hall served as the locus for rehearsal activity, an ‘emotional arena’ in which various ideas around emotion and performance were played out.<sup>2</sup> Work alternated between time spent on ‘the music’ (focussed on sonic and expressive features of the vocal performance) and on ‘blocking’ (focussed on the movements of the singers within the stage space). It also oscillated between verbal discussion and practical experimentation with bodies, props and sounds. And the production was shaped by a taste for jokes and playful distancing effects, including breaking the fourth wall (for example through singers addressing the audience or through singers’ interactions with the onstage musicians). Hidden amongst these ongoing preoccupations, was a more unusual moment, Gow’s question, ‘Why doesn’t he open the box?’ and his sense that the lack of this action was ‘the weirdest thing in the whole show’. Although initially postponed, Gow’s question came, alongside several others, to animate much of the next few days’ work. This article focusses on these questions, and the musical and dramatic problems with which they were entangled, in order to explore wider issues concerning the relationship between performance, heritage, and emotion in Western art music.<sup>3</sup> Over the course of the article, we move through several ethnographic vignettes of the rehearsal work on these musical numbers across several days. These are interspersed with analysis that discusses the kinds of practices and discourses deployed in the rehearsals around issues of motivation, emotion, history and performance. Our emphasis throughout is on tracing the creative process in action in order to analyse how individual performative moments emerge from widespread artistic discourses, cultural norms, and social interactions. We see the rehearsal room as an important, yet often overlooked, site in which different relationships with the musical and cultural past are imagined, performed, and negotiated. In the case of *Voyage*, and these arias in particular, we suggest that the rehearsal process resulted in a final production that was ambiguous and multi-layered in its combination of several performative modes and emotional registers.

*Voyage to the Moon* was a rare contemporary example of a pasticcio opera, reviving a musical practice that originated in the late seventeenth century, although commonly referred to by that term only from around 1730. Price describes how:

J.J. Quantz, during a visit to Florence in 1725 (though writing in 1755), heard several operas ‘patched together with arias of various masters, which is called “pastry” by the Italians, “un pasticcio”’.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Mark Seymour, ‘Emotional Arenas: From Provincial Circus to National Courtroom in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy’, *Rethinking History*, 16.2 (2012), 177–97.

<sup>3</sup> In doing so, the article joins a growing literature on the ethnographic study of Western art music as it is practised today. For an overview within ethnomusicology see Laudan Nooshin, ‘Introduction to the Special Issue: The Ethnomusicology of Western Art Music’, *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 20.3 (2011), 285–300; also Kay Kaufman Shelemay, ‘Toward an Ethnomusicology of the Early Music Movement: Thoughts on Bridging Disciplines and Musical Worlds’, *Ethnomusicology*, 45.1 (2001), 1–29; Stephen Cottrell, *Professional Music-Making in London: Ethnography and Experience* (Ashgate, 2004); Amanda Bayley, ‘Ethnographic Research into Contemporary String Quartet Rehearsal’, *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 20.3 (2011), 385–411; Paul Atkinson, *Everyday Arias: An Operatic Ethnography* (Lanham, MD, USA: AltaMira Press, 2006); Nick Wilson, *The Art of Re-Enchantment Making Early Music in the Modern Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Curtis Price, ‘Pasticcio’, *Grove Music Online*.

The originally pejorative term lost some of its stigma and came to describe a variety of operas created through the assemblage, re-contextualisation and substitution of pre-existing musical material. *Voyage* (as we will call it) counts as a twentieth-century example of one of Price's 'true' pasticcio: 'a composite original, in which diverse arias by several composers are fashioned into a new plot'.<sup>5</sup> *Voyage* was the result of a collaboration between three institutions: Victorian Opera, Musica Viva and the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions (CHE). Devised, workshopped and rehearsed in 2015 and early 2016, the production premiered in Melbourne in February 2016, before touring throughout Australia. The production involved a large team, but key personnel pertinent to this article include Michael Gow, a leading Australian playwright and librettist; Emma Matthews, soprano; Sally-Anne Russell, mezzo soprano; Phoebe Briggs, Victorian Opera's Head of Music and the production's Musical Director; and Jeremy Kleeman, bass-baritone. A multi-person collaborative project combining old and new music, the opera offered a distinctive opportunity for examining how twenty-first century Australian artistic practitioners relate to the European musical past and re-present it for modern-day audiences.<sup>6</sup> Although we recognise that opera (at least as performed in a concert hall) may not necessarily be conceived as 'heritage' in either colloquial or scholarly usage, our point here is not simply to expand the definition of heritage, but to note its inherently ambiguous boundaries and to suggest that it needs to be understood alongside other ways of relating to the past. We also join a wider move to conceptualise heritage not as a 'thing', but 'as practised and performed, subjective and situational, and emergent in particular settings'.<sup>7</sup> In that it involves the performance of a relationship with Australia's European cultural heritage, we see *Voyage*, and the culture of Western art music in general, as overlapping or blurring together with more conventional forms of heritage associated with re-enactment (a term especially pertinent to this article), commemoration, tourism, museums, and other heritage sites.<sup>8</sup>

*Voyage* took its story from one episode in Ludovico Ariosto's famous epic, *Orlando Furioso*, and collaged together musical numbers by composers such as Vivaldi and Handel with newly composed recitatives by its two composer-arrangers, Alan Curtis (1934-2015) and Calvin Bowman (who took up the role after Curtis passed away).<sup>9</sup> The episode explores chivalric ideals, namely the virtues of duty, loyalty and friendship, and the dangers of obsessive love and rage.<sup>10</sup> The opera narrates the loss of Orlando's sanity – precipitated by his infatuation with Angelica and subsequent discovery that she has eloped with an enemy soldier – and his friend Astolfo's quest, guided by a Magus or wiseman, to recover it from the moon, 'home of lost things' and domain of the fearful goddess Selena. The narrative events at issue in this article open the third and final act of the opera. Astolfo and the Magus return from the moon, having recovered Orlando's sanity – contained, in this production, within an old leather music case. Back on earth, they encounter a 'frenzied' Orlando consumed with anger and, as the libretto puts it, 'rampaging across the land'. Yet, as Gow's question suggests, the score demands two more arias (15 and 16) before the box is opened and Orlando's sanity is restored. First Orlando sings 'As Strong as an Army', then after a short

<sup>5</sup> Curtis Price, 'Pasticcio'.

<sup>6</sup> For background information on *Voyage*, including issues of Australian identity, see Joseph Browning and Jane W. Davidson, 'Assembling Voyage to the Moon: Emotion, Creativity and Historicity in a New Australian Opera', in *Opera and Emotion in the Antipodes*, ed. by Jane W. Davidson, Michael Halliwell, and Stephanie Rocke, in preparation; and Joseph Browning, 'Emotion as Multiple: Rehearsing Voyage to the Moon', in *Opera and Emotion in the Antipodes*, ed. by Jane W. Davidson, Michael Halliwell, and Stephanie Rocke, in preparation.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Haldrup and Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt, 'Heritage as Performance', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, ed. by Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 52–68 (p. 52); after Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> For a productive study of Western art music as heritage see Eric Martin Usner, "'The Condition of Mozart': Mozart Year 2006 and the New Vienna', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 20.3 (2011), 413–42.

<sup>9</sup> See Browning and Davidson, 'Assembling Voyage to the Moon'.

<sup>10</sup> For one scholarly analysis of the chivalric ideals surrounding the Orlando story, see Elizabeth H. D. Mazzocco, 'An Italian Reaction to the French Prose Lancelot-Grail Cycle: Matteo Maria Boiardo and the Knight's Quest for an Identity', in *The Lancelot-Grail Cycle: Text and Transformations*, ed. by William W. Kibler (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2010), 191–205 (p. 197).

recitative, Astolfo sings ‘Stand and fight’:

### **Aria 15**

As strong as an army I won’t be defeated.  
What stands before me I slaughter and ravage with fury.  
My frenzy unsparing will crush all I see.

My anger protects me like bright shining armour.  
No men will survive my rage unrelenting.  
Oh heed my warning.  
Prepare now to die.

### **Recitative**

Orlando, these taunts and insults dishonour your proud name.  
I now challenge you to combat, and if it must be, I will end your madness with bloodshed!

### **Aria 16**

Stand and fight, barbarous hero.  
See, I am fearless, weapon ready, like a fury from below.  
Vengeance is all I know.  
Fight with me! Fight with me! Savagery! That is all I know.

Vows of friendship are now forsaken.  
Face me now in victory or slaughter.  
Strike now at last! Strike the fatal blow!<sup>11</sup>

In accordance with the pasticcio model, Aria 15 was based on ‘O placido il mare’, composed by Johann Adolph Hasse (1699-1783) for his 1733 opera *Siroe* (and arranged for *Voyage* by research assistant Frederic Kiernan), while Aria 16 was based on ‘Col versar, barbaro, il sangue’, composed by Giuseppe Maria Orlandini (1676–1760) for his 1725 opera *Berenice*. The original dramatic contexts for these arias are complex and bear no straightforward relationship with their dramatic role in *Voyage*. Rather, they were chosen for their musical characteristics: both arias are virtuosic, fast, and (original dramatic complexities aside) fall apparently neatly within the conventionalised category of ‘rage aria’, although the kind of ‘rage’ – its motivation, form of expression and status as authentic or simulated – became central issues in the rehearsals. Although it involved little disturbance to the largely positive atmosphere of the *Voyage* rehearsals, work on these numbers, especially Aria 16, was among the most difficult and time-consuming in the production process. Where at other times (as discussed elsewhere<sup>12</sup>), different attitudes towards the emotions at stake in the production for the most part coexisted and mutually re-inflected each other, the work on Aria 16 was a rare moment in which divergent viewpoints clashed and so had to be more overtly negotiated.

The difficulties in staging these first numbers of Act 3 all revolve around questions of how and why certain actions which seemed dramatically urgent – opening a magical box, starting a fight, slaughtering someone – could be delayed for the sake of more singing, rather than immediately carried out. These questions are hard to extricate from another ‘problem’ at issue throughout the *Voyage* rehearsals: the emotional logic of the da capo aria. This ternary (ABA) musical form is strongly associated with Baroque opera and requires that a character sing the same extended passage at the beginning and end of the aria (separated by a contrasting B section). As such, it raises questions about how the potentially redundant repetition of music and lyrics might be invested with emotional meaning or performative significance. Gow commented, even at a very early stage in the

---

<sup>11</sup> Michael Gow, Alan Curtis, and Calvin Bowman, ‘Voyage to the Moon Score and Libretto’, 2016, pp. 102–19.

<sup>12</sup> Browning, ‘Emotion as Multiple’.

production process, that the da capo repeat could be ‘a director’s nightmare’, but that:

the temptation to do a lot should be resisted, really. I don’t think you need to have them running round like crazy people just because they’re singing the same stuff. I think it’s actually the same thing only even more intense.<sup>13</sup>

So, in referring to ‘problems’ we follow the usage of the *Voyage* team, who employed similar terms to describe the challenges they encountered when working on these musical numbers. Their and our implication is not that these were a wholly unwelcome feature of the production process. Rather they represented an issue to be solved, something that perhaps pushed against theatrical conventions or commonplace artistic intuitions, but that ultimately provided an opportunity to enrich their sense of the production: ‘problems’ meant the possibility of ‘breakthroughs’.

These problems arose from formal musical-dramatic structures – namely a particular sequence of da capo arias – that were perceived as more-or-less fixed containers within which the team had to work. The possibility of cutting certain numbers (most obviously 16) or significantly rewriting either the music or the libretto was not discussed during rehearsals. This sense of fixity grew, partly, out of the practicalities of the production process and artistic labour, including the need to keep to the (by that stage) finalised duration of the opera, the need to balance the number of arias apportioned to each singer, and a desire not to waste the work they had already invested in learning their parts. At the same time, fixity grew out of the team’s understanding of the musical-dramatic structure of the opera, including a shared feeling that the chosen sequence of musical numbers had their own narrative and emotional logic, and an increasing sense of *Voyage* as a musical ‘work’. This ‘work’ concept – which Goehr’s seminal analysis identifies as emerging around 1800 and which Born usefully glosses as ‘the belief that musical works...[are] perfectly formed, finished and ‘untouchable’, and transcend...any particular performance’ – was a powerful if ambivalent presence in *Voyage*.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, the project was premised on what was imagined as the contrasting musical ontology of the pasticcio, based on the reuse, adaptation, and assemblage of musical parts (‘imagined’ because Goehr’s ‘around 1800’ dating of the emergence of the work concept is contested, and the question of whether Baroque composers wrote musical works is especially thorny).<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the team nonetheless remained reluctant to substantially rework pre-existing arias, often preferring to retain original melodic lines and imitate the prosody of the original text-setting where possible – such tendencies demonstrating the ongoing power of the work-concept to regulate musical practice.<sup>16</sup> As historical artefacts, much older than *Voyage* and tied to authoritative composers, the individual da capo arias were even more strongly understood as ‘works’, or rather fragments of ‘works’. They are also the musical form most emblematic of Baroque opera and so were integral to the genre identity of the production.

These factors combined to strongly constrain the kinds of changes that could be made both to the opera and the individual arias, presenting the team with relatively rigid formal structures within which details of motivation, narrative logic, and performance choices had to be elaborated. In fact, comparable musical and dramatic constraints are a widespread feature of opera. Williams observes, for example, that because operatic gestures are ‘governed by the music, they tend, on the whole, to unfold more slowly than in spoken drama, their artificiality is more apparent and their duration more attenuated, often to the point of mannerism.’<sup>17</sup> In this sense, *Voyage* offers a revealing, but not unique, example of how various constraints shape the rehearsal process. Atkinson’s observation that, in the creation of opera, ‘the uncertainty and fluidity of the rehearsal

---

<sup>13</sup> Michael Gow, interview with Jane W. Davidson, Melbourne, 29 May 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Georgina Born, ‘On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity’, *Twentieth-Century Music*, 2.1 (2005), 7–36 (p. 8).

<sup>15</sup> Gavin Steingo, ‘The Musical Work Reconsidered, In Hindsight’, *Current Musicology*, 97 (2014), 81–112 (p. 92–5).

<sup>16</sup> On the work-concept as a regulative concept, see Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum*, 101–106.

<sup>17</sup> Simon Williams, ‘Acting’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. by Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 442–59 (p. 446).

period...is replaced by the stability of the production as it is finally negotiated' certainly applied to *Voyage*.<sup>18</sup> But our analysis highlights how this uncertainty is produced by fixed structures active during rehearsals, and, as we discuss below, can carry over into an apparently finished production.

As well as establishing constraints, the rehearsals also provided an opportunity to discover or reveal meanings latent in the work (the libretto and score, encompassing latencies associated both with *Voyage* and with the historical arias from which it was assembled). Working within these structures, the team drew on various discursive, sonic, embodied, spatial, and material resources: they discussed options, experimented with (usually small) variations in tempo and vocal ornamentation, and tried out gestures and movements within the space and using props, drawing on pre-existing artistic dispositions and bodily repertoires.<sup>19</sup> By returning to the rehearsal room, we can begin to discern how their use of these resources signalled two broad performative modes operating in this space – one associated with notions of realism, another with the idea of re-enactment – before introducing them as theoretical concepts.

## Day 8: Another Question, Formal Combat and a War Dance

When we return to Aria 15 after lunch, the problem is temporarily fixed. The half-joking suggestion made earlier that perhaps Astolfo simply cannot open the box becomes the real solution: he fumbles with the case at the end of 'As Strong as an Army' and so is forced to challenge Orlando to combat in the recitative preceding Aria 16. But as they move on to blocking Aria 16, a related problem arises. Matthews and Russell try out aggressive, macho movements; Astolfo approaches Orlando and they circle each other, chest-to-chest. But Gow cautions: 'We have to slow it down and avoid becoming too realistic, because then realistic questions arise, like "Why don't they just get to it [and fight]?"' As if for guidance, he comments on his choice of the word 'combat' in the libretto for the preceding recitative, saying that it is more 'formal' and so in keeping with the move away from realism.

As they continue experimenting, Russell improvises stylised stamps on the lyrics 'Fight with me! Fight with me!', each stamp coinciding with the first beat of a bar. Gow likes this addition, which he dubs a 'war dance', saying it reminds him of something in the Irish mythology he studied at university: a 'warp spasm', a word for the battle frenzy that the hero undergoes, which he likens to the transformation of the comic book character the Incredible Hulk.<sup>20</sup> Encouraged by these directions, Russell tries out other highly stylised gestures and flourishes of her sword.

## Performative Modes: Realism and Re-enactment

The arrival of this second question 'Why don't they just get to it [and fight]?' signals the intensification of the problems associated with this section of the production. Again, seemingly urgent action must be deferred to allow time for singing. Gow's reference to being 'realistic' indicates what he sees as one possible, yet ultimately unproductive, framing of this problem in terms of naturalistic motivations. If actions are understood to flow from the inner state of a human protagonist with whom contemporary audience members share a fundamentally similar emotional life, then rage should provoke fighting, not singing. To fully appreciate Gow's implication, the reference to realism needs to be understood in juxtaposition to another term that had been

---

<sup>18</sup> Paul Atkinson, 'Making Opera Work: Bricolage and the Management of Dramaturgy', *Music and Arts in Action* 3.1 (2010), 3–19 (p. 11). See also Gay McAuley, *Not Magic but Work: An Ethnographic Account of a Rehearsal Process* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 218–20.

<sup>19</sup> Atkinson, *Everyday Arias*, p. 89; also Atkinson, 'Making Opera Work'.

<sup>20</sup> 'Warp spasm' is the phrase Thomas Kinsella uses to translate the hero Cú Chulainn's 'ríastrad' or battle frenzy as described in the medieval Ulster Cycle. The term, and Irish mythology at large, have been taken up in various forms in comics, animation and other popular culture. See *The Táin: From the Irish Epic Táin Bó Cuailnge*, trans. by Thomas Kinsella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

circulating since early on. During rehearsals on Day 1, Gow commented that the show should ‘feel like a presentation or re-enactment, rather than realistic.’ And in the Design Meeting on the same day he alluded to the idea that the staging of the production would resemble that of a touring company, which had improvised design elements from standard touring equipment. Thus the set for *Voyage* incorporated music stands, road cases, and instrument cases, alongside highly elaborate costumes. This design concept served as a pragmatic concession to a limited budget and the practicalities of actually touring the production, but also brought a meta-theatrical dimension to the production. Gow’s idea of ‘presentation or re-enactment’ was never fully clarified – indeed in interviews he explained that this was just one layer of the production – but it did inform rehearsal work in significant ways.

These notions of realism and re-enactment were persistently, if subtly, in play throughout the rehearsals as what we will call ‘performative modes’. By this we mean ways of using the body, voice, rehearsal space, and props, which signal different attitudes towards the act of performance, specifically here towards the relationship between performance, reality, and history. We also take the term to encompass the co-constitution of these modes in discourse. In rehearsals, verbal instructions, suggestions and discussions concerning, for example, different styles of bodily comportment helped to shape the ways in which practitioners performed. Indeed, observing rehearsals makes it clear that the interplay between discourse and bodily practice is intensive and the border between the two extremely fluid.<sup>21</sup> Relatedly, it is important to note that distinctions between different performative modes are not natural or absolute, nor are specific gestures intrinsically ‘realist’ or ‘presentational’. Rather such distinctions were social and cultural conventions distinctive to the *Voyage* rehearsals. So, in the vignette above, Gow’s idea that the word ‘combat’ implies formality (rather than realism) is itself a performative assertion – the word equally lends itself to interpretation in terms of modern warfare, but his comment encourages its understanding in terms of historical pre-battle ritual (drawn, as we will suggest below, from popular medievalism).

Although ‘realism’ and ‘re-enactment’ were sometimes deployed in rehearsal talk as contrasting categories (as, implicitly, in Gow’s directive to ‘avoid’ realism), in practice they co-existed and took on a more ambiguous, non-binary relationship. This meant that performative modes operated in rehearsals as informal styles of action, rather than formalised systems or aesthetic positions. As such, they can be usefully related to recent and influential theorisations of the emotions in terms of ‘practices’, ‘styles’, and ‘performance’.<sup>22</sup> ‘Emotional styles’, writes Gammerl:

encompass...the experience, fostering, and display of emotions, and oscillate between discursive patterns and embodied practices as well as between common scripts and specific appropriations.<sup>23</sup>

What we call performative modes, although similarly wide-ranging in their compass, are specifically oriented towards what Gammerl labels ‘display’, that is towards the act of showing something to others. Maddern, McEwan and Scott describe ‘emotional performances’ as ‘repeated stylizations enacted through the body, ...texts, art and rhetorical devices’.<sup>24</sup> In these terms, realism and re-enactment in *Voyage* were both ‘emotional performances’, but, crucially, the former erased

<sup>21</sup> See Bayley, ‘Ethnographic Research into Contemporary String Quartet Rehearsal’, pp. 396-7; and on directors’ ‘mixture of pedagogic acts’, see Atkinson, ‘Making Opera Work’, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Monique Scheer, ‘Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion’, *History and Theory*, 51.2 (2012), 193–220; Benno Gammerl, ‘Emotional Styles – Concepts and Challenges’, *Rethinking History*, 16.2 (2012), 161–75; Philippa Maddern, Joanne McEwan, and Anne M. Scott, ‘Introduction: Performing Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Worlds’, in *Performing Emotions in Early Europe*, ed. by Philippa Maddern, Joanne McEwan, and Anne M. Scott (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2018), xiii–xxx. See also the introduction to this special issue.

<sup>23</sup> Gammerl, ‘Emotional Styles’, p. 163.

<sup>24</sup> Maddern, McEwan, and Scott, ‘Introduction’, p. xix.

its status as performance, while the latter highlighted its citationality. Where a ‘realist’ performative mode attempts to mimic contemporary reality, including its emotional, motivational, discursive and gestural norms (and in so doing obscures their historical specificity), ‘re-enactment’ (like meta-theatre) draws attention to its own artificiality and its status as performance. And where realism draws a causal, naturalised connection between ‘experience...and display of emotions’, re-enactment is citational and repetitive, it displays a previous instance or tradition of display (a past performance, a ritual, or the many previous ‘performances’ of an emotion such as rage).<sup>25</sup>

In deploying these terms, we need to distinguish between ‘re-enactment’ as it was conceived in *Voyage* and as it is commonly understood in the heritage literature. In *Voyage*, re-enactment often involved extending and highlighting the separation between the action onstage, life offstage and life in the past. In other contexts, however, re-enactment has no necessary implication of separation or artificiality. Indeed, re-enactment in heritage sites may aspire both towards an ‘authentic’ recreation of history and towards encouraging audiences to relate their own lives to the lives of historical others. Different heritage practices entail different attitudes towards this issue: Haldrup and Bærenholdt describe how, at the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde, Denmark, ‘authentic’ historical skills and artefacts related to ship-building and sailing are experienced within an otherwise self-consciously ‘modern framing’, including staff dress, speech, and behaviour which in no way attempts to be historically accurate.<sup>26</sup> With these varied possibilities in mind, the interplay (prioritisation, tension, and mixing) between different relationships with history that guide the performance of heritage remains an important issue for further empirical study – and informs our argument here.

Regarding *Voyage*, we should note, however, that re-enactment was not exclusively a distancing device, not least because the emphasis on the communication of emotions in Baroque musical thought was an important reference point for the production. Partly for this reason, re-enactment was also allied with heightened emotional states: a stylised gesture might be simultaneously artificial and intensified; an exaggerated vocal timbre might be, at once, non-naturalistic and, for that same reason, unusually expressive. But the status of Baroque rhetorical conventions as re-enacted rather than simply deployed speaks to a complex layering of historical factors in the performance of the emotions in this production. Like all trained opera performers, the *Voyage* singers drew, albeit in highly diffuse ways, on repertoires of gesture that have long historical genealogies. Williams describes current operatic practice as involving ‘a style that draws heavily on a gestural mode of acting that is outdated in the spoken theater, associated as it is primarily with the melodrama of the nineteenth century and a style of tragic acting from earlier periods.’<sup>27</sup> This ‘gestural mode’ was evident in *Voyage*, but its stylisation was imaginatively linked, through the pasticcio genre and Gow’s direction, to the particular rhetorical conventions of *opera seria*, where a ‘system of gesture and movement...served as a precise code that covered an extensive range of human emotions and motivations.’<sup>28</sup> Yet, the *Voyage* rehearsals did not, unlike some productions, attempt to reconstruct these Baroque conventions or their emotional significance (despite the fact that affect and rhetoric have long been central concerns in scholarship on Baroque music and have generated an extensive literature<sup>29</sup>); no historical treatises or twenty-first century commentaries were consulted. At the same time, as already discussed, the rehearsals also mobilised realist approaches divergent from the codified conventions of *opera seria*. The result was a multiply hybrid performative situation: not only did realist and presentational modes co-exist, but stylised

<sup>25</sup> Judith Butler’s work provides, of course, the foundational theoretical treatment of performance as citational. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York: Routledge, 1993); also Maddern, McEwan, and Scott, ‘Introduction’, pp. xviii–xix.

<sup>26</sup> Haldrup and Bærenholdt, ‘Heritage as Performance’, pp. 58–59; on the issue of authenticity in heritage studies, see Helaine Silverman, ‘Heritage and Authenticity’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, ed. by Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 69–88.

<sup>27</sup> Williams, ‘Acting’, p. 446.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, ‘Acting’, p. 448.

<sup>29</sup> For an overview, see George J. Buelow, ‘Rhetoric and Music: Up to 1750: 4. Affects’, *Grove Music Online* (2001); also John W. Hill, *Baroque Music: Music in Western Europe, 1580-1750* (London: W. W. Norton, 2005), pp. 389–406.



performance took on a double significance – it alluded to Baroque rhetoric, and borrowed some of its power regarding the communication of heightened emotions, while at the same time distancing itself from that very tradition, both practically (through the informal, deliberately unscholarly, ethos of the rehearsals) and dramatically (because stylisation as re-enactment constituted a quotation, rather than faithful embodiment, of Baroque conventions).

Practically speaking, Gow's interest in re-enactment motivated his preference, as director, for simple and stylised movements, for the creation of tableau rather than naturalistic uses of the stage space, for conceiving action in terms of historical conventions rather than contemporary motivations, and for distancing (e.g. 'fourth wall') dramatic effects. The singers, by contrast, often favoured more realist understandings of performance, asking questions about motivation and seeking performance choices that would 'make sense' to audiences. Atkinson's ethnographic work suggests that the search for motivation is a central feature of opera rehearsals and the realist orientation of such work chimes with Hunter's argument that opera singers' performances often rely on 'a thoroughly modern and psychological, rather than historicized and social-political, sense of human nature.'<sup>30</sup> But where Atkinson's work arguably emphasises the search for 'credible' or 'plausible' motivations,<sup>31</sup> we discuss how this (broadly normative operatic) concern with emotional credibility was reinflected by Gow's more unusual (although far from unique) directorial emphasis on non-realist approaches. As we shall see, the difference was not clear cut: the singers learnt to work within Gow's frame of 're-enactment' and Gow himself sometimes turned towards motivational questions.

As well as reflexively highlighting its status as performance, the idea of re-enactment also raises the question of what historical or past event is imagined as being re-staged. There is, however, no singular 'original' being re-enacted here. The meta-theatrical conceit of the touring company provides one source for re-presentation: the production both was and self-consciously *looked like* a touring show. But *Voyage* also drew on and sought to re-present events, characters and dramatic moments drawn from a broad and informal popular historicism – most pertinently here medievalist ideas about battle culture and knightly protocols (discussed below), although other rehearsal work invoked an eclectic mix of magical, biblical and mythical reference points extending well beyond the *Orlando Furioso* source material.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the project of re-enactment reached further still. By likening Astolfo's war dance both to Irish mythology and to the transformation of the Incredible Hulk, Gow elided historical and contemporary reference points, such that *Voyage*, albeit fleetingly and only in the minds of the creative team, also re-enacted an iconic episode from Anglophone popular culture. Importantly, then, Gow's re-enactment was eclectic, even irreverent, and in no way invested in notions of 'authentic' historical reconstruction that motivate some early music performances or other forms of heritage culture.<sup>33</sup> Instead, it involved a kind of 'cultural bricolage', which Atkinson identifies as a crucial strategy in opera rehearsals, and which, he astutely notes, often 'combines the esoteric and the mundane in the search for appropriate metaphor'.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, it also echoed broader processes by which 'people in their performances with heritage draw on scripts and choreographies provided by media and popular culture'.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, if our analysis leaves historical reference points somewhat underspecified, this reflects the informality of *Voyage* rehearsals; to seek precise historical precedents would be to measure the production again a historicism to which it did not aspire.

This combination of literary or historical and popular culture references was typical of

---

<sup>30</sup> Atkinson, 'Making Opera Work,' p. 13; Mary Hunter, 'Historically Informed Performance', in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. by Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 606–26 (p. 616).

<sup>31</sup> Atkinson, 'Making Opera Work,' passim.

<sup>32</sup> Browning, 'Emotion as Multiple'.

<sup>33</sup> In music, the seminal study here is Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). The wider musicological literature is discussed in Dorottya Fabian, 'The Meaning of Authenticity and The Early Music Movement: A Historical Review', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 32.2 (2001), 153–67; in heritage studies, see Silverman, 'Heritage and Authenticity'.

<sup>34</sup> Atkinson, 'Making Opera Work', p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Haldrup and Børenholdt, 'Heritage as Performance', p. 61.

Gow's contributions as director. Also typical was his strategic use of such references: after observing a singer's movements, Gow often made some comment that added a new discursive framing and so could potentially reinfect the singer's sense of their character or his/her current emotional state and thus feed back into their subsequent efforts to act that out. In the case of the 'war dance', Gow's brief comment encompasses two frames of reference – Irish mythology and twentieth-century sci-fi – that, although historically disparate, both push against realism, here specifically through allusion to hyperbolic emotional states. Relatedly, Gow mentioned briefing Russell on the description of Astolfo in *Orlando Furioso*, as a way of informing her performance. He reflected a few days later:

He's quite a fearsome warrior...in the legends, he's quite terrifyingly belligerent and does all these amazing things. ...[He] defeats a giant and forces the giant to be his beast of burden and...[has] a horn that he blows that's so terrifying that armies run away.... [So I explained all this] just in terms of, just trying to pull Sally-Anne [Russell] back from such a naturalistic reading of where she was going with it. ....[S]ometimes in battle, warriors taunt each other before they fight, ...that's part of a given, without all the Chekhovian, Stanislavskian stuff, and I think it worked because she was much simpler today and wasn't afraid of it, she wasn't apologising for standing there not fighting.<sup>36</sup>

Where Gow's reference to the 'warp-spasm' and the Incredible Hulk frame Astolfo as emotionally excessive, and this reference to *Orlando Furioso* emphasises his terrifying battle prowess, the idea of 'combat' and 'taunts' brought a contrasting frame of emotional restraint that would be intensified through references to knightly protocol in subsequent rehearsals. Although divergent and potentially contradictory, Gow used both emotional excess and emotional restraint as useful antidotes to realist conceptions of the emotions. Such ambiguities simultaneously offered resources for rehearsal work and raised further problems for the team to navigate.

## Day 9: Another Question, More Jokes and a Solution

Re-watching the blocking for Aria 16 the following day, Gow again explains that he wants to 'pull back' from the 'daggers drawn' atmosphere and avoid escalating the fight too quickly. He suggests Matthews sheathe her sword, but discovers that this is not an option, because in order to have suitably dishevelled clothing in Act 3 – and so reflect Orlando's emotional turmoil in the costume – Matthews cannot wear a sword belt. Part of Gow's answer is to make small adjustments elsewhere: Astolfo's struggle to open the case is moved to the start of Aria 15, so that his challenge to Orlando in 16 can be played as a 'deliberate ploy', meant to buy time. This leaves space for another 'musical joke' at the end of 15: after singing this virtuosic aria, Orlando should face the audience as if to say 'How good was that? Now clap'. Reconceptualising Orlando's emotional state as egotistical and inflated rather than enraged justifies further delaying the fighting: if Orlando does not consider Astolfo a worthy opponent, he has no reason to engage. This rethinking chimes with Gow's suggestion that rather than provoking or threatening the band, Orlando should stretch out his arms in an encouraging gesture, as if buoyed up by the music and saying 'Play louder, isn't this exciting?!'

While working on the recitative before Aria 16, other issues of motivation emerge. Russell raises another question: the phrase 'Orlando, these taunts and insults I will no more endure' seems not to make sense with the current blocking, she explains, because Astolfo and the Magus are hiding at that time, so how can the insults be directed at them? Gow explains that 'it's not personal, more a

---

<sup>36</sup> Michael Gow, interview with Joseph Browning, Melbourne, 6 February 2015.

metaphysical dishonouring', so they decide to change the words to 'Orlando, these taunts and insults dishonour your proud name'.

Returning to Aria 16, Gow again prefaces the run-through by commenting that 'The drive is for realism, but it has to be more formal.' They run many alternative movements, experimenting with ways to avoid escalating the fight. For perhaps the first time in the rehearsals, almost everyone in the room makes suggestions (including one of the authors of this article). The unusual atmosphere signals the collective sense of a problem to be worked through, yet the growing number of possibilities also seems to intensify the difficulty. Matthews and Gow take turns to play Orlando alongside Russell's Astolfo: standing close or far apart, sitting, with Astolfo's sword sheathed or at Orlando's neck, circling each other, clashing swords. But Gow insists that the text says 'the fight hasn't started yet' and explains they should think more of the formality of knightly combat with its 'parading', 'favours' and 'throwing down the gauntlet'. Seen this way, Gow explains, it is simply a question of 'how do you justify a convention' and he suggests they return to the original idea of highly stylised, pre-battle tension.

Yet, once more, just as a solution seems close, the problem re-emerges. For Matthews, the emotional logic of the number is unavoidable: Orlando is crazed and would attack immediately. She asks Gow 'Why don't I go for him?' and he replies: 'What if ... you know exactly who it is and you're reluctant to fight? So Astolfo's job is to find a rising series of provocations.' They try again: Orlando recognises his friend – as if 'from a different part of his brain' as Gow puts it – and initially refuses to fight. Gow suggests they 'set up' a 'No': Orlando puts out his hand in a 'stop' gesture and shakes his head, as if to say, 'don't make me do this.' Then, as the aria progresses, Astolfo's repeated threats – stamping and singing the phrase 'Stand and Fight' over and over – eventually enrage Orlando and they move to clash swords just as the number ends. Afterwards, Gow comments that this approach works because Orlando and Astolfo now 'both have a problem to solve' (resisting and provoking aggression respectively) and it introduces dramatic irony as Orlando goes from self-inflation to reluctance. They run Arias 15 and 16 once more, then move on.

As they work on the recitative preceding Aria 17, Kleeman suggests, almost incidentally, that perhaps Orlando should open the box. Prior to this the Magus had been opening the box, but it was not clear how or when that was supposed to happen, and the ambiguity distracted from the main action (singing). Everyone quickly decides to go with this idea, as it solves the original problem of why the box could not be opened earlier – no one else could open it, because it contains Orlando's sanity. Attention now turns to the practical issue of how Matthews can open the box while holding a sword.

### **Navigating Problems: Between Motivations and Conventions**

This work on Day 9 represents the culmination of the problems surrounding Aria 16. More than on previous occasions, the lengthy time devoted to working on the blocking, the variety of options and opinions about how to proceed, and the sense of compounded difficulties gave these few hours a distinctive atmosphere, unique within the 17-day rehearsal period. By this point the rehearsals of Aria 16 and surrounding numbers had raised a series of motivational questions (all in the same form, asking why something *does not* happen): 'Why doesn't he open the box?' (Gow), 'Why don't they just get to it [and fight]?' (Gow), 'Why don't I go for him?' (Matthews). As one question was postponed, others accumulated: deferring the opening of the box precipitated the need to fight; Astolfo's provocations and delays only intensified Orlando's desire to attack.

There are several reasons why these questions became increasingly pressing, eventually creating something of an impasse in the rehearsals. Answering these questions through particular blocking decisions was, at this late stage in the rehearsals (relatively speaking, since arias that appeared later in the opera were also the last to be blocked), increasingly shaped by the accumulated weight of previous choices. Specific gestures or areas of the stage space were, by this point, freighted with significance because they either reproduced or departed from blocking used for

earlier numbers and thus added continuity, variety or novelty. Making Astolfo's 'rage aria' something more than a mere repetition of Orlando's 'rage aria' – or making the A section of a da capo aria different on the repeat – prompted musical and blocking decisions that always built upon and responded to prior choices. Regarding the da capo repeat of Aria 16, and what he, at the time, called 'the question of how you psychologically justify doing the same thing again', Gow's direction to Russell was simple: 'it's the same, but worse'. A logic of emotional and performative intensification ran through the work on these numbers. In addition, as the rehearsals progressed, practical and dramatic issues increasingly overlapped such that networks of interconnected factors affected each decision. This is demonstrated by the issue of Orlando's sword belt, where, to borrow Atkinson's observation, 'material circumstances temporarily defeat[ed] the actors [and director], leading to further improvisation'.<sup>37</sup> Here, a costume decision intended to reflect a character's emotional state (dishevelled clothing, requiring lack of sword belt) constrained the ways in which a prop could be used to propel or stall the progress of the plot (fighting with swords). This, in turn, prompted quite far-reaching reconceptualisation of the narrative, reframing Astolfo's aria as a 'deliberate play' and Orlando as egotistical rather than enraged.

Another reason for the emergence of this impasse was different practitioners' reliance on different performative modes when working on the scene. Where the singers tended to focus on motivational issues, Gow's response was to encourage a non-realist performative mode by appealing to a broad conception of knightly protocol. The tension between these two modes repeatedly pulled the rehearsal in different directions, causing options to proliferate, raising seemingly intractable questions, and ultimately slowing the whole process down. Individuals were not, however, simply allied with different performative modes. Although Gow emphasised formality, he occasionally also participated in more realist approaches. For example, his answer to Matthews's question, 'Why don't I go for him?', reproduced her motivational framing by treating Orlando as conflicted, at once enraged and reluctant to fight his friend. Far from ideologically invested in a particular type of performance, Gow turned pragmatically to any solution that was felt to 'work'. Likewise, although the singers tended to discuss motivational issues, they put a great deal of work into embodying re-enactment, physically trying out Gow's suggestions about stylisation and simplicity. For this reason, it was important that Gow's injunctions towards a formal rather than realist performative mode used ideas that were widely understood by all. His specific points of reference – 'dishonour', 'parading', 'favours', 'throwing down the gauntlet' – as well as the generalised appeal to a more formalised notion of combat all draw on well-known and widely-circulating twentieth and twenty-first century understandings of medieval culture, especially the numerous depictions of knights, jousts, and battles in film, television, novels and more. As the scholarly literature on this phenomenon (often glossed as 'popular medievalism' or 'neo-medievalism') attests, the medieval has been subject to extremely flexible interpretation in popular media and *Voyage* did not depart from this tendency: among the many possible popular conceptions of knights and medieval warfare available, Gow selected only those that readily conveyed notions of emotional restraint and formality.<sup>38</sup> The discussion (described above) that resulted in the libretto being changed to 'Orlando, these taunts and insults dishonour your proud name' drew, for example, on well-established popular conceptions of knightly reputation and honour – one that resonates with scholarly readings of historical sources, as in Lynch's assessment that 'a name became in Malory's

<sup>37</sup> Atkinson, 'Making Opera Work,' p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> The extensive and varied literature in this area includes numerous monographs, articles and edited collections, as well as the journal *Studies in Medievalism*. Examples, some of which provide overviews of the wider literature, include *Medieval Afterlives in Popular Culture*, ed. by Gail Ashton and Daniel T Kline (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); *The Medieval Hero on Screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy*, ed. by Martha W Driver and Sid Ray (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004); Andrew B. R Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media: Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-First Century* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017); *Mass Market Medieval: Essays on the Middle Ages in Popular Culture*, ed. by David W Marshall (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2007); Paul B Sturtevant, *The Middle Ages in Popular Imagination: Memory, Film and Medievalism*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018); *King Arthur in Popular Culture*, ed. by Elizabeth Sherr Sklar and Donald L Hoffman (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2002).

[*Le Morte Darthur*]...an index of power and prestige, something seen as a good in itself'.<sup>39</sup> Yet despite his literary knowledge and interest in the *Orlando Furioso* source text, Gow did not present these ideas in especially scholarly ways, but as resources for the singers to use in crafting their role.<sup>40</sup>

Importantly, Gow's appeals to knightly protocol contributed to a much broader sense of re-enactment as *multiply* formal and mimetic in *Voyage*. His comments about re-enactment in other rehearsals and via other reference points – for example through staging choices that made *Voyage* look overtly like a touring production – brought a pervasive self-consciousness about the performative act, which was further intensified by the use of meta-theatrical jokes and other moments that broke the fourth wall, as well as repeated emphasis on the 'semi-staged' nature of the production. In particular, the decision to have the orchestra onstage, rather than in a pit, incorporated a constant reminder that this was a performance not a simulation of reality. It also chimed with his sense of formality and stylisation as characteristic of another of *Voyage's* historical reference points, Baroque opera. Gow remarked, '[T]he whole week, in the back of my mind I've been thinking "Don't forget it's also a concert"'. This gave him 'permission' to have singers 'just sing' without extraneous action. This reuse of Baroque opera's 'Now I stand and sing' trope was, he explained, his way of 'dealing with the past and old practice, whereas the practice now, in contemporary productions, is to be as busy as hell.... I kind of like that we have at times gone, "No, there's nothing happening, they're just singing" and the music...is doing the work'.<sup>41</sup> Finally, and returning us to issues local to Aria 16, the work on this number invoked the idea that Astolfo was 'faking' anger in order either to play for time or provoke Orlando – effectively building the idea of unreal or staged emotion into the narrative of the opera. Together, these various senses of 're-enactment' moved in and out of focus during the *Voyage* rehearsals.

Also important to reassert here is that, although these rehearsal problems represented a clash of different attitudes towards performance, they were not experienced as wholly negative. Certainly, the work surrounding these arias was tiring and challenging for many members of the *Voyage* creative team, but it was also welcomed as an opportunity to enrich the production. Reflecting later, Gow was completely unfazed by and, if anything, positive about the difficulties that emerged. He explained that, 'There's at least one of those on everything I do. There's...this kind of blood clot that just, it stops the whole thing, but it is in a sense the turning point.' Similarly, when performers become unsure how to proceed, Gow's response is that 'I always push harder then, because that's a sign that to me they're close to something and it's a big breakthrough'.<sup>42</sup> One part of this breakthrough was the emergence of an answer to the question of why the opening of the box containing Orlando's sanity had to be delayed for two arias. Kleeman's off-hand suggestion that only Orlando could open the box was taken up so quickly that there was no chance for any overt rationalisation as to why that solution felt appropriate. It is, however, entirely in keeping with famous examples, such as Cinderella's slipper or the Arthurian sword in the stone (both memorialised in popular culture as well as a variety of literature), of a mythic, fairy tale, or at least non-realist narrative device that we could call 'the perfect fit'. Some comparable sense of destiny or unique ownership as manifest in a magical object seemed to undergird the *Voyage* team's enthusiasm for Kleeman's suggestion. Coming at the end of a rehearsal, the solution also seemed to consolidate the progress made on these arias. Yet, despite all this, the question of why Orlando and Astolfo did not immediately fight remained somewhat unresolved.

## Days 10 to 17: Repetition, Editing, Revising

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Lynch, *Malory's Book of Arms: The Narrative of Combat in Le Morte Darthur* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1997), p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> See Stephanie Trigg, 'Medievalism and Convergence Culture: Researching the Middle Ages for Fiction and Film', *Parergon*, 25.2 (2009), 99–118.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Gow, interview with Joseph Browning, Melbourne, 6 February 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Gow, interview with Joseph Browning, Melbourne, 6 February 2015.

During the remainder of the rehearsal period, focus turns elsewhere – to other sections of the opera, working with the newly-arrived orchestra, and memorising the full show – only occasionally returning to Arias 15 and 16. During discussions after a run of the whole opera on Day 10, Gow suggests that perhaps Orlando should recognise Astolfo during the B section of Aria 16, where the lyrics mention ‘friendship’. He also comments that making 16 ‘unrealistic’ is challenging, but he likes the subversion of expectations: ‘the convention is that Astolfo has to sing the da capo aria, whereas there would actually be a pile of limbs on the floor.’

In an interview on Day 11 Gow mentions that one of the things he learnt from the previous day’s run was the general need to simplify: ‘[W]hat I always do is overcomplicate things the first time through and then there’s an edit. And I feel like I’ve got to do most of the editing today and last night coming into today, so we got rid of a lot of fat...and you see the absolute meat of the story’. This process of simplification also applied to Aria 16, including the question of Orlando’s attitude towards Astolfo:

[S]ometimes I just make things up and say ‘Do this’ and by doing that, it’s not the right thing, but the solution becomes clear. It’s often the reverse of what I’ve just said. And Emma [Matthews] found that [instead of playing Orlando as conflicted], that it was the taunting thing that works best. That she’s going ‘Oh fight? Sure [I’ll] fight! Who the hell are you?’ which is the best, strongest choice.<sup>43</sup>

For a while, this consensus lasts and the team seem to have settled into the idea that Orlando should be played as having an inflated ego, not as conflicted, and that Astolfo is taunting him. Yet, during the last few days of the rehearsal period, Russell and Matthews’ performances shift slightly and repeatedly. The highly stylised blocking remains the same, but details of gesture and facial expression are fluid: Orlando seems to move between self-inflation and reluctant recognition of his friend; Astolfo appears sometimes to deliberately play for time and sometimes to be caught up in Orlando’s madness. Despite these ambiguities, the original problem seems to fade away as opening night approaches.

### **Ambiguous Endings: Between Realism and Re-enactment**

As this closing work on Arias 15 and 16 suggests, these numbers followed a twisting trajectory and the team did not arrive at a finished interpretation in any straightforward sense. Tracing this process helps to reveal the complex interplay between realist and presentational performative modes, as well as the varied emotional styles they mobilise.

First, it is important to note that the idea, developed on Day 9, of Orlando as torn – enraged yet half-recognising Astolfo; caught up in multiple, conflicting emotions – was probably the most psychologically complex interpretation and so the most potentially interesting in ‘realist’ terms, hence its appeal to the team. The subsequent move towards playing Orlando as having an inflated ego was partly motivated by a drive for simplicity that was especially evident during the later stages of the rehearsals. This aligned with Gow’s desire to avoid realist modes (although the idea of Orlando’s inflated ego has ties as much to modern psychology as to excessive premodern rage). It also grew from a kind of dramatic pragmatism, which emphasised emotional directness and clarity of action – an issue of particular importance in a production that was staged in large halls, with some audience members very far from the stage and so reliant on understanding the narrative by observing large gestures, not small facial expressions. Rage and egotism were easier for the singers to play, and for audiences to see, than emotional ambivalence.

---

<sup>43</sup> Michael Gow, interview with Joseph Browning, Melbourne, 6 February 2015.

The subsequent fate of the arias – namely the re-emergence of ambiguity around characters' motivations – reaffirms the important point that re-enactment and realism are not mutually exclusive performative modes. Throughout the final days of rehearsals and into the public performances, the large, stylised gestures the performers used in these numbers remained largely fixed. But within that structure, they continued occasionally to improvise small gestures: a frown from Matthews might suggest that Orlando was emotionally torn; a sideways glance from Russell might suggest that Astolfo was faking his anger to play for time. The formality of (re-enacted) knightly combat acted as a container for realist motivations and emotions; often both performative modes were in play at the same time. That the result was somewhat ambiguous need not imply that the production lacked clarity of artistic vision since the simple, stylised movements were extremely clear and made sense on their own terms (i.e. as a performance of restrained knightly protocol or a warrior going berserk; and as a generic feature of Baroque opera). Instead the ambiguity can be understood as potentially generative since it allowed space for performers to make small variations to their performance each night, and for audience members to interpret the production in different, potentially multi-layered ways. The potential for ongoing variation chimes with points that Gow made repeatedly in interviews, citing the aphorism that an artwork is 'never finished only abandoned' and that the production would continue to 'evolve' after opening night, partly in response to the layout of different venues. Likewise, the potential for diverse responses was evident in press reviews of *Voyage*, such that Shmith encountered 'a pasticcio that succeeds brilliantly in almost every way, and even has a plausible storyline, drawn from an epic 16<sup>th</sup> century poem', while McCallum argued that 'when a mish-mash of virtuosic and attractive arias is matched to an improbable story, the whole thing becomes nothing more than an excuse for singing with no pretence of dramatic purpose.'<sup>44</sup> That the same production can prompt such divergent reviews is, of course, not something unique to *Voyage*. But here it reminds us that the performative modes we have identified responded, in part, to the two musical ontologies ('work' and 'pasticcio') underlying the production; the interplay between realism and re-enactment served to stitch a musical patchwork into a single narrative 'whole'. While it is not our aim to arbitrate on the dramatic integrity of the resulting production, we do want to note that the *problem* of integrity was an important concern, for creative team and reviewers alike, and resulted from *Voyage*'s distinctive overlaying of musical ontologies allied with different historical periods. Although not uniquely modern, questions about what constitutes musical or dramatic integrity, and how that is valued, are historically specific.

Returning to issues of production (rather than reception), the fact that the problems associated with Arias 15 and 16 faded from view, and were not subject to overt resolution, is also significant, because it demonstrates the value of understanding artistic projects such as *Voyage* as emergent from social interactions, cultural forms and embodied knowledge, rather than the result of fixed, pre-existing aesthetic positions. If the artists involved had been heavily invested in ideologies of theatrical realism or re-enactment, some kind of final interpretation might have been necessary in order to fully adhere to one or other philosophy. But these were, instead, ways of working, performative modes that interacted and permitted more provisional and ambiguous artistic results. Where they surfaced in rehearsal talk, references to 'realism' and 're-enactment' were not labels for idealised types of performance, but signposts within a complex, shifting sense of the styles of performance appropriate to the production. Feld's notion of 'interpretive moves' usefully describes the fluidity at stake here:

. . . interpretive moves act roughly like a series of social processing conventions, locating, categorizing, associating, reflecting on, and evaluating the work through

---

<sup>44</sup> Michael Shmith, 'Voyage to the Moon review: Victoria Opera and Musica Viva reach for the stars', 16 February 2016 (accessed 5 March 2019). <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/opera/voyage-to-the-moon-review-victorian-opera-and-musica-viva-reach-for-the-stars-20160216-gmv1c5.html>. Peter McCallum, 'Voyage to the Moon review: Voices soar but dramatics fall short', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 February 2016 (accessed 5 March 2019). <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/voyage-to-the-moon-review-20160223-gn1918.html>. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to the relevance of these reviews for our argument.

various aspects of experience. Such conventions do not fix a singular meaning; instead they focus some boundaries of fluid shifts in our attentional patterns as we foreground and background experience and knowledge in relation to the ongoing perception of a sound object or event. Meaning then is momentarily changeable and emergent, in flux as our interpretive moves are unravelled and crystallized.<sup>45</sup>

In *Voyage*, rehearsal work was discussed and evaluated through interpretive moves that ranged from directorial suggestions to reflexive motivational questions, drew upon aesthetic references points centred around popular conceptions of knightly protocol, and interacted fluidly with moments of bodily experimentation and performance. As Feld's theorisation suggests, rather than producing a singular and static artistic 'interpretation', these complex negotiations produced several shifting alternatives whose relationship was only ever partially stabilised. The tension between realist and presentational performative modes shaped not only the rehearsal process, but the 'final' (i.e. publicly performed) production as well. In light of the complexity of people's engagements with the past, often in ways that evade theoretical models, Haldrup and Bærenholdt argue that 'It is most significant, therefore, to point out the creative and active ways in which people make use of heritage'.<sup>46</sup> Understood this way, the ambiguous interplay between the performative modes that shaped *Voyage* highlight not so much the operation of fixed *paradigms* through which our relationship with the past is imagined, but rather the *practices* through which artists, audiences and others continually improvise that relationship.<sup>47</sup> Paying attention to this dynamic contributes, we suggest, two key insights to the aims of this special issue: first, it demonstrates that performance does not merely reflect, but is constitutive of, our complex relationships with history; second, in emphasising the processual nature of that relationship, it reframes 'heritage' as an ambiguous category that operates alongside and overlaps with other cultural forms. Where scholarly analyses of finished cultural *products* have produced sophisticated and instructive theorisations of the ways in which we imagine the past, ethnographic or other empirical approaches offer a crucial and complimentary focus on *process*, which recognises the uncertain and emergent constitution of these imaginaries, helping to tell their stories and, ultimately, give them a history.

---

<sup>45</sup> Steven Feld, 'Communication, Music, and Speech about Music', in *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues*, ed. by Charles Keil and Steven Feld (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 77–95 (p. 88).

<sup>46</sup> Haldrup and Bærenholdt, 'Heritage as Performance', p. 65.

<sup>47</sup> Dell's work on 'paradigms of desire' in medievalism studies provides an example of the kind of study we have in mind here – at once theoretically rich, yet focussed on finished 'texts' (a twelfth-century French *roman* and a 2001 film) and relatively fixed 'theories of history' – that might be complemented by more emphasis on practice and process. See Helen Dell, 'Past, Present, Future Perfect: Paradigms of History in Medievalism Studies', *Parergon*, 25.2 (2009), 58–79.