Journal of the Society for American Music (2020), Volume 14, Number 1, pp. 33–50
 doi:10.1017/S1752196319000531

Pitching Opera: Innovating New Music Theater at Banff and Stratford, 1970–1990

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Abstract
The Banff Summer Festival of the Arts and the Stratford Summer Music Festival have been unrecognized sites of operatic innovation in Canada. Indeed, the flourishing of what might be termed "new music theater" in Canada is imbricated with the history of these two festivals. Archival research reveals that the inventive, often revolutionary, approaches to music theater honed at Stratford and Banff from 1970–1990 ultimately defined the course of Canadian new music theatre in the decades that followed. Founded in 1953 as a Shakespeare festival, the Stratford Festival eventually became renowned for its (nearly exclusive) focus on musical theater. At Banff, discussions about generic innovation occurred regularly, producing what I suggest was one of the foremost centers in the world for innovation in music theater. Charting the development of opera in Canada through conversations that took part at the Banff and Stratford festivals during the period 1970–1990 reveals the unique possibilities that the peripheral positioning of these festivals—aesthetically, critically, and geographically—offered to the development, dissemination, and innovation of so-called new music theater in Canada.

The years between 1970 and 1990 were crucial for the innovation of opera in North America. In these years, the tradition was critiqued and ultimately revitalized as pioneering artists and arts administrators reinvented various approaches that would pave a new way forward for opera, or "music theater," as it would come to be known.[1] As Sasha Metcalf has recently illustrated in her article "Funding 'Opera for the 80s and Beyond,'" operatic energies in the United States turned to the creation and performance of new works in the 1960s with the support of the Ford Foundation, and in the 1980s with OPERA America's "Opera for the 80s and Beyond" and the Brooklyn Academy of Music's (BAM) Next Wave Festival.[2] In Canada, the experimentation with the operatic form in the 1970s and 1980s was based in a similar cross-fertilization of music and experimental theater

I would like to thank Michael Bawtree for his generosity, Liza Giffen and Christine Schindler at the Stratford Festival Archives, and Lianne Caron, Andrew Hennan, and John Yolkowski at the Banff Centre's Paul D. Fleck Archives. Thank you also to Andrew Mall and my fellow panelists in the Festivals and Musical Life Seminar at SAM 2017 in Montreal, PQ, Canada. Finally, my warmest thanks to the editor and to the two anonymous reviewers for the journal, who provided invaluable feedback on earlier drafts.

[1] I will use the term "new music theater" to delineate these innovative, generically experimental works from traditional opera, and also from more commercially driven musical theater. In his book *The New Singing Theatre: A Charter for the Music Theatre Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), director Michael Bawtree settled on the term "new music theatre" to describe these innovative dramatic musical works. Bawtree's influence on both festivals will be evidenced throughout.

[2] See Sasha Metcalf, "Funding 'Opera for the 80s and Beyond': The Role of Impresarios in Creating a New American Repertoire," *American Music* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 7–28. Metcalf writes of the decline of support for new American opera in the 1970s, following the initial promise of no less than twenty-two Ford Foundation commissions in the 1960s.

communities, but the focus and context of these innovations were slightly different than those in the United States, though no less dynamic. This innovation did not occur in any of Canada's major cities or within the context of any of its major operatic companies. Rather, a great deal of this work was focused at Canada's summer performing arts festivals—specifically, the Banff Summer Festival of the Arts and the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. When Lord Harewood toured Canada in 1971 in order to write what would become a rather bleak report on the state of opera in Canada, he did make note that the only real light in the country's opera scene was the Third Stage at the Stratford Festival.[3] Indeed, surveying the programs and archival materials at Canada's two most prominent performing arts festivals reveals the degree to which the history of music theater in Canada is imbricated with the history of these festivals.

I follow two related lines of inquiry here. First, I am interested in summarizing some of the conversations that occurred at Stratford and Banff between 1970 and 1990 concerning the innovation of music theater. Capitalizing on their peripheral positioning, these festivals served as catalysts for out-of-the-box thinking about training, form, repertoire, scope, interdisciplinarity, and performance. As I will show, the ideas and processes honed in these festival contexts would go on to shape a generation of new music theater creators in Canada.

Second, I am interested in tracking conversations concerning the generic distinction between musical theater and opera at these festivals, and in discussions, works, and practices that challenged these generic strictures. As I signal in the title of my essay, opera was reconsidered and re-pitched in the festival contexts at Banff and Stratford. There has long been discussion and debate about the generic distinctions between the two genres, and tensions remain surrounding works that fall uneasily between the barrels. Still, while the line that separates them is a legendary one, many have argued that it is nebulous: Bernard Williams has suggested that "the relations between opera and other forms which are contrasted with it are . . . complex, and the distinctions . . . are to some degree arbitrary."[4] And in an introduction to her preliminary list of staged dramatic music in Canada since 1867, Mary Ingraham has noted that musicals and operas in Canada have historically not situated themselves within clearly delineated formal boundaries, revealing instances in which the properties of so-labeled operas and musicals in Canada demonstrate elements of cross-pollination.[5]

As the debates within these festival contexts demonstrate, generic distinctions in the realm of music theater are rarely arbitrary, nor are they inconsequential. The redefinition of "opera" in Canadian new music theater from this period resonates with similar contemporary movements in the United States, as seen in the avant-garde music theater works of Philip Glass, which borrowed from new developments

[3] See George Henry Hubert Lascelles, Earl of Harewood, *Opera in Canada: A Report*, Commissioned by the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council (Toronto, 1972). He wrote, "Present thinking has . . . produced an exciting scheme. . . . Canada's present operatic situation urgently requires experiment of some sort. . . . Stratford should provide exactly the right milieu" (32).

[4] Bernard Williams, *On Opera* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 4.

[5] Mary Ingraham, "Something to Sing About: A Preliminary List of Canadian Staged and Dramatic Music Since 1867," *Intersections* 28, no. 1 (July 2007): 14–77.

in the New York performance art scene more than from those in opera, and in the advocacy of impresarios such as Houston Grand Opera director David Gockley, who sought to foster the cross-pollination of music and theater in the works of new music theater he developed.[6] By drawing on previously unexamined archival documents at the Banff and Stratford Festival Archives, I will explore ways in which operatic processes and forms were innovated in these festival contexts. I will also examine the rich contributions of the Canadian actor-director Michael Bawtree, Canada's great music theater visionary, whose innovative ideas about music theater paved the way for continued innovations.

Opera: The Festival Scene

Canadian performing arts festivals that played a significant role in the innovation of opera follow in the footsteps of several international post-WWII music festivals whose opera programs were highly innovative such as Hindemith's Donaueschingen Festival, the Tanglewood Festival, the Avignon Festival, the Glyndebourne Festival, Savonlinna (Finland), the Musiktheater Biennale in Munich, the O'Neill Centre's Music Theatre Workshop in Connecticut, and the annual American Music Theatre Festival in Philadelphia.[7] Other Canadian examples with a strong focus on opera that I will not have the opportunity to address here include the Guelph Spring Festival, the National Arts Centre (NAC) Summer Festival, the Algoma Fall Festival, and R. Murray Schafer's Peterborough Festival. But none of these placed as strong an emphasis on music theater, nor did the effects of their programming and training programs have as significant an impact on the Canadian new music theater scene after the 1990s.

Festivals are unique economically, politically, and artistically, and they capitalize on their peripheral positioning in terms of time and space. Most of these postwar festivals arose because of a significant increase in the disposable income of the middle class and an increase in vacation time, particularly in the summer months, when the Banff's and Stratford's performance offerings were at their peak.[8] Both festivals benefited from early Canada Council funding as the result of the Massey Commission in 1951 as well as from provincial arts funding, festival fundraising campaigns, and national centennial arts funding, emerging from the Massey Commission and the founding of the Canada Council in 1957. The Banff Centre also benefited from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Opera for a New America fund through Opera America.

Like many music festivals, the Stratford and Banff festivals are located at a distance, both temporally vis-à-vis the traditional September–April season of most major opera companies and in terms of their locations at some distance from the geographical centers of opera in Canada. The notion of escape from Toronto is

[6] Again, Sasha Metcalf's "Funding 'Opera for the 80s and Beyond" captures the US reality brilliantly.

[7] Michael Bawtree's *The New Singing Theatre* provides a complete list and discussion of these festivals.

[8] For a more thorough and lengthy discussion of this, see Bruno Frey's "The Economics of Music Festivals," *Journal of Cultural Economics* 18, no. 1 (March 1994): 29–39.

articulated in nearly all of Stratford's advertising materials and many critical reviews of performances. In the foreword to the 1958 Festival, for example, esteemed "voice of Canada" Pierre Berton described the sense of magic that accompanied pilgrimages to Stratford's remote location:

> We made an expedition of it, our group. We leave the city early in the day and we drive leisurely past the fat farmhouses, with the winter wheat ripening in the heaving fields, and over rivers named Thames through towns called Shakespeare; and we bring wine and picnic baskets and vacuum packs of ice and rugs to sit on. And in the warm evening we sprawl out along the Avon and watch the swans drift by, or we stroll among the roses in the Shakespeare garden. And we buy paper fans from small perspiring boys and sticky orange pop from the festival stand, and we steal a look at the actors playing catch ball behind the new theatre.[9]

At Banff, the respite of the Rocky Mountains is often configured as a place where new artistic discoveries and growth are possible. The mountains are given as a catalyst for artistic inspiration and respite, and images like the one on the cover of M. J. Thompson's book *The Banff Centre: Mountain Campus* or David and Peggy Leighton's *Artists, Builders, and Dreamers: 50 Years at the Banff School* are characteristic in their use of photography to attract both artists and audiences to the Banff Centre's training programs and performances.[10]

Although Bruno Frey notes that the choice to focus on new music is not a given at summer arts festivals—many producers believe the risk is too great and focus their programming on more conservative crowd pleasers—I contend that the temporally and geographically peripheral positioning (akin, perhaps, to the "liminal space" or "ephemeral places" that Timothy Storhoff and Andrew Mall, respectively, describe elsewhere in this issue) of these festivals facilitated creative work that also, ultimately, fell at the creative periphery. Indeed, while Stratford chose periodically to turn to Mozart, Offenbach, and even Gilbert and Sullivan in order to ensure box office returns, at Banff, producers and administrators seized the opportunity to create something that would form a contrast with the work on neighboring opera stages during the regular opera season. Perhaps most significant were the opportunities that both festivals provided Canadian composers to develop their work. Frey argues that festivals are best understood from the supply side as "an evasion of the restrictions imposed on high artistic activity in concert houses and opera houses," reaffirming the ripe context for experimentation and risk-taking that often occurs in these contexts.[11] As British-Canadian actor/director Michael Bawtree put it, "Because of their naturally enterprising and festive spirit they can often draw a bow at a venture without falling flat on their faces."[12] As the Banff and Stratford festivals reveal, the spirit of adventure and experimentation is certainly one that the festival context seems to breed.

[9] Annual Festival Program Booklets: Program for 1958, "Foreword" by Pierre Berton, The Stratford Festival Archives.

[10] See M. J. Thompson, *The Banff Centre: Mountain Campus* (Canmore, AB: Altitude Publishing, 1993); and David and Peggy Leighton, *Artists, Builders and Dreamers: 50 Years at the Banff School* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart: 1982).

[11] Frey, "The Economics of Music Festivals," 30.

[12] Bawtree, *The New Singing Theatre*, 204.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196319000531 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The Stratford Festival

According to Robertson Davies, "When Stratford is spoken of, its financial struggles are given great and justifiable prominence. But it had its artistic and intellectual and philosophical struggles as well [. . .]."[13] One of these struggles surrounded the nature of the productions to be featured on Stratford's stages—an issue that was not exclusive to music drama. As Ric Knowles has argued, though the narratives about the Stratford Festival have always been concerned in part with Canadian nationalism, promoting the festival as "Canada's national theatre," early Festival administrators nevertheless subscribed to what Knowles refers to as "a delayed colonial celebration of a nineteenth-century brand of Canadian nationalism configured on an imperialist British model."[14] The Festival's programming was inevitably bound up in the legitimizing work that Canadian artists, actors, directors, and musicians had been struggling with through the past century. Decisions concerning the kind of music theater to offer on its stages were thus also imbricated in debates (some stated, most merely implied) concerning opera's value as high art. The Festival's first music director was composer Louis Applebaum, who chose to compose and mount a Broadway-style musical when given the opportunity to compose a musical comedy in 1958, thinking that American musical comedy was saturating the theater scene in North America, and that this would bring financial and artistic success to the Festival. Unfortunately, this did not materialize as planned because some reviewers deemed Applebaum's score for *Ride a Pink Horse* too "cerebral" and also, ironically, too Canadian.[15] Indeed, the philosophical tensions between opera and musical theater, and the changing approaches to the justification of lyric theater within the Stratford context, reflected the changing priorities of the Festival itself as it evolved over time and under changing leadership. And though the same colonialist priorities that influenced the theatrical productions also inevitably shaped developments in music theater, nationalist priorities were somewhat

[13] In Tyrone Guthrie, Robertson Davies, and Grant Macdonald, *Renown at Stratford: A Record of the Shakespeare Festival in Canada* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1953): 9. In very general terms, it seems obvious that opera was valued a great deal at the start and less toward the end. There was also a period in the middle of the Festival's history, in 1969, when operas were abandoned because, as Pettigrew and Portman acknowledge, "Gascon had recognized that they were both costly to the Festival and showed little prospect of growth or of developing significance." See Jamie Portman, *Stratford: The First Thirty Years* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1985): 9.

[14] Richard Paul Knowles, "From Nationalist to Multinational: The Stratford Festival, Free Trade, and the Discourses of Intercultural Tourism," *Theatre Journal* 47, no. 1 (March 1995): 20. Knowles references Tyrone Guthrie's idealist rhetoric, calling for a Festival that "must demonstrably be a Canadian one," one which "set out to show that Canadian artists could achieve . . . standards of which they need not feel ashamed" (23). And yet, there is remarkable evidence of the Festival's early directors' interest in cultivating a place for high culture. Though initially excited about the idea of the Festival, in 1954 *Toronto Star* critic Nathan Cohen observed that Stratford was "just another summer theatre venture, with special overtones of snobbery." See Wayne E. Edmonstone, *Nathan Cohen: The Making of a Critic* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen, 1977): 227.

[15] Walter Pitman, *Louis Applebaum: A Passion for Culture* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2002): 119. The work was *Ride a Pink Horse*, by John Gray, and featured a centaur that is discovered alive and is seeking entry into Canada, which it finds difficult under existing immigration laws. Part of the controversy surrounding the work was its commission by the newly formed Canada Council—general opinion being that "only truly serious (i.e., classical) music should benefit from the largesse of the Council" (Pitman, *Louis Applebaum*, 119).

more nuanced, in some instances offering the opportunity for innovation despite these ideological pressures.

Opera was introduced to Stratford in 1956 with Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* in order to right a challenging financial situation (possibly the first time in opera's history it has been considered a financial solution!).[16] Louis Applebaum wrote about Britten's opera:

> The opera which Stratford is offering is a relatively new one, by perhaps the leading opera composer of our day. Though it requires modest resources and its musical merit is undeniably great, it has never before been produced in this country. Stratford's presentation will, we expect, aim the attention of the audience on the essential dramatic and musical values of the work rather than divert it with the conventional operatic trimmings.[17]

This statement reveals one of the tensions at the heart of music theater at Stratford, that between tradition and innovation. Britten is a British composer, thus confirming criticisms of the colonialist nature of Stratford's priorities in this early period. On the other hand, as Applebaum mentions, this is new music, and he hints at the kinds of artistic imagination required to rethink the potential of these works in this relatively small context. These early operas were chosen for their small scale and their potential to feature star performers (in this case, Regina Resnick, Jennie Tourel, John Vickers, and Jan Rubes).[18] Applebaum returns to this theme for his 1959 music notes in the annual program:

> While the lavish human, mechanical and financial resources with which most European opera and theatre companies are endowed might seem attractive, they should not create envy in us. There are many good reasons why Stratford, even if it were equipped to do so, should not produce the *Aidas* and the *Götterdämmerungs* of operatic literature. If interest can be stimulated in small-scale productions, if a worthwhile style and standard can be achieved, and if composers can be encouraged to write for such a theatre, then Stratford's efforts fit very well into our present social scheme.[19]

It is interesting that Applebaum discusses composition here, since there were no new Canadian works of music theater written for Stratford in these early days, aside from Applebaum's musical comedy, and none in its theatrical repertoire either. Despite his initial conservative contribution with *Ride a Pink Horse*, Applebaum remained committed to Canadian composers and performers throughout his time at the Stratford Festival, effectively conceiving of the Stratford Festival as a "new music" festival and eventually the site of an annual International Composers' Conference, attended by composers such as Ernst Krenek and Edgard Varèse, along with many Canadian avant-garde and serial composers.

[16] Pitman, *Louis Applebaum*, 110–11. *Lucretia* is also a curious choice given its rather cold reception at the Glyndebourne Festival in England at its premiere ten years prior. Britten himself was invited, along with the English Opera Group, to lead the 1957 production of *The Turn of the Screw*, with Peter Pears in the leading role.

[17] Louis Applebaum, "Stratford's Second Music Festival," Stratford Festival Publication, 1956.

[18] Louis Applebaum, "Stratford's Second Music Festival."

[19] Annual Festival Program Booklets: Program for 1959, "Notes for Music" by Louis Applebaum, The Stratford Festival Archives.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196319000531 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Applebaum's intention was to "put Canada on the map."[20] Despite his commitment to Canadian composition in other musical genres, Applebaum seems not to have produced many Canadian works of music theater or opera likely because of the box office risks of doing so.[21]

The history of opera at Stratford can be understood in one sense as a negotiation of the genre's associations with elitism—at times celebrated, at others rejected. The earliest programs from Stratford reveal a pressing concern for legitimizing the cultural status of the Canadian Shakespeare festival, and the presentation of opera in its early years was likely done in the hope of bolstering the Festival's theatrical legitimacy.[22] The celebration of opera's status as elite culture arises at several points in the Festival's history, most significantly under the musical leadership of violinist Oscar Shumsky, who in 1964, committed himself to the reintroduction of what he called "legitimate" opera to Stratford after a run (or what Shumsky called a "rash") of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas.[23] The program reads thus (under a photograph of Shumsky leading a workshop):

> On a Stratford Summer Evening in '64, the candelabra of Tanya Moiseiwitsch's handsomely-refurbished Avon Theatre were dimmed, and the gossipy opening measure of 'Figaro' whispered in a new era for Opera. True, this was not Opera's first appearance at Stratford. There had been a few isolated flings, and one could look back with nostalgia on the days of the perennial rash of G&S fun that broke out after Gilbert and Sullivan's refreshingly daring 'Pinafore'. However, the summer of '64 did mark Opera Seria's first avowed declaration of taking up permanent residence in the area.[24]

This "legitimate opera" (though ultimately more comic than *seria*, as advertised) was Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, under Richard Bonynge with singers from the Metropolitan Opera. For many, the arrival of Mozart at Stratford seemed to signal that Stratford had "made it" operatically—in fact, Shumsky referred to Mozart as the "counterpart to Shakespeare in music" in 1966—significant indeed for the Stratford Shakespeare Festival.

But not all welcomed opera. Indeed, responses to several of the Festival's productions over the years rejected its elitism. For example, in John Kraglund's review of *Orpheus in the Underworld* in July 1959, he explained, "When the Stratford Festival opened its new music season last night, it gave promise of having the first really popular musical event of its checkered history. . . . It seemed to us all that what was necessary to win its appeal was the elimination of the title, opera—which it may be, but not in the sense customarily meant."[25] These sentiments were expressed in other spheres as well; the 1968 season prompted more soul searching at Stratford and a change of name from The Stratford Shakespeare

[20] Pitman, *Applebaum: A Passion for Culture*, 131.
[21] Pitman, *Applebaum: A Passion for Culture*, 133.
[22] Another example of this is Guthrie's penchant for pomp and pageantry, which was well served by Applebaum's fanfares—performed at the beginning of each theatrical performance in order to summon the audience into the theater, and which carried regal and royal associations.
[23] Annual Festival Program Booklets: Program for 1967, The Stratford Festival Archives.
[24] Annual Festival Program Booklets: Program for 1967, The Stratford Festival Archives.
[25] John Kraglund, "Only One Word Limits Appeal of This Orpheus," *The Globe and Mail*, July 11, 1959.

Festival to, simply, the Stratford Festival. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, along with the abandonment of the more traditional and restrictive reference to the Bard himself—which impacted programming decisions on the theatrical side—Director Jean Gascon made the decision to abandon opera in 1969—or so it seemed.

In many ways, what followed were some of the most fruitful years for music theater at Stratford. The most strikingly innovative moment in Stratford's operatic history was the adoption in 1971 of the "Third Stage"—a space for new experimental theater and workshops, which Gascon commissioned. Gascon asked director Michael Bawtree and composer Gabriel Charpentier to plan and produce it. Despite its small size (seating only 250) and the fact that, like the original main tent, it was very hot in the summers, its importance in the innovation of opera in Canada cannot be overstated. In fact, in its early years, it was widely recognized as a site for new Canadian works of music theater. As Meg Westley writes, "Between 1972 and 1976, an average of three Canadian works were presented at the Third Stage every year, many of which were commissioned by the Festival. Nearly half of these works were new Canadian operas, and for a time the Third Stage was regarded as a major outlet for contemporary Canadian opera."[26] In 1972, Michael Bawtree organized a successful all-Canadian program and this was to be its focus moving forward.[27] As the program for that year states, "We . . . hope that the return to Stratford of opera, *this time contemporary and Canadian*, will be the beginning of an important new development for music-theatre both in this country and elsewhere."[28] One of the Third Stage's most impressive undertakings was R. Murray Schafer's *Patria II: Requiems for a Party Girl* in 1972, directed by Bawtree and musically directed by Serge Garant. The piece was the perfect vehicle for the kind of generic challenges to tradition that Bawtree sought out for this space. As the composer himself explained it:

> *Patria* is not an opera. Neither is it a drama. It uses the resources of both of these forms, as well as those of television and film. What results is a mischievous hybrid which may begin to take on the appearance of a new genre. Ideally, what we are struggling toward is a kind of theatre in which all the arts may meet, court, and make love.[29]

The challenges to generic dividing lines are significant in Schafer's description and are certainly in line with his philosophies about music drama established prior to this work. But it must be emphasized that Stratford's Third Stage offered a context in which this kind of experimentation was possible—even encouraged. These experiments would never have been possible at any of Canada's major opera companies. Michael Bawtree explained:

[26] Meg Westley, "The Third Stage at Stratford: A New Era?," *The Queen's Quarterly* 97, no. 4 (1990): 640.

[27] This program consisted of a one-week revival of Gabriel Charpentier's *Orpheus* (originally commissioned for the National Arts Centre in 1969), a version of *Pinocchio* adapted and directed by John Wood, and Schafer's *Patria* (*Requiems for the Party Girl*).

[28] Annual Festival Program Booklets: Program for 1972, The Stratford Festival Archives. Emphasis added.

[29] Annual Festival Program Booklets: Program for 1972, "Introduction to *Patria*" by R. Murray Schafer, The Stratford Festival Archives.

> I think in a place like Stratford or Guelph you can do whatever you like really. . . . There are a lot of restrictions if you're running a kind of winter program for a theatre, or an opera program, but in festivals you have a chance to be much more adventurous, you can do a one-off of things, and our Third Stage program allowed us to do anything we liked. We could do a show with four people, or six people, we could choose. . . . The world was our oyster; we could choose anything we liked.[30]

The Third Stage was a significant platform upon which several Canadian opera (music theater) innovators cut their teeth. Murray Schafer's work was featured prominently, and he would go on to become Canada's leading composer of new music theater, including seeing his *Patria* cycle flourish in the 1980s and 1990s to its tenth iteration, plus an epilogue—an extensive endeavor whose seeds were fostered at Stratford. The careers of several of Canada's burgeoning opera stars such as Michael Burgess, Maureen Forrester, Phyllis Mailing, and Gary Relyea were developed in the context of the Stratford programming. Further exciting innovations in music theater at Stratford followed in the mid-1970s, including premieres of Raymond and Beverly Pannell's *Exiles*, which combined electronic and orchestral music, Harry Somers's *The Fool*, Jean Vallerand's *The Magician*, Raymond Pannell's *She Stoops to Conquer*, Charles Wilson's *Everyman*, and Menotti's *The Medium* (starring Forrester), but this path did not lead far.[31]

The Festival programs from the late 1970s, under the leadership of the British director Robin Phillips, reveal music's continued slow and silent disappearance from Stratford.[32] William Littler took note: "In times of economic troubles, artistic ventures tend to order their priorities . . . and in both Stratford and Niagara-on-the Lake, the play is the thing."[33] Under the leadership of Robin Phillips, both classical music and opera took a back seat, and while Phillips spoke of waiting to find the right time to re-integrate opera, that time never came.

The Stratford story is an interesting one where opera is concerned, because while Stratford had great potential to serve as a site of innovation—realized most directly in the context of the Third Stage—it also nevertheless used opera throughout its history as a bastion of elite culture. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, American musical theater—and only the surest box office bets—replaced opera. It is obvious in the move to operetta and then lyric musical theater that the administration wished to position the Music Theater productions as lighter foils for the "serious" theatrical productions. Reviews of Bernstein's *Candide* in 1978, for example, regarded the production as "a light, tuneful and arresting diversion from the stage plays."[34] The early 1980s featured a series of Gilbert and Sullivan productions

[30] Michael Bawtree, interview by author, December 5, 2016, Wolfville, NS.

[31] See Michael Bawtree's *The Best Fooling: Adventures in Canadian Theatre* (Cirencester, Gloucestershire: Mereo Books, 2017).

[32] This is particularly interesting given that Phillips would go on to an extensive career in opera.

[33] William Littler, *The Toronto Star*, July 24, 1976. Littler reports that Raffi Armenian, Stratford's Music Director, was hoping to mount Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* and Schoenberg's *Erwartung*, but the grant approval from the Ontario Arts Council did not arrive in time. Littler's article also reveals that Robin Phillips also had a plan to make Stratford a producing center for Baroque opera, beginning the next summer with a production of Monteverdi's *L'Incoronzione di Poppea*.

[34] James Nelson, "Candide—A Light, Tuneful Diversion from Stage Plays," *The Stratford Beacon Herald*, June 9, 1978. Fascinatingly, the word "opera" is not mentioned in this review. Another calls it a

directed by Brian MacDonald that took Stratford by storm, and their value was celebrated again by reviewers in terms of the levity that they brought in contrast with the serious theatrical programming in theater. These musicals were advertised as being innovative in their addition of new lyrics with clever references to Canadiana, but their musical conservatism and their British roots remained intact.

Frustratingly, the details of the history of music theater at the Stratford Festival are nearly entirely omitted from the literature on the Festival's history.[35] Shockingly, even many of the annual Festival souvenir programs fail to mention music. John Kraglund recognized the disappearance of opera in a 1975 review of Somers's *The Fool* and Vallerand's *Le Magicien*, where he observes that "Opera was at one time a major attraction of the Stratford Festival's music season. Despite all evidence to the contrary, almost everyone connected with the festival insists it is still of prime importance."[36] Despite this, there were aspects of music theater that developed uniquely because of the festival context in which they were honed at Stratford. These include the opportunity to experiment with the unique potentials of chamber opera, the focus on Canadian repertoire in the context of the Third Stage, and the development and training of young singer-actors, again primarily in the context of the Third Stage.

The Banff Centre

Of all Canadian summer Festivals, the Banff Centre has been the site of the most lengthy and detailed conversations about the development and innovation of music theater. In their widely read book *The New Music Theatre*, Thomas Desi and Eric Salzman note that the Banff Centre's thriving music theater program was "one of the most important and earliest defined programs of its kind in the Americas."[37] Dr. Ernesto Vinci, a vocalist who taught at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, initiated the opera program in 1950. In the 1950s and 1960s, productions of operas by Mozart, Verdi, and Puccini were toured throughout the West, projecting a cultured image of the Banff Centre where international classical stars came to train young Canadians in the traditions of European opera. The operatic training program at Banff continues to this day, and the Banff Centre for the Arts is highly regarded internationally as a center for artistic innovation, and for state-of-the-art operatic training in particular. Throughout most of the Banff Centre's history, opera and musical theater co-existed and operated as two distinct programs with separate artistic directors and operating budgets. Fascinatingly, as the years went on, the repertoire they produced blurred the line between the two,

"Broadway, ballet, opera and theatre collaboration." Many thought the production to be tacky and lackluster.

[35] The music theater productions are given mere mention in the books on the Stratford Festival. Many of the programs omit musical elements or downplay their significance. The program for 1968, for example, omits the performers of the well-received Rossini *Cenerentola* production but includes the actors for the theatrical productions.

[36] John Kraglund, "Fool and Magician Meet in Purgatory," *The Globe and Mail*, July 31, 1975.

[37] Thomas Desi and Eric Salzman, *The New Music Theatre: Seeing the Voice, Hearing the Body* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008): 236.

and discussions both within each unit and between them were often focused on the redefinition of generic boundaries.[38] For example, even as early as 1980, the works listed as having been performed under the Opera Program include Benjamin Britten's *Albert Herring*, Kurt Weill's *The Threepenny Opera*, Stephen McNeff's *Peking Dusk*, Frederic Rzewski's *Price of Oil*, Leofwin Luke's *The Grimwood Clock*, Otto Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Canadian Musical Theatre giant David Warrack's *Drummer*. Furthermore, the staff of the Musical Theatre/Music Theatre program at The Banff Centre was nearly all operatically trained and oriented. But there was also a spirited ongoing conversation among program and Centre administrators that addressed outright the tensions between the two genres and a consistent commitment to the future of new music theater in Canada. This innovative spirit can be seen not only in the repertoire choices and cross-disciplinary training of the artists, but also on a very preliminary level in the constant negotiation of the programs' names: at Banff, opera and musical theater were produced in the context of programs entitled Music Theatre, Musictheatre, Musical Theatre, Opera as Theatre, the Inter-arts Program, Lyric Theatre, the Music Theatre Studio Ensemble (MUTSE), The Integration Program, and several others.

The most striking aspect of the conversation surrounding music theater at Banff is the emphasis that program directors and staff placed on genre's definition, scope, approach, and form(s). There was also a consistent acknowledgment and awareness of the position of Canadian efforts in the greater context of an international music theater scene. Several international approaches and initiatives in the innovation of music theater were identified by administrators as inspirations throughout Banff's history (including the international meeting of the New Small-Scale Opera and Music Theatre in Brussels in 1992, Music Theatre International, the International Theatre Institute, Richard Pearlman's "Opera Liberation Front," and others). These approaches were modeled at Banff: for example, a document entitled "Music Theatre: A Background," from the introduction to the MUTSE program in the late 1970s, noted, "There is no training program anywhere in the western world which takes music theatre as its base of operations. Canada, which has no strong indigenous tradition either in European opera or in the American musical, is seen as an ideal location for launching this initiative."[39] The MUTSE program,

[38] An inter-office memo from George Ross to Neil Armstrong dated Nov 30, 1984 discusses, as Ross put it, "some wild thoughts on the future of this program." Ross argues that The Banff Centre was actually very well positioned to be a cutting-edge program, and that "we must approach the Broadway movers and shakers to convince them that we are going to really take this art form seriously even to the extent that if a Sondheim were writing a show that needed a first performance out of the eye of NY that it could possibly be done here. . . . I strongly feel we cannot go backward. We have made this step into the modern musical theatre era and we must continue with it." In 1984, Music Theatre considered doing *A Little Night Music* but realized it was beyond their singers' technical abilities. Later the opera department would grapple with it, but they ended up producing Dominic Argento's *Postcard from Morocco* and Cavalli's *L'Ormindo* instead. In 1985, George Ross and Neil Armstrong considered Bernstein's *Candide* in the opera program in light of a discussion about making opera "more accessible."

[39] "Music Theatre: A Background," Music Theatre and Opera Collection, AA28 e.5: MT Studio Ensemble Program 1980–82, The Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives at the Banff Centre for the Arts.

one of Banff's most innovative training endeavors, began with a mandate of auditioning in Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, London, Paris, Zurich, and Vancouver, to recruit up to fifteen performers, four stage designers, three composers, and three writers. The participants' activities were split into three categories: skill development, research, and creation, and included regular experimentation, "labs," and a focus on intense interdisciplinary collaboration. By the late 1970s, there were discussions among administrators at Banff about innovating opera based on a need to experiment with the production and performance of the genre—even about its conception. As early as 1978, a certain anxiety about the shifting ground on which opera stood was beginning to reveal itself, as illustrated by this statement from The Opera Study Committee meeting minutes of March 11, 1978: "A new consciousness has to enter the world of opera. Opera has to rejuvenate itself by invading the alternate theatre spaces thereby generating entirely new opera audiences."[40]

But it was the arrival of Michael Bawtree in 1981 as Director of Music Theatre that, I would argue, made the most striking and significant contribution to the development of Music Theatre at Banff. Bawtree, once named Banff's "resident utopian," was previously director of the Stratford Festival's Third Stage, Director of English Theatre at the NAC in the early 1970s, and co-founder of COMUS Music Theatre of Canada in 1975. Bawtree professed his rejection of the distinction between musical theater and opera constantly, and he built his programs around this idea. He argued, "We must avoid the idea that there is some genre, some esthetic pigeon-hole called 'Music Theatre' into which some works fit and others do not."[41]

Archival planning documents reveal the impact and reach of Bawtree's inventive approach to music theater. Figure 1 shows a copy of Bawtree's Inter-Arts proposal—a document that demonstrates his commitment to innovative interdisciplinary thinking from 1979 in a program that sought to build an interdisciplinary element into the Winter Cycle (the year-round training program). Bawtree's Inter-Arts ideas are articulated in a document entitled "Inter-Arts at Banff: A Review of Inter-Arts Activity and Thought Since 1850," which documents the philosophical and ideological basis for his proposed (and ultimately realized) structure. Though the innovation was probably most significant on a philosophical level—it was intended, it seems, as a tool through which music theater might be imagined from the ground up—there were also productions that emerged from the program. R. Murray Schafer's environmental opera *The Princess of the Stars* was one such piece, produced in 1985, and performed on a local lake (Two Jack Lake) as the sun rose.

[40] "Opera Study Committee Minutes," March 11–12, 1978, Music Theatre and Opera Collection, 7A5 a.1: The Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives at the Banff Centre for the Arts.

[41] See Bawtree, *The New Singing Theatre*, vii. The major overall aim of Bawtree's approach—and to the Banff Centre's Music Theatre programming moving forward—was to give equal emphasis to singing and theater. Bawtree and other administrators at Banff (including John Metcalf, Colin Graham, etc.) saw the program as responding to demands on singers to be equally skilled as singers, actors, and movers. See "The Role of inter-Arts in the School of Fine Arts Programs," 1984, Music Theatre and Opera Collection, AA28 e.5: MT Studio Ensemble Program, The Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives at the Banff Centre for the Arts.

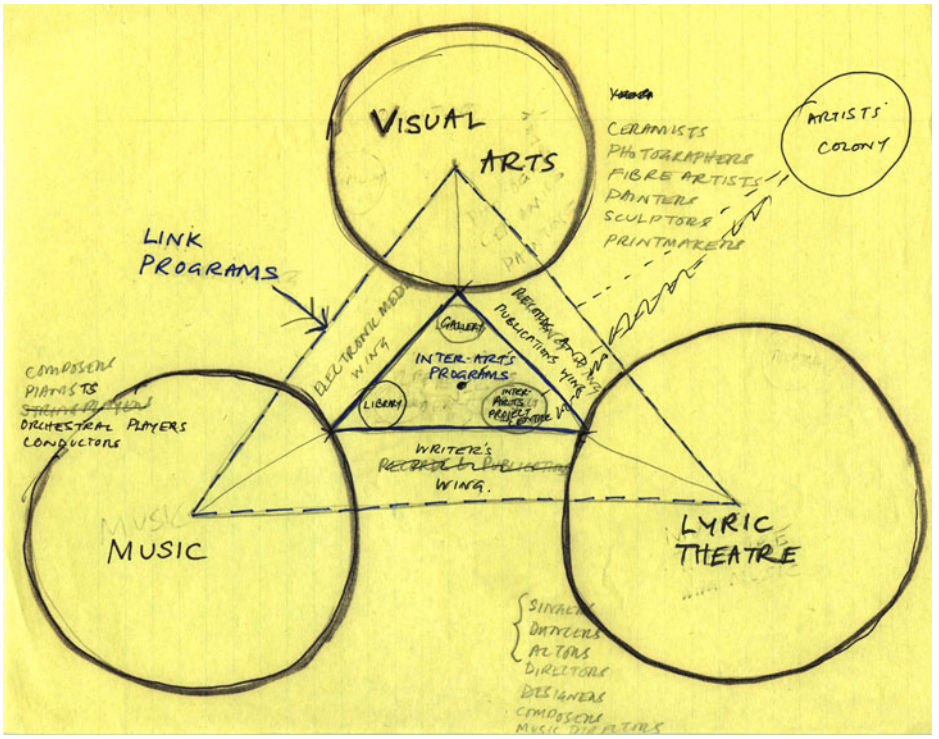

Figure 1. Michael Bawtree's Inter-Arts proposal. Diagram of Centre for Arts organization (circa 1979). "Michael Bawtree Correspondence, 1979–1981." Theatre Arts fonds, TA3a.2a. The Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. Banff, Alberta, Canada.

In a document entitled, "The Music Theatre Studio Ensemble" from September 1981, Bawtree writes:

> The program was given the designation of music theatre to link it with some of the innovative work that has been undertaken in this area since 1950. Music theatre is a broad term covering all kinds of theatre in which music is an integral element, from European opera to American Musical Theatre. Central to the concept is the desire to break free from the conventions, and to develop a popular form of theatre able to draw from the best element of opera, drama, and the American musical.[42]

Aside from the rich discussions about fresh ways forward for the genre, the most important innovation to music theater at Banff occurred in the form of the training program that became so central to the Centre's mission and brand. With the rise of opera programs and regional opera companies in the 1970s in Canada and the United States, the need for a training program to bridge university education and professional experience was sorely needed, and there were many singers looking

[42] "The New Music Theatre: Guidelines," 1985, Music Theatre and Opera Collection, TA 3a 3f: MT Program Planning, The Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives at the Banff Centre for the Arts. In a series of guidelines for "The New Music Theatre" Bawtree explains, "If the goal for our profession is a new music theatre, we need to re-state for ourselves the guidelines which artists and producers need to follow as they work toward that goal."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196319000531 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for further training. Both the summer training program and the Winter Cycle of MUTSE, established in the early 1980s, gave young professionals the opportunity to take up residence at Banff for a year to work on their craft, train in adjacent areas (such as acting and movement for singers, etc.), create contemporary new works, and tour to local communities. Significantly, the repertoire they focused on was primarily contemporary and was generically varied. Examples of pieces produced in this context include Stephen Oliver's *Sasha* (1983; directed by Colin Graham and conducted by Steuart Bedford); Julian Grant's *Skin Drum* (1987); Sid Hodkinson's *St. Carmen of the Main* (1987); and John Beckwith's *Crazy to Kill* (1989). As Kenneth DeLong reports, "Patterned somewhat upon the style of the COMUS Music Theatre in Toronto and similar organizations in Los Angeles and New York, the Music Theatre program attempts to train a new breed of singing actors who can cope with the vocal and dramatic requirements of this new form of 'opera'."[43] Meeting minutes from March 1978 reflect the realization that Canadian opera companies cannot afford the resources to run training programs and that there is a "need for a new attitude of excellence that gets away from cliché acting and cliché productions."[44] In line with the priorities articulated in Bawtree's Inter-Arts ideal, the Music Theatre Studio Ensemble took pride in its focus of rounding out the training that artists would have received in their more discipline-specific programs prior to their arrival at Banff. Scottish composer Buxton Orr, for example, writes about his experience as a member of the Winter Cycle from September 1985 to April 1986, where he served as Composer-in-Residence:

> The training programme for the Ensemble, which consisted of 30 participants and 15 resident faculty, has as its guiding principle that wherever possible all should take part in all aspects of that programme. This meant that, for example, composers and librettists would take part in movement and acting classes, stage designers had seminars in following scores, and . . . the singer-actors were required to create their own pieces of music theatre.[45]

Perhaps most telling is Orr's recollection of the rigorous critical process that underscored the musical innovations at Banff during this period: "The crucial meeting after the performances was devoted to a carefully structured 'critique' devoted not to assessing success or failure of the end product but to the 'process' by which a piece was made and what the audience made of its intentions."[46] From 1978 onward, the program focused on training the complete artist rather than rapid shallow learning of roles, as has been the norm in typical operatic performance contexts. Though the results were promising, program administrators were often concerned with the heavy emphasis on training—this concern was expressed

[43] Kenneth DeLong, "Banff," *Opera Canada* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1984), 15.
[44] See "Opera Study Committee Minutes."
[45] Buxton Orr, "A Music-Theatre Training Programme," *Composer* (Spring 1987): 15. Incidentally, Orr's experience resonates with my own experience as a member of the Banff summer opera training program in 2000, known as "Opera as Theatre," in which a similar cross-pollination and Inter-Arts model was in place.
[46] Orr, "A Music-Theatre Training Programme," 16.

repeatedly throughout documents from the late 1970s to the late 1990s. As one report noted, "The feeling was expressed that there has to be a fairly strong priority on one or the other [training or performance], that if you try to do both as prime goals, the program will suffer from diffuseness. Expectations will be disappointed on both counts."[47] One reviewer, for example, in evaluating a performance of *Sasha* (April 12, 1983), remarked that composer Stephen Oliver was set up to fail with the commission, since "he was also charged with creating a piece that showcases the talents of eighteen performers, so that one in the same time, he is supposed to be creating a masterwork and a school exercise."[48]

Canadian singers in the program who have gone on to international careers include, among many others, Jackalyn Short, Benjamin Butterfield, Barbara Hannigan, Laura Pudwell, and Monica Whicher. In fact, one would find it difficult to find a professional singer in Canada who has not benefited from a residency at the Banff Centre. Faculty members were recruited from across Canada, the United States, and Europe, and included representatives from the Royal Opera House, the Metropolitan Opera, the Royal Opera in Stockholm, and others from companies and university training programs in Canada.

From the 1980s onward, and particularly in the 1990s under the direction of Keith Turnbull, there was also a great deal of new Canadian work produced at Banff. This occurred chiefly in the context of the Music Theatre Integration program (begun in 1994), which sought to train singers in an eight-week immersion in contemporary music theater. Singers accepted into this program were asked to arrive having prepared three works by a long list of contemporary composers including John Beckwith, Luciano Berio, John Cage, Peter Maxwell Davies, George Rochberg, Harry Somers, R. Murray Schafer, Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Tavener, Michael Tippet, and Claude Vivier. Turnbull's three-year plan from this time, especially, continues the work of pushing the envelope generically speaking, emphasizing interdisciplinary work and specifically the need to build bridges with the Canadian opera and theater communities.[49] Works produced under Turnbull's strong leadership include Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy* (1991); Michael Nyman's *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (1993); Peter Maxwell Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1991); Udo Zimmermann's *White Rose* (1993); and Canadian compositions such as Quenten Doolittle's *Boiler Room Suite* (1989); and John Metcalf's *Tornrak* (1990), and *Kafka's Chimp* (1993).

Festival Resonances

As with the question of creative influence in general, one can never be sure how deeply felt the influence of priorities, processes, and ideas has been. As was the

[47] See "Opera Study Committee Minutes."

[48] "Sasha Review," Music Theatre and Opera Collection, AA28 e.5: MT Studio Ensemble Program 1980–82, Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives at the Banff Centre for the Arts.

[49] Keith Turnbull, "3-Year Plan," 1989, Music Theatre and Opera Collection: MT Program Planning 1988–89, The Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives at the Banff Centre for the Arts.

case in England with Benjamin Britten's English Opera Group and Aldeburgh Festival, the ideas and ways of thinking honed at Banff and Stratford have undoubtedly made a resounding and permanent impact in new music theater companies and festivals the country over, a fact that is more surprising when one accounts for the relatively intense, ephemeral, and impermanent nature of the festivals themselves, an idea that Andrew Mall explores so cogently in his article in this volume.[50] It is possible, for example, to trace their effects on the formation of many subsequent innovations in music theater in Toronto alone. These smaller companies emerged in the shadows of the Canadian Opera Company, engaging in exciting discussions about the ideal form of the genre and the rehearsal and training processes, and pioneering new avenues for the commissioning and creation of works of new Canadian music theater. Companies include COMUS Music Theatre of Canada (founded by Michael Bawtree, Gabriel Charpentier, and Maureen Forrester in 1975); Tapestry New Opera (founded by Wayne Strongman in 1979); Soundstreams New Directions in Music (founded by Lawrence Cherney in 1982); Queen of Puddings Music Theatre (founded by John Hess and Dáirine Ní Mheadhra in 1995); and Against the Grain Theatre (founded by Joel Ivany and Miriam Khalil in 2010).[51]

Though the festival context in both locations provided rich opportunities for innovation and sparked fascinating debates about and among the various subgenres of music theater, it is evident that Michael Bawtree deserves recognition as a key maverick and agitator in both cases. Similar, perhaps, to Harvey Lichtenstein at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and David Gockley at Houston Grand Opera, Michael Bawtree's role as an inventive impresario should not be underestimated. Like Gockley, Bawtree was interested in the tensions between music theater genres. His alliances with music theater innovators, including Colin Graham of the English Music Theatre Company and Marjorie Samoff of the American Music Theatre Festival, suggest that he was involved in conversations internationally about next steps for the genre. Under his leadership, Canadian developments were remarkable enough to warrant recognition by the International Theatre Institute's Music Theatre Committee as the Canadian leader in innovation in music theater in the 1980s. The International Theatre Institute would go on to promote and develop

[50] I am thinking specifically of the impact that the English Opera Group (EOG) and the Aldeburgh Festival had on the development of English chamber opera and a tradition of so-called native opera for England, begun in 1946 with the staging of Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*. The impact that the festival context and priorities of the EOG had on the subsequent development of the genre in England could be compared to the impact that I believe the Banff Festival had on opera in Canada. Also, intriguingly, Colin Graham, who became involved with the EOG in 1953 and later attempted to reinvigorate the group in the 1960s amid financial challenges, became director of the opera program at the Banff Centre in 1984, and focused on the well-rounded training of singers. See Justin Vickers, "An Empire Built on Shingle: Britten, the English Opera Group, and the Aldeburgh Festival," in *Benjamin Britten Studies: Essays on an Inexplicit Art*, ed. Vicki P. Stroeher and Justin Vickers (New York: Boydell, 2017): 89–177.

[51] Joel Ivany is currently the Artistic Director (2014–) of *Opera in the 21st Century*, the month-long summer opera intensive currently on offer at Banff, which was born as a partnership between the Canadian Opera Company, Against the Grain Theatre, and The Banff Centre for the Arts.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196319000531 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bawtree's revolutionary artistic ideas as a model for international innovation in music theater.[52]

Finally, the recent move from traditional opera seasons to a festival model by companies such as Portland Opera, Opera Philadelphia, and Vancouver Opera was initially met with scorn by the international operatic community as the result of long-feared retractions of operatic funding. These festivals have seemed, as a result, to be the mere remains of their former full-scale parent companies. But it strikes me that if the innovation and renewal of opera at festivals throughout the 1970s–90s in Canada is any indication, this new festival model might in fact be exactly what such companies need, allowing for developments not otherwise possible for opera in traditional mainstage contexts. As the Banff and Stratford programs reveal, the festival model holds great promise for the continued innovation of music theater in Canada and beyond.

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