

RESONANT NARRATIVES: THE POWER OF HYBRID COMPOSITION

JESSICA O'DONOGHUE

PhD Student in Composition, The University of Sydney (Sydney Conservatorium of Music, Australia)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7058-6627>

<https://doi.org/10.61215/MA.2025.vol.2.iss.1.02>

Abstract

This research explores the transformative potential of hybrid composition as a vehicle for compelling storytelling in 21st-century opera and vocal music. By integrating diverse musical languages—from Western classical traditions to experimental and popular forms—it investigates how stylistic and cultural hybridity can deepen emotional resonance and expand narrative possibilities. At the heart of this inquiry is the belief that genre-fluid composition invites heightened listening, where familiar expectations are disrupted in service of empathy, insight, and emotional impact. Drawing on theoretical frameworks by scholars such as Nigel Fabb and David Huron, who emphasize the roles of expectation and surprise in affective response, this study proposes that musical hybridity can amplify intensity and render complex or confronting narratives more accessible.

The research is undertaken through a triadic lens: composer, performer, and scholar. This intersectional perspective foregrounds the multiplicity of voices—personal, cultural, and artistic—that shape the creative process, and it reflects on how collaborative devising, improvisation, and studio-based techniques contribute to a more porous and dynamic compositional practice.

As a case study, my original chamber opera 'Menarche' is examined. The work investigates intergenerational trauma and the female body through layered vocal textures, extended techniques, and improvisation within notated frameworks. Fusing music, text, performance, and design, 'Menarche' constructs an immersive storytelling environment that exemplifies the emotional and conceptual power of hybrid operatic form.

Bibliography

Texts

1. Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*. A&C Black, 1997.
2. Adorno, Theodor W. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Psychology Press, 2001.
3. Albrecht, Michael. "Eklektik: Eine Begriffsgeschichte Mit Hinweisen Auf Die Philosophie- Und Wissenschaftsgeschichte." (1994).
4. Alcalde, Bruno. "Mixture Strategies: An Analytical Framework for Musical Hybridity." *Music Theory Online* 28, no. 1 (2022).
5. Alcalde, Bruno. "Mixture Strategies: An Analytical Framework for Musical Hybridity." *Music Theory Online* 28, no. 1 (2022).
6. Balan, Mihaela-Georgiana. "Polystylism in the Context of Postmodern Music. Alfred Schnittke's Concerti Grossi." *Artes. Journal of musicology*, no. 23 (2021): 148-64.

7. Bartleet, Brydie-Leigh, Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, Carolyn Ellis, and ProQuest. *Music Autoethnographies: Making Autoethnography Sing: Making Music Personal*. Bowen Hills, Qld: Australian Academic Press, 2010.
8. Best, Susan. "Conceptual Art and After: The Rise of the Interesting." *Art Monthly Australasia*, no. 311 (2018): 26-29.
9. Borgdorff, Henk. *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*. Leiden University Press, 2012.
10. Broch, Hermann. "Notes on the Problem of Kitsch." (1950).
11. Bull, Anna and Scharff, Christina. "Classical music as genre: hierarchies of value within freelance classical musicians' discourses," *The European Journal of Cultural Studies.*, 24(3), (2021): 673-689.
12. Bull, Anna and Upso. *Class, Control, and Classical Music*. Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2019.
13. Bull, Anna, Christina Scharff, and Laudan Nooshin. *Voices for Change in the Classical Music Profession: New Ideas for Tackling Inequalities and Exclusions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2023.
14. Byron, Tim, and Jadey O'Regan. *Hooks in Popular Music*. Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022.
15. Calinescu, Matei. "Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism." (1987).
16. Clarke, Eric F. and Doffman, Mark. *Distributed Creativity: Collaboration and Improvisation in Contemporary Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
17. Cooper, Robert. "Notes on Organizational Kitsch." Paper presented at the Conference on Aspects of Organization, University of Lancaster, 1986.
18. Eco, Umberto. "The Structure of Bad Taste." *The open work* (1989): 180-216.
19. Emmerson, Simon. "Where Next? New Music, New Musicology." Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 2007 Electroacoustic Music Studies Network Conference, 2007.
20. Fabb, Nigel. *A Theory of Thrills, Sublime and Epiphany in Literature*. London: Anthem Press, 2022.
21. Fenton-Miller, Solomon. *Compositional Strategies in Alfred Schnittke's Early Polystylism*. The University of Iowa, 2016.
22. Friedländer, Saul. *Reflections on Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*. Yale Univ. Press, 2020.
23. Gibson, Eleanor Jack, and Anne Danielson Pick. *An Ecological Approach to Perceptual Learning and Development*. Paperback. ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
24. Giesz, Ludwig. "Phänomenologie Des Kitsches." In *Phänomenologie Des Kitsches*: Brill Fink, 1975.

25. Glyde-Bates, Alexander. "Critiquing Classical Kitsch: A Portfolio of Compositions That Critique the 'Popular Classics' of Western Art Music." University of Southampton, 2017.
26. Greenberg, Clement. "Avantgarde Und Kitsch." (1939).
27. Hancox, Donna. *The Revolution in Transmedia Storytelling through Place: Pervasive, Ambient and Situated*. Routledge, 2021.
28. Hansen, Kai Arne, Eirik Askerøi, and Freya Jarman. *Popular Musicology and Identity: Essays in Honour of Stan Hawkins*. Routledge, 2020.
29. Herrington, Tony. *Epiphanies: Life-changing Encounters With Music*. London: Stronge Attractor Press, 2015.
30. Huebner, Steven. "Ravel's Tzigane: Artful Mask or Kitsch?". *Twentieth-Century Music* 17, no. 1 (2020): 63-86.
31. Huron, David. *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation*. London: MIT Press, 2006.
32. Jaunslaviete, Baiba. "The Theory of Polystylism as a Tool for Analysis of Contemporary Music in the Postsoviet Cultural Space: Some Terminological Aspects." *Rasprave: Časopis Instituta za hrvatski jezik i jezikoslovlje* 44, no. 2 (2018): 455-65.
33. Juslin, Patrik N., Patrik N. Juslin, and John A. Sloboda. *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*. Series in Affective Science. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
34. Kulka, Thomas. *Kitsch and Art*. Penn State Press, 2015.
35. Lehmann, Irene and Palme, Pia. *Sounding Fragilities. An Anthology*. Wolke, 2022.
36. Levy, Robert I, Pierre Heyman, and University Of Chicago Press. *Tahitians: Mind and Experience in the Society Islands*. Chicago; London: University Of Chicago Press, 2005.
37. Linstead, Stephen. "Organizational Kitsch." *Organization* 9, no. 4 (2002): 657-82.
38. Lior and Westlake, Nigel. Spotify, *Compassion* (2013)
39. Magarotto, Matteo. "The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory. Oxford Handbooks." JSTOR, 2015.
40. Mayall, Jeremy. "Cross-Genre Hybridity in Composition: A Systematic Method." *Organised sound: an international journal of music technology* 21, no. 1 (2016): 30-39.
41. Minahan, Stella. *The Aesthetic Turn in Management*. Routledge, 2017.
42. Molitor, Claudia, and Thor Magnusson. "Curating Experience: Composition as Cultural Technology—a Conversation." *Journal of New Music Research* 50, no. 2 (2021): 184-89.
43. Mould, Stephen. *Curating Opera: Reinventing the Past Through Museums of Opera and Art*. London: Routledge, 2021.
44. Ngai, Sianne. "Our Aesthetic Categories." *PMLA* 125, no. 4 (2010): 948-58.
45. Ngai, Sianne. *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form*. Harvard University Press, 2020.
46. Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Harvard University Press, 2004.

47. Penner, Nina. *Storytelling in Opera and Musical Theater*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020.
48. Perkins Gilman, Charlotte. "The Yellow Wallpaper." Toronto Metropolitan University, 2022.
49. Reid, Anna, Peres Da Costa, Neal and Carrigan, Jeanell. *Creative Research in Music: Informed Practice, Innovation and Transcendence*. Routledge, 2020.
50. Rentfrow, Peter J., Goldberg, Lewis R., & Levitin, Daniel J. "The structure of musical preferences: A five-factor model," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 100(6), (2011): 1139–1157.
51. Ross, Andrew. *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*. Routledge, 2016.
52. Rutherford-Johnson, Tim. *Music after the Fall: Modern Composition and Culture since 1989*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017.
53. Ryyanen, Max, and Eret Talviste. "Longing for a Place That Does Not Exist: The Importance of Kitsch for the Estonian Singing Revolution." *Journal of Baltic Studies* (2023): 1-17.
54. Ryyänen, Max. "Kitsch Happens. On the Kitsch Experience of Nature." *Espes* 8, no. 2 (2019): 10-16.
55. Schnittke, Alfred. *A Schnittke Reader*. Indiana University Press, 2002.
56. Simon, Gregory M. "Shame, Knowing, and Anthropology: On Robert I. Levy and the Study of Emotion", *Ethos*, 33(4), (2005): 493–498.
57. Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays*. Vol. 52: Macmillan, 2001.
58. Stępień, Justyna. *Redefining Kitsch and Camp in Literature and Culture*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014.
59. Streeten, Nicola, and Nicola Streeten. "2000–2019: A Change of Attitude." *UK Feminist Cartoons and Comics: A Critical Survey* (2020): 207-55.
60. Sunderland, Naomi, Dan Bendrups, Natalie Lewandowski, and Brydie-Leigh Bartleet. *Music, Health and Wellbeing: Exploring Music for Health Equity and Social Justice*.
61. Throop, C. Jason. "Hypocognition, a "Sense of the Uncanny," and the Anthropology of Ambiguity: Reflections on Robert I. Levy's Contribution to Theories of Experience in Anthropology", *Ethos*, 33(4), (2005): 499–511.
62. Wanke, Riccardo D. *Sound in the Ecstatic-Materialist Perspective on Experimental Music*. Routledge Research in Music Series. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2022.
63. Wanke, Riccardo. "The Emergence of an Ecstatic-Materialist Perspective as a Cross-Genre Tendency in Experimental Music." [In English]. *Organised Sound* 22, no. 3 (Dec 2017 2017-11-29 2017): 428-36.
64. Wanke, Riccardo. "A Cross-Genre Study of the (Ec)Static Perspective of Today's Music," *Organised Sound* 20, no. 03 (2015): 331–39. doi:10.1017/S1355771815000266.

65. Webb, John. "Schnittke in Context." *Tempo*, no. 182 (1992): 19-22.
66. Wlodarski, Amy Lynn. "George Rochberg's Road to Ars Combinatoria, 1943–63." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 12, no. 2 (2018): 119-50.
67. Young, Rob, Wire The, Rob Young, and ProQuest. *Undercurrents: The Hidden Wiring of Modern Music*. 1st ed. London, England. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Continuum International Publishing Group ProQuest Ebook Central, 2002.
68. Zentner, Marcel, Grandjean, Didier, and Scherer, Klaus R. "Emotions evoked by the sound of music: Characterization, classification, and measurement", *Emotion*, 8(4), (2008): 494–521.

69. Music and Scores

70. Adams, John. *Doctor Atomic* (2005)
71. Belling, Huw. *Fumeblind Oracle* (2021)
72. Belling, Huw. *Victory Over the Sun* (2016)
73. Björk. Spotify, *Utopia* (2017)
74. Björk. Spotify, *Vulnicura* (2015)
75. Camille. Spotify, *Ilo Veyoul* (2011)
76. Camille. Spotify, *Le fil* (2005)
77. Camille. Spotify, *Ouï* (2017)
78. Collier, Jacob. Spotify, *Djesse Vol. 3* (2020)
79. Francesconi, Luca. *Quartett* (2011)
80. Golijov, Osvaldo. *Ainadamar* (2003)
81. Mazzoli, Missy. Spotify, *A Thousand Tongues* (2021)
82. Mazzoli, Missy. Spotify, *Vespers for a New Dark Age: I. Wayward Free Radical Dreams* (2015)
83. Muhly, Nico, Dessner, Bryce, McAlister, James and Stevens, Sufjan. Spotify, *Planetarium* (2017)
84. O'Donoghue, Jessica. *Menarche* (2024)
85. Reich, Steve. *The Cave* (1993)
86. Reich, Steve. *Three Tales* (2002)
87. Saariaho, Kaija. *Innocence* (2011)
88. Serret, Veronique. Spotify, *Prima Volta* (2022)
89. Symonds, Jack. *Shape of the Earth* (2018)
90. Venables, Philip. *4.48 Psychosis* (2016)
91. Yun, Du. Spotify, *A Cockroach's Tarantella* (2020)
92. Yun, Du. Spotify, *Angel's Bone* (2017)