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A Quasi Economic Perspective on the History of New Opera

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Dove sono i bei momenti di dolcezza e di piacer;

Where are they now, the happy moments of sweetness and of pleasure?

DEMAND AND SUPPLY –

A QUASI-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE HISTORY OF NEW OPERA,

AND WHAT MIGHT BE DONE TO ENCOURAGE MORE OF IT TODAY

A report prepared as part of the Clore Leadership Programme

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However, responsibility for the opinions and recommendations expressed in this paper remains my own.

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Executive Summary

The issue of the paucity of new works by living composers being performed on main opera stages, in relation to those from an established canon or repertoire, is not new in opera – it has been around for at least 150 years.

Nor is it unique to opera – ballet, theatre, musicals and classical music all face similar issues.

In opera, the issue is essentially one of cost.

Consumer demand for quality has always meant that opera producers have rarely, if ever, made a profit. But what consumers really value in opera is singers, not composers, and a high proportion of the costs and an even higher proportion of the economic ‘rents’ in opera have always gone to them. From ‘*di cartello*’ in the early days of opera to the global superstars of today, singers have always been paid more than composers.

The growing popularity of opera amongst the middle classes from the early 1800s on exacerbated this, as the building of bigger theatres, with larger numbers of seats to fill, the hiring of permanent orchestras and choruses, and the imperative to provide more year-round entertainment only increased the power of the star singers as theatre managers struggled to fill their theatres in order to cover their fixed costs.

These economic factors also led to the development of a repertoire of established, popular works that audiences would pay to see, and for *impresari* to seek out these works from other sources, rather than rely on the more last-minute, journalistic, even hack-style on-site method composing of new operas each season that had, in general, existed beforehand. Changes in musical tastes also had an impact on this, making opera composition a more involved and demanding process than had previously been the case.

At the same time, changes in copyright law and improvements in printing led music publishers, particularly Ricordi, to sign-up promising composers with hitherto unheard of high fees, invest in the promotion and marketing of them as individuals as well as their works, and then make money on the licensing of these works to opera houses around the world.

This led to a glorious age for some opera composers, from about 1850 through to the early 1900s, where successful ones were able to extract some of these economic rents and enjoy fortune as well as fame. This effectively began an age of ‘industrialisation’ of opera production, i.e. multiple or mass production of a few works by different opera houses around the world.

It was also an age where there was little competition for the middle class ‘entertainment dollar’. The world changed dramatically in the late 1800s and then early 1900s. The consumer still had a high demand to relate to singers and performers, but this was now satisfied through the development of operetta and musicals and, more importantly, radio and the phonograph, which could do this in much cheaper and more accessible ways. Later, film, TV and electronic music only increased the trend, and the commissioning and performance of complete works of

successful new opera, which didn't translate well to these new media, became less and less frequent.

To what extent this system of economic rewards influenced the emergence and support of 'successful' composers, in terms of their ability to write works that remain in the repertoire, is ultimately uncertain and probably un-provable. Genius doesn't necessarily depend on economic factors. And nobody knows what is going to be successful instantly or years later, either in opera or any other art form or media.

But given this history, what help can it be, if any, in recommending action to encourage the support of more new opera?

The first thing is that we should start from the perspective of the singer rather than the composer. This is what audiences relate to. Ways should be considered to encourage established or ambitious opera singers to perform new work that suits their voice and their desire to have a relationship with their audience. These ways could include direct subsidy to the singer, and from the singer to the composer, rather than in effect the other way around. They need not be focused on complete new works for a main stage, but could consider more manageable output in line with how contemporary audiences want to listen to music, i.e. in the form of individual aria or duets, released on CD, DVD or radio, and available commercially and online before public performances are committed to, rather than after. Demand pull rather than supply push.

Secondly, there needs to be greater consideration to the role of *impresari* who specialise in the creation of new works. They need to be able to develop their skills through a volume of newly created work, on the basis that you need a large number of misses in order to get one hit. It means being able to have a large number of projects at various stages of development. This therefore means encouraging *impresari* or commercial producing companies outside the main opera houses, the latter being restricted in their ability to support new work through budget requirements and audience expectations. It means recycling any returns from successes back into other new works, which in turn means allowing commercial ways of remunerating composers as well as allowing commercial risk finance to be used, with the latter's emphasis on building portfolios of projects and sharing of risks and rewards with a number of parties, rather than requiring a single opera house to take a big hit on its budget in any one year.

Finally, there needs to be greater consideration to encouraging those composers who want to write opera to specialise in writing opera, and to write a lot of it. The historical data is not completely conclusive, but a large number of the composers whose works are now in our repertoire wrote their first opera around age 26, wrote on average one opera every two years, and on average wrote 27 operas each (see data in appendix VI). Clearly not every opera they wrote was then or is now a hit. But it is the volume of output, and the specialisation, that should be encouraged.

If nothing else, it would seem that the opera world could take on the role of composer-in-residence or Young Composers with the same enthusiasm and effort it gives to Young Artists. Not everything that gets written need be for the main stage. Theatre does this extensively, with a whole ecology around new work, and classical music and ballet are taking on the challenges of composer or choreographer –in-residence as responses to the challenge of creating new works.

No one answer is going to 'solve' the problem of new opera, and existing efforts by opera houses and companies should be encouraged. Clearly more can always be done. But this paper presents a new perspective that can hopefully guide efforts in the future with a greater chance of success.

Introduction

The idea that anyone would want to encourage the creation of more new operas presupposes that (a) there are not enough new operas being produced, that (b) it would be better if there were, and (c) there is some set of market, policy and/or organisational failures that prevent more new operas being produced, and that it is possible to redress these through some sort of action or policy.

Certainly there are not many new operas currently being produced compared to the various golden ages of opera. Today there are perhaps 20-30 new operas written each year across the UK, Europe and the USA, though very few are performed on the main stages of well-known opera houses. This compares to a peak of over 70 p.a. on major stages in the late 1700s, with a consistent output of 40-50 p.a. in the preceding and subsequent decades, although declining from the mid-1840s onwards. Clearly something has changed in the ecology or economy of opera that supported new work being commissioned and performed.

Would it be 'better' if more new operas were produced today?

Those that say 'yes' to this view tend to do so from either a desire to add to the operatic repertoire, partly out of sense of duty to the next generation(s), partly in order to keep opera fresh and in touch with contemporary audiences, and not become a living museum.

However, of the new operas that do get produced, very few enter the repertoire, and of the audience that attends new opera, much of it appears to consist of opera 'collectors' and other buffs, rather than a contemporary or more mainstream audience.

Perhaps we should accept that the world has moved on in the last hundred or so years, and that the world is not necessarily a worse place for it?

[with respect to]...the fate of composition in the 20th century [the] temptation is strong to see the overall trajectory as one of steep decline. From 1900 to 2000, the art experienced what can only be described as a fall from a great height. At the beginning of the century, composers were cynosures on the world stage, their premieres mobbed by curiosity seekers, their transatlantic progress chronicled by telegraphic bulletins, their deathbed scenes described in exquisite detail. On Mahler's last day on earth, the Viennese press reported that his body temperature was wavering between 37.2 and 38 degrees Celsius. A hundred years on, contemporary classical composers have largely vanished from the radar of mainstream culture. No one whispers "Der Adams" [in the way that Viennese taxi drivers used to whisper "Der Mahler"] as the composer of El Nino walks the streets of Berkeley. Ross

On the other hand, it is quite possible that many people, and not only taxi drivers, could tell you where they were when they heard the news that Michael Jackson had died, a composer (and performer) whose music touched the lives of millions despite him never stepping on the stage of an opera house.

Nevertheless, it is an interesting intellectual exercise to consider how to encourage the creation of new opera for two broad reasons:

- one, because it could help point up the limits and possibilities of public policy in the arts as the issue of the creation of new work is also of concern in other lyric and performing arts such as classical music, theatre, and ballet;
- two, because it might be an area where arts organisations (or other cultural actors) could learn from the recent advances in management thinking in business around the area of innovation (or indeed vice-versa) such that the chances of success of new opera that is produced are higher.

Both of these outcomes appear to be worthy objectives.

Before going on, it is worth having a small discussion about at least one definition, that is, what is an opera?

For the purposes of this study, I have in mind a 2-3 hour piece of drama and musical theatre, likely performed in an established opera house that can seat a 1,200+ audience, with classically-trained solo singers, possibly a chorus, a 35-70 piece orchestra, no use of a microphone or amplification, and hopefully including (from a personal aesthetic point of view) some tuneful and melodic music, including arias, duets and ensembles.

While perhaps not controversial, this definition is potentially limiting, as even many recognised operas in the repertoire don't fit this description.

However, it does help narrow the focus of the analysis, as a looser definition of drama and musical theatre that included Broadway and West End musicals, films that include music as a soundtrack, and even rock or pop concept albums/shows might prove too broad to be insightful, albeit these are all different ways for audiences to 'consume' opera-like experiences.

Having said all that, many of the trends in these cultural/entertainment sectors are the same as in the opera world, and often the same underlying reasons apply, so it doesn't pay to be too categorical or rigid in our approach.

The other definition worthy of discussion is how should we measure the success of new operas? There is a certain presumption that the more new operas that enter the repertoire, the better, as if this is a measure of their quality. This is, of course, a tall order, and one that opera itself didn't try to live up to for at least 200 years of its early history. Other art forms are not so preoccupied with this definition of success.

However, I will stick with this measure, albeit with a more modest noting of whether new opera have ever received more than one subsequent new production, rather than on whether or not they have entered the repertoire.

This paper is divided into two main parts.

The first part takes an historical look at the development of opera, particularly from an economic perspective, looking at the demand for new opera, and its impact on its supply, with a view to trying to establish the factors that caused it to reach its current situation, and give us a perspective on what constraints the production of new opera might be working under.

It openly and somewhat deliberately does not take a musical or compositional perspective, believing that economic, social, financial or technological factors are often major factors that influence the type and amount of music composed and performed, and that the study of these factors is given too little consideration in the study of the history of music, or in the production of recommendations about what is to be done.

The second part takes a contemporary look at the nature of cultural/creative industries and, with some knowledge of innovation techniques from business and other sources (including other arts forms), discusses some of the options for how the Arts Council, an opera house, or other cultural actor might want to act in order to support the creation of more new operas that enter the repertoire.

Finally, some overall conclusions are drawn, and some recommendations made for funding bodies and opera companies.

Historical Demand for new opera

There is a tendency in discussions about how to encourage the creation of new works in areas like opera, ballet, theatre and classical music to focus on the creator of the work, in this case principally the composer: How can we find more money for commissions? How can we encourage young classical music composers to compose opera? What circumstances might lead composers to write more and perhaps better-received operas?

However, from an economic perspective, this focus on the *supply* of new works ignores the *demand* side of the equation.

Almost all activity starts from this perspective, as it is the *demand* that draws forth the *supply*.

And while we can speak of the demand for a new opera as a complete work or product, it might be more useful to think of it as a bundle of products or services, all of which coalesce into a number of people choosing to attend a live performance in a particular venue on a given night in return for the price of a ticket.

There is certainly a demand for entertainment, and therefore there might be competition between attending a drama, dance and music concert, or indeed staying in and having dinner with friends.

Related to this, there might also be a demand for social prestige, and/or opportunities to network, do business and meet people and friends in a socially-acceptable environment.

There might also be demand for a relationship with a celebrity, someone rare, exciting or exotic, such as a performer or, possibly, a composer, and/or keep up with the latest event or fashion.

There may indeed be a demand to listen to some beautiful or interesting music, preferably well-played or sung, in a live environment, as music seems to have a remarkable ability to touch the human spirit. Such music might be one or two songs, or a whole evening of an integrated composition.

Finally, there might be a genuine, though not necessarily *solus*, demand to listen to new or interesting music that conveys what a composer is trying to say, and/or moves an art-form on.

All these demands were extant at the time of the early development of opera, although to a greater or lesser extent.

Developed in the early 1600s in Italy against a back-drop of multitudinous city-states and noble courts, entrenched polyphonic music, and few 'grand' secular occasions outside the church, opera started when a group of nobles started to produce their own versions of what they imagined Greek drama to have been like – including acting, singing, and costumes.

It became particularly associated in Italy with the carnival season, when the noble families (and others) would gather in towns for a period of festivities in January and February each year, before the austerities of Lent began on Ash Wednesday.

The first known opera was Jacopo Peri's *Daphne* (now lost), first performed in Florence around 1597. The first opera in a public theatre was *Andromeda*, performed in Venice in 1637. By 1700, Venice, a free-trading city well known for its carnival, reportedly had 6 opera houses.

Although it started with individual supporters who would finance a production in their own homes for the private enjoyment of themselves and their guests, opera quickly developed to a point where noble families would club together to share the costs of a season's entertainment, generally delegating the actual organising of the production to an 'impresario' (who might, but quite often didn't, make money), and later on even financing the building of theatres themselves, which were then let out to these impresarios.

It's fair to say that opera audiences at this time, and arguably still do, at least to some extent, did not attend the opera necessarily for the music, but to talk, eat, drink, gamble, and visit each other. Indeed, opera houses at the time were designed for this, with most seats in private boxes, and passageways and ante-chambers behind the boxes that facilitated socialising, even during performances.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, opera in Europe and especially in Italy was the moral equivalent of football, television and social clubs all rolled together in modern Western society – it was the main source of entertainment for individuals with money and leisure. Roselli

In this environment, new operas were requested each year, partly for fashion reasons, though also encouraged by economic ones.

The San Carlo theatre in Naples, for example, between the years 1790 and 1825, gave 122 world premieres, supplemented by 94 first local performances of works previously presented elsewhere. That's over 3 new operas per year, and nearly 3 previously-performed operas, at just one theatre (see King).

Of the 216 operas performed over that period, there were 64 different composers.

La Scala in Milan, over the same period, was responsible for 173 premieres of operas by 53 composers and produced an additional 229 pieces by 45 composers. That's 5 new operas and over 6 previously performed operas per year, in the same house.

Across the whole opera world, including Vienna and other German speaking cities, Paris, London, as well as the rest of Italy, the early operatic period was a time of enormous output.

Something like 760 operas were premiered across Europe, or 76 per year, between the years 1781-1790. In the decades leading up to this, output ranged from 41 p.a. up to 70 p.a.

Clearly, the huge volume of demand produced a huge (certainly by today's standards) volume of supply of composers who would/could write opera, although for most opera composers, opera was a sideline to their main compositional or musical duties, principally with the church or court.

This was also partly due to the seasonality of production, with one or perhaps two seasons a year.

Given the freelance nature of these opera production up to the early 1800s, preparations were often every last minute. Indeed, often both composers and performers were given only 3 weeks to create and learn an opera for that season, sometimes even less if it was an *opera buffa* or a *farsa*.

Clearly one factor in the speed of composition of the music was that operas at the time had less music in them than today – fewer instruments in the orchestra, little chorus, re-used libretti (for example, the 27 libretti of the Italian poet Metastasio (1698-1782) were used in more than 800 operas, and his most popular, *Artaserse*, was set to music more than 80 times) and long periods of spoken dialogue or recitative, for example.

For what really mattered were the singers.

The contracts between the nobles and the chosen impresario would generally specify, amongst other things, that the singers had to be of first rank, or "*di cartello*", and this was reflected in their rates of pay.

For example, in London, at the King's Theatre for the 1763-1764 season, the *primo uomo* Antonio Mazziotti was paid the equivalent of £712, while the composer Mattio Vento was paid £104. The composer's contract required him to play at all and whatever rehearsals required, play the harpsichord at other operas during the season, and compose one opera. If he composed another opera, he would receive another £38.

When Gluck's *Alceste* was first performed in Bologna in 1778, the *prima donna* received nearly twice as much as the entire chorus and two conductors combined.

And in 1838, when Naples paid Donizetti 2,000 *ducati* for a major work, a leading singer like Ronzi got 100 *ducati* per night, and could easily make a 1,000 *ducati* a month.

Musically, by 1783 operas started to become more elaborate, and by 1823 opera by and large had more concerted pieces, more scenes with chorus and extras, sometimes more historically conscious sets requiring more elaborate movement; orchestration too, though conservative audiences disapproved, was growing more complex.

Driven by these higher costs, theatres which had made a point of honour to put on two new operas each carnival season, like La Fenice in Venice, were beginning to find such a programme

unmanageable. They had to fall back on presenting one opera new to their own town but not expressly composed for it.

This shift to what was in effect a repertory system coincided with the first copyright law in Italy in 1810. Previously, if a theatre commissioned an opera from a composer, the theatre owned the rights in the work, and the composer was not able to offer it elsewhere.

This period also saw improvements in music printing, heretofore a very labour-intensive and expensive operation.

From 1803–1808, Giovanni Ricordi worked as a music copyist and dealer in printed music and instruments in Milan. In 1807 he studied printing techniques for several months with Breitkopf & Härtel in Leipzig and when he returned to Milan he founded his publishing company in 1808.

By 1814 Ricordi had ensured himself the duty of copying all orchestra and opera material of La Scala, where he also worked as a prompter, and he published the first catalogue of his editions. The publishing house already owned about 800 scores.

In 1825, Giovanni Ricordi purchased the complete musical archives of La Scala. Later taking it one step further, Ricordi started to go direct to the composer, and in 1839 he bought the copyright to Giuseppe Verdi's *Oberto conte di San Bonifacio*, for 1,600 lire, marking the beginnings of a long working relationship.

Clearly a clever operator, in 1840 Ricordi managed to persuade the Austrian government to promulgate a Convention with the King of Sardinia, to which the other Italian States would adhere, for the further protection of copyright, making his own much more valuable as they could now be enforced more widely.

Ricordi sought to promote his own and his composer's interests not just through buying up copyrights, but through advertising and promotion. For example, Giovanni's son Giulio went into the business of printing advertising posters, often by celebrated graphic artists, to help create demand for their operas.

This combination of factors – rising musical and theatrical costs leading to a shift to a repertory system demanding popular 'previously written' work, combined with increasing, almost monopolistic control over those works (there was really only one other significant publisher like Ricordi) - saw the emergence of the composer who could not only dictate terms but could impose himself as an autonomous artist, entitled to his privacy and able to create away from the world of theatre.

That was the difference between the young Rossini (1792-1865), who stayed at his impresario's house and composed with the opera company laughing, talking, singing around him, and Verdi (1813-1901) who insisted on staying at an hotel and kept the impresario at arm's length.

Furthermore, composers who had made a decided hit could pretty well control the choice of singers for their later operas. It was Verdi who was first able to demand that his works should be performed as written, without the transpositions and interpolations that had been common form. Verdi made this demand as early as 1846, seven years after his debut.

His unchallengeable position, backed as it was by a publisher who could enforce his copyright, was by then a sign that the old helter-skelter opera business with its journalistic methods was drawing to an end.

While tempting to see this as a 'good thing', from the Romantic perspective of the composer, the shift was really being driven by economics, politics and consumer behaviour, as well as music.

In 1836 a publisher could still be described by a rival as eccentric and mad for wanting to know where a score let out on hire was to be performed and by which singers. Within a few years not only were publishers beginning to exercise this kind of 'quality control', they were beginning to commission scores and act as go-betweens to composers and *impresari*.

These shifts were also combined with the growing popularity of opera, including its popularity amongst the bourgeoisie. By the mid-1850s, a growing middle class, being attracted to new, commercial opera houses un-associated with the nobility, were starting to become important consumers of opera.

This led to larger theatres being built, with fewer if any loggia, as the socialising and group bonding that took place amongst the nobility was no longer considered to be a good thing, either for them or for society.

For example, while the old court theatres were built to hold perhaps 400-500 people, new opera houses like La Scala in Milan were built to hold 2,200 in 1778, the Gran Theatre de Liceu in Barcelona – 2,500 in 1847, and the Royal Opera House Covent Garden – 2,200 in 1858.

Whether the increasing size of the auditoria really influenced musical styles, or the other way around, the costs of putting on opera went from simply extravagant to extraordinary.

Perhaps ironically, larger theatres and higher fixed costs, the impact of copyright and the general move to a repertory system leads to some predictable behaviour on the part of the consumer.

One of the effects of income on cultural consumption is a taste for improved quality in the cultural experiences consumed.

This preference for quality manifests itself in a willingness to accept and pay for higher-fixed costs (e.g. a full-time, paid orchestra rather than a freelance one), and a tendency to 'superstardom', similar to the *cartello* required by the aristocracy, just made more in tune with the contemporary industry of marketing and promotion.

Superstardom is increased by the apparatus of promotion, and the apparatus operates because the public is eager to engage with the trappings of superstardom and will spend money to revel in them. While a good argument can be made that modern technology and the cultural changes that it supports have greased the skids for superstardom, it would clearly be wrong to regard it as a new phenomenon, nor unique to opera.

In the West End, the curtain call is crucial. You have to reassure the audience that they have seen the best thing available in the marketplace

(Nick Hytner, Artistic Director, the National Theatre, quoted in Theatre Matters)

So, as opera became more popular, but yet carried huge fixed costs, it came to rely increasingly on superstars, both singers and composers.

As such it became, and continues much the same to this day, driven by star singers in the same way that Hollywood films are driven by the stars in them, rather than the screenwriter or director.

And with such a large repertoire to draw from that is acceptable to the quality-oriented consumer, there is little if any need for an aspiring or ambitious singer to seek out new repertoire in order to maintain contact with their audience or fans.

Perhaps depressing from the point of view of the composer, the un-depreciating stock of compositions keep raising the threshold quality required of new scores to gain entry to the repertory. The performed repertory can grow more and more slowly over time. Nothing in fact precludes an equilibrium in which audiences give unheard compositions no significant chance to beat out a rehearing of a familiar work and the repertory becomes closed.

Who knows what the situation for new opera would have been like today if this situation, allowed to develop over a hundred years or so, had stayed as it was in the late 1800s/early 1900s?

To some extent, there was a move away from 'proper' opera to operetta, popularised by Johann Strauss II (1825-1899) and Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880).

Musicals started to appear. For example, the Victorian era partnership of librettist W. S. Gilbert (1836–1911) and composer Arthur Sullivan (1842–1900) collaborated on fourteen comic operas between 1871 and 1896, of which H.M.S. Pinafore, The Pirates of Penzance and The Mikado are among the best known.

Even Puccini is too far along this musical continuum for some operatic tastes.

But there was a trend to other forms of musical entertainment knocking opera off its top perch.

Technology and the development of electricity, though, probably had the most impact.

In 1902, for example, the rising opera star, Enrico Caruso, recorded 10 arias in a hotel room in Milan and, thereby, helped to establish the gramophone as a serious medium for classical music.

In 1906, the year of *Salome* in Graz, the Victor Talking Machine Company introduced its new-model Victrola phonograph, which, though priced at an astronomical two hundred dollars, proved wildly successful. Caruso ruled the medium; his sobbing rendition of "*Vesti la giubba*" was apparently the first record to sell a million copies.

However, the electrification of music would forever change the world in which Mahler and Strauss came of age, bringing classical music to unprecedented mass audiences but also publicising popular genres that would challenge classical composers' long-standing cultural hegemony.

Even in 1906, rag-time numbers and other syncopated dances were thriving on the new medium. Small bands made a crisp, vital sound, while symphony orchestras came across as tinny and feeble.

Not only this, but the advent of the radio and the phonograph had a near catastrophic impact on home music-making, with sales of pianos, that mainstay of the sheet music publishing industry, falling dramatically in the early 1900s, as individuals went from being producers of their own music to consumers of other people performing music.

The low costs of LPs, tapes, CDs, and DVDs has led to a huge consumption of opera and classical music, though not necessarily in an opera house or concert venue.

But it has also led to the development of many other forms of musical entertainment, from blues to rock to pop to rap and beyond.

So it's possible to see the relative eclipse of 'classical' music by 'popular' music is really a shift towards performer-based music. Whether we like it or not, most customers prefer performer-based music, particularly when it is available at low costs.

Summary

In a sense, what began to happen in the 1840s with copyright and music printing was the industrialisation of music composition.

Yet with industrialisation, it becomes more and more evident that listeners of music identify more with the performer, with the singer, with the superstars, than with the composer, a trend that continues inside and outside opera houses to this day.

And while the non-operatic music world has embraced many aspects of this industrial composition (e.g. Tin Pan Alley, Motown, record companies generally), the opera world has yet to come up with a comparative response.

Historical Supply of new opera

So, driven by high fixed costs, the nature of audience demand (with its premium on quality, superstardom, and identification principally with the performer, rather than the composer), independent *impresari* and indeed other, subsidised, opera producers put on more and more established operas from the repertoire, and fewer and fewer new works, from the mid-1840s onwards.

This development wasn't unique to opera. By the 1850s, for example, audiences for symphonic music had grown accustomed to the idea that the music of the present did not necessarily dominate the music of the past. Whereas the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra of 1781-1785 took 87% of its repertoire from live composers, by 1850-1855 the percentage had fallen to 39 percent.

Exceptions remained, of course, and in particular premieres of new operas by Wagner (1813-1883), Puccini (1858-1924), and Richard Strauss (1864-1949) were eagerly anticipated by opera lovers and the general public alike.

So can we learn anything more about the impact that the economics of opera had on composers and the music that was written?

As mentioned above, composing operas was, historically, a freelance activity for composers, who often had other, full-time jobs as court or church musicians and who then tried their hand at opera both as an art form and in order to supplement/increase their income.

Bellini (1801-1835) was born into an age when a composer was expected to complete an opera in a matter of weeks and not, as was the case half a century later, within a matter of years. When he died at the age of 34 he had completed 10 operas – an impressive number, but at the same age Rossini had written 39, while Donizetti created 35.

The move from a seasonal type of opera ecology where a composer could make a useful addition to his freelance income to one where there could be significant rewards from writing a successful opera led to the development of composers who specialised only in opera. Composers such as Donizetti (1797-1848), Bellini (1801-1835), Verdi (1813-1901) and Puccini (1858-1924) all focused on opera; with little other output either of choral, vocal or orchestral work (see appendix xxx).

Indeed the output of these composers is quite remarkable in terms of numbers of operas written - Donizetti 75, Bellini 11, Verdi 31, and Puccini 13 - though this also shows the trend to fewer and fewer operas being composed, particularly once a reputation had been established. For example, after writing two per year early in his career, Verdi retreated to writing one every 10 years or so.

Today, there have been something like 430 new operas commissioned since 1991 (author's own research, based on operabase.com), although this figure includes many 'studio', workshop and chamber opera commissions. This averages out around 20-30 per year across the UK, Europe and the USA – lower than the figures for the mid 1800s, though not by that much.

But the existing system doesn't provide for many composers to specialise in opera, nor to write many of them, as their early counterparts were sometimes able to do.

Included in the above data are c. 300+ composers who have written at least one opera in the past 18 years, although only 30 have composed 3 or more. Of the over 220 different commissioning organisations, although only 38 had commissioned 3 or more operas.

So it's quite a small market of buyers and sellers, and the ability to develop specialist skills in commissioning and composing are limited.

This raises the interesting question of whether or not who commissions and the economic rewards from writing an opera influences the number and type of operas written.

Some authors have suggested that the patronage system, at least as it existed in Germany, Austria and Italy during the 18th century, provided an environment uniquely conducive to making music as a profession, with multiple potential employers in different cities competing for musicians, and as a result, music composition (not just opera) experienced a kind of golden age, with more individuals employed as musicians, more turned to composition as part of their responsibilities, which in turn, it is argued, implies that more composers of superior talent would emerge.

However, this 'competing noble courts' hypothesis receives mixed support from the data on 646 composers studied by economist F.M.Scherer (see bibliography) - the more politically centralised Austrian environment dominated, though Italy was nearly as active as fragmented Germany in giving birth to composers relative to its population.

An alternative to the patronage system is a free market system.

The free market might provide maximum opportunity for the composer to pursue his most creative instincts, or it might reward disproportionately the composition of unimaginative fluff appealing to some lowest common denominator.

Timothy King, an economist with the World Bank, reviewed data that covered periods when both the noble courts and the free market system predominated. His conclusion was that the economic analysis of incentives and working conditions is very limited, perhaps even useless, in its capacity to explain why genius emerged when it did. With hindsight, the patronage-driven operatic market of Vienna suited Gluck and Mozart, but the inferior conditions under which market-driven opera was created in Venice, Milan and Naples did not prevent the emergence of the genius of Rossini and Donizetti.

Unfortunately, King's analysis stops short of the major changes in copyright laws in the 1840s, although the impact of changes in the law in 1810 seems to have had a dramatic impact.

There was a significant negative effect on the volume of new operas performed, but a positive one on the chances of success of an opera staying in the current repertoire, according to figures used by King. (see table below)

Success rate of operas remaining in the repertoire, by decade of premiere

Decade	# of opera premieres at major houses	# still in repertoire	'Success rate' %
1751-1760	415	4	1%
1761-1770	521	17	3.3%
1771-1780	703	16	2.2%
1781-1790	760	21	2.8%
1791-1800	435	9	2.1%
1801-1810	408	5	1.2%
1811-1820	375+ (*)	15	4.0%
1821-1830	350+ (*)	18	5.1%
1831-1840	325+ (*)	28	8.6%
Total	4,292	133	3.1%

(*) Estimate, as unable to find original source. Quoted in Timothy King, based on Charles Parsons, The Mellen Opera Reference Index (see bibliography)

Some economists have argued that, like modern high-technology investments, the skew distribution of potential rewards confronting composers provides a more or less ideal motivational system to induce striving toward fame and wealth.

Unless their affairs were managed particularly badly, those who are gifted enough to be composers can at least be reasonably certain of employment, albeit that this employment is likely to come mainly from teaching and performance rather than composing. This has always been the case, and only a privileged few composers were ever wealthy enough to rely solely on their composing to make a living.

But if their efforts to excel in performance or freelance composition are unusually effective, they might achieve, in Samuel Johnson's apt phrase, riches beyond the dreams of avarice.

There seems to be some truth to this, at least in terms of opera composition pre and post the impact of changes in copyright legislation and enforcement.

Currently, though, we seemed to have lost in the opera world is the ability to reward talent 'beyond the dreams of avarice', and hence the number of composers that might be drawn to write opera, let alone successful opera, is much reduced. The dreams of avarice have been replaced by a hope of a commission for a world premiere that is often to be its dernière.

Perhaps this would have happened anyway.

With a static to declining number of opera houses starting in the early part of the 20th century, high fixed costs of producing an opera, and increasing competition for audiences with new forms of technology and music leading to a narrowing of the repertoire, it's unlikely that many opera houses could afford to pay the costs of a new commission versus the costs of hiring the rights to an existing work, or indeed the scores to a work that is out of copyright, a trend that first emerged after 1810.

Summary

Economists have tried to consider whether the type of economic reward for a composition influences the number of compositions or their quality.

There is no definitive evidence that one system is always better, for example that the patronage system is always better than the free market, or vice versa.

But there is some evidence to suggest that a system that rewards disproportionately more successful operas is more likely to produce more popular operas in terms of their ability to join the repertoire, other things being equal.

And there is some evidence to suggest that the current ecology is not producing enough composers who can specialise in the writing of operas, itself linked to higher chances of success

It is with these themes in mind that we now turn to what might be done about it.

What is to be done?

Based on this particular history of new opera, as an explanation for where we have got to today, there seem to be at least three levels where public policy or action might be expected to affect the ecology or economy of the creation of new operas:

- At a systemic level
- At the organisational level
- At the level of the composer

The system for new opera

It was interesting to read an Arts Council of Great Britain report on opera and ballet in the UK 1966-69, chaired by Lords Harewood and Goodman.

A point was made by the Composers' Guild that the Royal Opera repertory did not include enough British compositions. The Committee recommends that as soon as sufficient money is available, additional subsidy should be offered to opera companies specifically earmarked for the commissioning, production and performance of contemporary British opera; it would certainly seem the right of a British composer of merit to have an early production of his work

This would seem to fit with the view that small amounts of money are likely to bring about large amounts of work in the case of composers

Artists are typically multiple job-holders and spend long hours on artistic work, implying that even small rewards in the form of, say, commissions, grants or prizes have a considerable impact on creative supply. The policy implication is that small increments in income from any source...could have significant results because artists have a strong preference for art work while being averse to other work. Peacock

It seems hard to argue with this view, and certainly there is a need to produce more operas, from whatever source, in order to increase the chances of one of them being successful.

Admittedly, economic analysis cannot predict the appearance of genius. True genius is an extremely rare phenomenon, and from an economic point of view, an increase in the number of individuals pursuing musical composition as a profession implies at best in a very weak statistical sense that one or a few will be outstanding geniuses

However, the above analysis suggests that a more commercially-driven system, with the emphasis on greater rewards for the 'superstars' of composing, is at the very least worth encouraging.

The unsubsidised commercial industries, being reliant on the market, have to please the public taste for novelty. Some economists even argue that the market is therefore a superior institution for fostering creativity and cultural innovation than subsidies Towse

Certainly, the results suggest a mixed system where some composers could be paid regularly to compose (not necessarily for the main stage of a large opera house), while others operate in a more free-lance, market-driven model.

In trying to come to a view as to where to place the emphasis on any policy initiatives, it is worth remembering that opera shares a number of characteristics of other cultural/creative industries, and an analysis of how these approach the issue of new work could perhaps provide some interesting pointers.

The University of Leeds professor of media and music industries David Hesmondhalgh has identified a number of distinctive features common to the cultural industries.

Distinctive Features of the Cultural Industries

Problems:

1. Risky Business (nobody knows)
2. Creativity vs. Commerce
3. High production costs and low reproduction costs
4. Semi-public goods; the need to create scarcity

Responses:

1. Misses are offset against hits by building a repertoire
2. Concentration, integration and co-opting publicity
3. Artificial scarcity (e.g. advertising, copyright, limiting copying)
4. Formatting: stars, genres and serials
5. Loose control of symbol creators; tight control of distribution and marketing

Source: Hesmondhalgh, The Cultural Industries, p. 18

A very common feature of creative/cultural industries is that 'nobody knows' what is going to be successful, and the generic response to this is to have a number of projects on the go in the hope that at least one of them will be successful to cover all the rest.

This system is also one of 'superstardom', in which the rewards of success go to a very few, yet the prospect of these rewards is highly motivational for a large number of individuals (and firms).

This can apply to performers, financiers, exhibitors, producers and indeed composers.

Some interesting statistics are:

- Nearly 30,000 albums were released in the USA in 1998, of which fewer than 2% sold more than 50,000 copies
- 88 hits in 1999 – 0.03% of releases – accounted for a quarter of US record sales
- Of the 350 or films released in 1996, only 10 or so will be box- office hits.

Historically, the productions of operas follow a similar pattern, at least in terms of chances of success as defined by remaining in the current repertoire.

The historical, pan-European output of new opera reached c. 76 per year in the decade 1781-1790, most of which were from Italy. It varied from 40-50 per year in the preceding decades, though dropped down to about 30 per year up to the 1840s. Of all of these, maybe 3% of these operas are still in the repertoire (see table above)

Currently there are 41 forthcoming world premieres of operas for the period November 2009-July 2010 listed on www.operabase.com, an online database and resource that tracks over 600 opera houses and companies from around the world..(see appendix xxx).

This seems high compared to the average of 23 new operas over the period 1991-2008, although this may reflect problems in collecting comprehensive recent data.

Still, it's not far off the volume of new operas being produced from the period of the 1840s onwards though, with this level of volume, it is not surprising that very few operas become big enough hits to enter a very well-established repertoire.

If we lower the hurdle rate of 'success', and ask how many of these operas have had at least two subsequent productions (or revivals) since their premiere, rather than 'enter the repertoire', then c. 16% of new operas can be qualified as a success.

The UK and Europe tend to go for fewer operas, achieve a slightly higher success ratio (25-30%), while the US, with its bigger market but also larger number of studio or workshop-based companies, produces a higher number of new operas, though with a lower success rate (9%) .

So, if opera is like other cultural industries, the key to calling forth *successful* new opera is to have a slate of investments in a large number of operas with the expectation that the majority of them will be failures, but at least one will be a superstar success and pay for the rest.

Is such a state possible with opera?

On the face of it, funding new works by (state or privately) subsidised opera houses doesn't look like it will create a large number of operas. There are only 6 major opera houses/companies in the UK, and they are focused on producing quality repertoire in order to cover their fixed costs, and therefore (arguably) they are not best placed to develop new operas. Budgets at 95% of capacity do not allow much room for manoeuvre. Certainly the number of new operas produced by these houses is relatively few, although their record is not that bad in producing successful new opera, depending on how you define success.

Perhaps commercial producers could be encouraged to step in? However, if money could be made in this area, then no doubt there would already be private, commercial producers operating like this as well.

Potentially, though not necessarily, there is some sort of 'market failure'. Market failures can be hard to define, as the failure is often a failure to produce a desired outcome, rather than the failure of a market itself. Indeed, the market may be operating all too well.

Before looking specifically at opera, it is worth a brief consideration of other art/entertainment forms.

Certainly, many people in musical theatre would share a view that there are no good new musicals coming through the system any more, and that this is largely due to the fact that putting on a musical is so expensive, and in particular paying for the stars that are needed to attract people to the theatre. It is safer to rely on established products that can help draw a crowd rather than use a cast of unknowns in an unknown story with music by an unknown composer, however good.

Films suffer the same issues, with it harder and harder to create a media buzz that will draw audiences to the cinema (or TV or DVD). In fact, the amount of money spent on promotion and distribution can often exceed the cost of producing the film. And despite the fact that the economic rents from films often go to the stars rather than the producers, film-makers increasingly rely on them in order to help sell a film.

Two 'market failures' then could be access to distribution and marketing, and finance (the latter of which might be used to solve the former).

Having said that, it is interesting to watch the developments around live relays, broadcasts and cinema showings of opera, particularly from the Metropolitan Opera House and the Royal Opera House.

For a recent performance of *La Traviata* from Covent Garden, while 2,200 people watched it inside the house, up to 100,000 people watched it around the country in a mixture of free outdoor screenings and paid-for cinema showings. While as a whole this activity still needs to be subsidised, principally through commercial sponsorship, it does open up the idea of developing commercial revenue streams for new work, and possibly bringing in commercial investors through the development of film and DVD sales.

It's even possible to start thinking that maybe a route forward is to think first about the commercial exploitation via film or TV of a new work before it is commissioned, in the same way that TV production and British film-making look to pre-sales and distributor commitments, particularly from the all-important US market, before undertaking any filming work.

It is certainly a test of popularity and relevance to contemporary audiences, and it is on the back of these tests that finance is sought for production.

Indeed, for the mass contemporary audience, consumers in general develop a relationship with performers via TV, film or music first, and only once they are established in these media do some of these consumers follow them into the theatre or concert hall, to see or hear their latest work.

Even so, this way of operating is expensive. A typical West End show costs £500,000+ for a drama and £5m for a musical, and films even more, much of which goes to the star or stars.

Of course, even having a star in your show is not a guarantee of success, so it is interesting to see how the commercial theatre sector deals with this risk.

Due to the inherent riskiness of the commercial production, risk and reward is shared out at each stage of a show's development, with producers (or investors) taking various financial stakes. Even a show as seemingly inevitably successful as *Spamalot* required 13 producers/investors, and *Coram Boy's* transfer from the National Theatre to the West End required 11, plus 8 associates.

Given this system exists for theatre and musicals, there is no reason to suggest it couldn't work for opera, new or old, if commercial producers felt there was a demand for it.

For example, some opera does get produced commercially, generally by single producers, though falling back on the highlights of the repertoire, performing in commercial theatres, using technology such as microphones and amplification, and employing relatively cheaper artists from central and Eastern Europe.

In these respects, at least, opera doesn't seem to suffer any more than commercial theatre in producing new work. However, one difference between the opera and commercial musical theatre world is the area of commissioning.

Commissioning is a long-established practice in the classical music and opera world, with opera houses sometimes vying for the right to produce the next work from an established and successful composer.

While this is an entrenched habit within the non-commercial sector, it is possible to argue that the culture of commissioning represents a significant dis-incentive for the creation of new work.

However, in general it's fair to say that the actual price of a commission is not the major financial factor in the decision as to whether or not to go ahead with a new work.

What is a major financial cost to an opera house in putting on new work is the lowering of ticket prices to attract an audience (for example, for *The Minotaur* at Covent Garden, the top ticket price was £65, versus £185 normally), the sunk production costs of a work that will unlikely be seen again, and the opportunity cost of not putting on performances of their normal repertoire with its known financial returns.

These add up to significant investments that are not recognised in the cost of the commission and, like the commission itself, cannot be capitalised.

But to allow the financing of productions to be opened up to private investors or lenders, suitable rights need to be gathered and allocated. Currently too few rights are retained by the commissioner of a new opera. While this may be the norm in opera, classical music and ballet, it is not the case in commercial theatre, musicals or film, and it suggests there needs to be more flexibility in the financing of commissions if commercial capital is to be attracted to it.

Summary

Overall, then, at a systemic level, while it is difficult to be too conclusive, there are a number of areas that might be worth further thinking about:

- Starting from the perspective of commercial exploitation before funding production, including a plan for media as well as opera house distribution
- Securing involvement of stars before funding production or indeed commissioning
- Developing models for sharing risk at different stages of a project's development, probably including private sector investment
- Considering moving away from the commissioning model

Organisations involved in new opera

A McKinsey study of leading media companies in Europe showed that all successful innovators have three characteristics in common: they have a clear sense of direction, they are open to new ideas, and they have a rigorous approach to execution.

Media players can learn from successful developers in other industries that have similar dynamics, such as fashion producers or venture capitalists. Key success factors in innovation management include: generating breakthrough ideas, focusing on the most promising ideas, testing pilots/prototypes extensively, and rigidly monitoring and managing new products' success. Many of these have been taken up by different opera houses at different times, though no doubt more could be done.

However, it is unlikely that they will be able to support the kind of focus necessary to build and maintain a capacity for successful innovation, as the volume of new work that can be supported is limited.

One key piece of learning is that innovation requires different people to those that are in the current business. Almost by definition, the skills and mindset that make someone successful in one environment are unlikely to make them successful in another.

The Innovator's Dilemma (author: Clayton Christenson) is that it is always going to be easier to please your existing, high-priced customers than it is to focus on the upcoming, potentially revolutionary product that might replace it.

Indeed, studies of American opera companies seem to support this. Opera companies compete primarily on quality, mainly the vocal prowess (or at least renown) of their principal singers. The share of opera house budgets devoted to personnel expenses accordingly increases with their size – 53% for the smallest group, 70% for the largest. Repertory choices are also more conservative when the company has full-year contracts with its artists, which implies heavier fixed costs and reliance on donations. Conversely, opera companies with slender budgets are more venturesome in repertory (see Caves).

Since a key feature of innovation is that different people are better at innovating than others, and that these people need to have resources built around them that will enhance their ability to succeed, a film or commercial theatre model of production is suggested, with shifting coalitions of experts, depending on the project.

And this in turn leads to a focus on the role of the producer or, as they used to say, the *impresario*, in order to bring it all together.

... it is still true that a feature common to all artistic enterprise, subsidised or commercial, high art or pop culture, is that it seeks out outstandingly talented 'personalities', the high income superstars. Great rewards fall to the chosen few...also to a host of 'middlemen' whose function it is to search out and promote talented newcomers. Towse

Certainly the commercial theatre world embraces the role of the producer, and even goes so far as a sector to run a charity course that develops a young generation of producers, plus has a structure where the leading producers and theatres contribute to a fund that these young producers can apply to for investment funding (Stage One, run by established producers and supported by a voluntary levy on the major producers and theatres). Crucially, this fund is not a grant but an investment, with any positive returns ploughed back into the fund. Nor is it a 'lead' investor - in fact, it can only invest up to £15,000 and 10% of the budget, and prefers to be the last in rather than the first.

Perhaps this is an idea that could be studied within the opera world.

It's relevant to consider the nature of the British film industry, as described by a report into the film industry by the House of Commons in 2003.

In general, British producers are under-capitalised and raise money for their productions on a film-by-film basis. This places them in a weak negotiating position with distributors who usually acquire the valuable rights in the films they distribute, and those films which are successful benefit exhibitors and distributors before the producer realises any profit. It also means that producers are unable to spread risk across a slate of films, offer proven financial management or produce a recognisable track record to attract investors.

As the commercial success of the US film industry demonstrates, a winning film industry is distribution-led. Money spent in development and production is earned back through international distribution via a series of sequentially-ordered release 'windows', first cinemas, then video/DVD, then pay and free TV. Profits are taken, and the monies from distribution are eventually reinvested up-stream in new production, creating a virtuous circle. A valuable library of underlying rights to films is thus created, which can be exploited over many decades.

Crucially, distribution 'pulls' production and the combined efforts create a significant profit centre. And distribution in the US market is the biggest pull for production.

Unfortunately, the indigenous commercial UK film industry remains resolutely production-led. In the absence of UK-based global distributors, most domestic UK film production is financed at arm's-length from the distribution sector and relies on international film sales to connect the product with individual distribution in each territory.

The majority of productions are thus financed by a mix of supply-side measures, including subsidies, sales to UK terrestrial broadcasters, and by 'pre-selling' ad hoc packages of intellectual property rights through sales agents. In the UK, films are not 'pulled' into production by a single distributor or sales agent with a global reach, but 'pushed' into production by highly entrepreneurial producers.

And, even where a distribution interest has been generated, the producer's links to distribution are often mediated through a third-party, the sales agent, who generally deals, not with one distributor, but many covering different territories.

As a consequence, the linkage between the production base and the cycle of market exploitation (cinema, DVD/video, pay/free TV, secondary markets) is structurally weak.

In the majority of cases, revenues generated by a film are not recycled directly back into UK production, but instead reside with off-shore distributors who have no direct relationship at all with the UK production base.

And the fragmentary nature of this financing model contrasts sharply with the integrated model which forms the basis of US studio financing. The 'cottage industry' approach of the UK production sector, comprising scores of film companies, is remarkably successful at delivering excellent, culturally significant but ultimately unprofitable British films.

This industrial structure also fails to deliver a consistent flow of films such that risk can be spread across a slate of projects. This inability to run a portfolio of films to mitigate financial risk acts as a very strong disincentive to private investment into the UK production sector.

Obviously, this approach also does nothing to build the significant corporate structures which are essential to achieve a sustainable industry.

So perhaps the role of distributors should be considered, with the ability to underwrite the marketing and distribution of operas in North America and other key markets and technologies, should be investigated. Through this distribution function, the revenue for future productions – the slate – might be realised, and the under-capitalised, risky, 'cottage' industry that make up many single projects could be supported.

Summary

The ability of the subsidized opera sector in the UK to produce significant numbers of new operas is limited, given financial, organizational and audience constraints.

One possible forward is to try to involve the private sector, through the support of individual *impresario* or firms that can specialise in developing new opera, can develop slates of projects, and can pursue commercial-attractive distribution deals, all of which might be able to attract and sustain portfolio investment from third parties.

Composers of new opera

It has to be acknowledged that, whatever is done to promote the role of producers, or to improve the process of innovation within individual organisations, whatever those organisations might be, the stock of potential composers may just not be there to build on – i.e. it's not a question of devising the right system for the next genius composer to rise to the top, as there aren't enough composers out there wanting to write an opera, let alone finding those who might have some potential for it.

The challenge for media developers is to find enough true talent initially to feed into the innovation funnel, as there is a limited pool available in terms of both artists and concepts/plots for shows, films and magazines. Bilton

This is a problem shared by theatre, musicals, classical music and ballet, and it is interesting to consider their experiences.

Certainly opera houses could consider some of the ideas that come out of other art forms, such as composers-in-residence, reducing the focus of creating a fully-fledged work for the main stage, seeking composers from within existing practising artists, rather than solus composers, etc.

There is unlikely to be one answer that suits all individuals and organisations, and the key from a systemic perspective is to have different approaches.

However, from an analysis of historically the most successful opera composers as ranked by Bachtrack (see appendix VI), some interesting observations can be made:

- The average age when they wrote their first opera was 26, with half aged between 24 and 28
- They wrote on average one opera every two years, with the majority between one and three
- They wrote operas for, on average, 33 years, and wrote 27 operas each (with very wide variation) and, for at least half of them, opera writing was their main compositional output

This compares to the current 30 or so living composers who have composed more than 3 or more operas. Philip Glass appears to be the most prolific current composer, with 17 operas to his name. Jonathan Dove is next at 12. Then it appears to be a bit of a jump down to relatively unknown composers like Edward Rushton and Giorgio Battistelli, with 7 each.

So the current system certainly doesn't seem to be supporting the volume of output by current composers necessary to generate enough operas to enter the repertoire.

While not definitive statistically (and the sample includes a number of operetta composers), this analysis suggests one thing a subsidised opera house could do would be to support a young composer's programme with ambitions to be on the same scale of their current Young Artist's programme (often up to 12 young singers per year). Getting composers into the theatre, preferably as working musicians or music staff, is perhaps the best way of developing them.

Classical music in general appears to be moving away from a commissioning model towards composers in residence, and similarly ballet companies are beginning to adopt this approach. It is also well-known, practised and financially supported in the theatre world.

There could also be less focus on the creation of a 'magnum opus' for the main stage, with all the difficulties that that entails – composers do need to be able to fail before they can succeed. Not all the operas by the most successful opera composers are successful, and certainly not seldom their first ones.

Summary

More could be done to support identifying and training young composers, particularly in their mid-late 20s, as a way of building up a wider base of composers who have the skill and interest to write for a theatre or opera house.

Summary & conclusions

In conclusion, opera, like much of classical music and the other lyric arts, is facing an uphill struggle to renew itself, much of which it can do little about.

When faced with high costs and prices, subsidised organisations (either public or private) tend to prefer 'quality', of performers and repertoire. Much of this is based on consumer behaviour that is unlikely to change, and has been going on in the case of opera for at least 150 years, if not more.

Technological change, especially in the form of cheaper access to entertainment, is also a major factor that is unlikely to improve in the favour of opera produced on the main stage of a traditional opera house.

While no one thing or activity is likely to make much impact on this, I have tried to suggest in this paper that incorporating some of the ideas about innovation from business, within the activities of existing opera houses/companies, could be helpful. Some of this is already being done, and should be encouraged.

More importantly, I've suggested that the way to get audiences to want to listen to new work is to get singers - the performers, the superstars - to want to perform it, and for it to be distributed in a way that audiences want to hear it.

This could appeal to established singers looking to enhance their artistic reputation, or aspiring singers wishing to differentiate themselves in the marketplace.

Subsidy should go to the singer first, rather than the composer, as a way of manifesting the importance of this link.

In addition, it's possible to consider the writing of arias and duets first which, if viewed as successful, lead to the writing of the rest of the opera, rather than seeing these pieces as an indivisible piece of composition.

Subsidising such singers would need to include a proportion of funds to assist with distribution, marketing and promotion, whatever forms those might take – much like the role Ricordi and other publishers played in the 19th century.

I also believe it is through supporting those 'middlemen', the producers, the *impresari*, with a system that provides superstar rewards to composers for success, that we could see the return of great new opera.

Where subsidy occurs outside of singers and producers, it should focus on identifying composers who want to work in theatre, who want to write more than one opera, and who are willing to write quickly. Specifically, I've suggested that supporting more composers-in-residence and Young Composer's programmes would be useful.

One of the difficulties with defining creativity is its mystical, quasi-spiritual quality, detached from the systems and structures that may support or inhibit it.

However, through focussing on the creativity in the systems and the organisations involved in producing new opera, we can hopefully produce more, successful, new opera compositions.

This would likely mark a return to the mindset of opera as entertainment, with a greater emphasis on connecting the singer(s) with the audience, and with a more 'work-a-day' approach to composing.

Mahler...codified the etiquette of the modern concert experience, with its worshipful, pseudo-religious character. Opera houses of the 19th century were rowdy places; Mahler, who hated all extraneous noise, threw out singers' fan clubs, cut short applause between numbers, glared icily at talkative concertgoers, and forced latecomers to wait in the lobby. Emperor Franz Joseph, the embodiment of old Vienna, was heard to say: "Is music such a serious business? I always thought it was meant to make people happy". Ross

With luck, it will also mark a return to the great bonanza that can come with success, and re-establish those happy moments of sweetness and pleasure in the hearts of opera-lovers everywhere.

Recommendations

For Arts Council England and other public funding bodies

1. Consider funding trained opera singers, either aspiring or established, to perform music by living composers
 - a. Can be arias, duets, or ensembles, rather than whole operas, with preference for the former
 - b. May be for performance in subsidised opera house or company, or for commercial recording, film or performance, with preference for the latter
2. Consider supporting and funding private management companies/producers or existing commercial enterprises (“impresari”) to promote singers who perform newly composed music and who are able to distribute work across different media i.e. opera house, theatre, recordings, film, internet, etc.
 - a. Such producers to negotiate their own rights to works, borrow money and retain earnings
 - b. Some consideration to be given to the development of an international distribution capability as well as individual production capabilities
3. Consider funding certain core costs of these companies alongside a ‘last 10%’ approach to investment (rather than subsidy) in individual projects, much like Stage One in theatre, and perhaps with subsidised opera sector involvement
4. Consider other success-based funding or support i.e. the more successful a new work based on agreed criteria, the more support the company receives.
5. Consider lobbying the Treasury for tax relief on private investment in these companies, similar to tax relief for film production
6. In funding companies to produce new work, preference to be given to freelance rather than fixed-cost base companies
7. Consider creating a conference or forum of new works practitioners in opera, ballet, theatre, classical music and other art forms for the development and sharing of ideas and best practice

For Arts Council England and other public funding bodies as well as subsidised opera houses or companies

8. In funding new work, preference to be given to work that can demonstrate it has passed certain hurdles within a structured process or development pipeline
9. In funding new work, preference to be given to work where other funders, not limited to other public or private funding bodies, are also investing or funding – indeed, a greater preference to be given to work where there is a greater number of other funders, public or private, in partial development of a ‘slate’ principle
10. In funding new work preference to be given to work that has a documented plan for commercial exploitation, perhaps with conditional commitments and pre-sold film, TV or recording rights, for example

For subsidised opera houses or companies

11. To create funded positions for composers to operate as residents or associates within a building in the way that theatre and ballet appear to have taken this on and which are available to Young Artists
 - a. A condition of such employment is that work or works for performance must be created during a composer’s tenure, although this work need not be for the main stage
 - b. Where possible, preference to be shown to composers in the appointment of music staff, musicians, and other related positions
12. To create funded producer or impresario roles within an opera house of individuals who can operate in both the commercial and public sectors and produce work not necessarily on the main stage of the opera house but yet provides a commercial or other type of return
13. To consider moving away from commissions for new work towards ‘music for hire’, options and participation rights in new works, including the possibility of receiving future rewards from such investments
14. In funding new work, preference to be given to work that is co-commissioned and/or co-produced with other opera houses, particularly in the United States, as is common in the film industry
15. To consider strategic alliances with opera houses in lower-cost countries for the development of new work

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Appendices

- I. New opera activity 1991-2008
- II. Forthcoming world premieres November 2009 – July 2010
- III. Ideas for innovation from other art forms
- IV. Ideas for innovation from business
- V. Flow of funds for new opera – text, chart
- VI. Historical composers – table

Appendix I

New opera activity 1991-2008

Country/Opera House	New operas	Annual average	Successful operas*	%	Most Successful Opera	# of showings
	#	Per annum	#			
UK	58	3.5 p.a.	17	25%		
Of which:						
Royal Opera House	7	1 every 2.5 years	4	57%	The Tempest	4
English National Opera	9	1 every 2 years	2	22%	Blond Eckbert	4
Glyndebourne	2	1 every 9 years	1	50%	Flight	8
Opera North	2	1 every 9 years	2	100%	The Adventures of Pinocchio	3+**
Welsh National Opera	2	1 every 9 years	0	0%	-	-
Scottish Opera	2	1 every 9 years	0	0%	-	-
Almeida Opera	12	1 every 1.5 years	3	25%	Powder her face	21
Aldeburgh Opera	4	1 every 4.5 years	2	50%	Ion	3
Channel 4	5	1 every 3.6 years	1	20%	The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit	6

*has received more than one (i.e. at least two) subsequent production (revival or new production); can include co-productions

** at time of writing

Note: 1991 selected due to availability of data; most data from operabase.com, which has data from 1996

Country/Opera House	New operas	Annual average	Successful operas*	%	Most Successful Opera	# of showings
Europe	99	5.5 p.a.	29	30%		
Of which:						
Paris Chatelet	5	1 every 3.6 years	2	40%	El Nino	4
La Monnaie, Brussels	4	1 every 4.5 years	4	100%	Death of Klinghoffer	6
Salzburg Festival	4	1 every 4.5 years	2	50%	L'amour de loin	6
Munich Biennale	6	1 every 3 years	0	0%		
Batignano, Italy	3	1 every 6 years	0	0%		
Zurich Opera	4	1 every 4.5 years	0	0%		

*has received more than one (i.e. at least two) subsequent production (revival or new production); can include co-productions

** at time of writing

Note: 1991 selected due to availability of data; most data from operabase.com, which has data from 1996

Country/Opera House	New operas	Annual average	Successful operas*	%	Most Successful Opera	# of showings
	#	Per annum	#			
USA	244	14 p.a.	22	9%		
Of which:						
Metropolitan Opera	6	1 every 3 years	1	15%	The Voyage	2
New York City Opera	4	1 every 4.5 years	0	0%	-	-
Houston Grand Opera	16	1 every 1.1 years	5	33%	Little Women	19
San Francisco Opera	7	1 every 2.6 years	3	42%	Dead Man Walking	17
Los Angeles Opera	9	1 every 2 years	0	0%		
Lyric Opera of Chicago	7	1 every 2.6 years	2	29%	A View from the Bridge	4
American Music Theatre	7	1 every 2.6 years	0	0%		
American Opera Projects	8	1 every 2.3 years	0	0%		
Music Theatre Group	20	1.1 every year	1	5%	Marco Polo	2
Opera Delaware	11	1 every 1.6 years	0	0%		

*has received more than one (i.e. at least two) subsequent production (revival or new production); can include co-productions

** at time of writing






Note: 1991 selected due to availability of data; most data from operabase.com, which has data from 1996

Appendix II


Forthcoming World Premieres of Operas.

Source: Operabase.com, October 23, 2009


November 2009



- Nov 05  **World premiere** Nantes. Michel Musseau: [Le Concile d'amour](#) (5-10 Nov)
The Borgia pope is sinking down into immorality with delight. God asks the Devil to help him stop the terrestrial orgy. A joyous and blasphemous tragedy; Opéra pour voix, instruments, marionnettes et machineries; After Concile d'amour, tragédie céleste by Oskar Panizza
- Nov 13  **World premiere** Leeds. Dove: [Swanhunter](#) (13-22 Nov)
Libretto: Alasdair Middleton, after Norse myth; Lemminkainen travels north to find a wife on a journey that culminates in his death. His mother uses the magical and healing power of the human voice in song to nurse him back to life
- Nov 14  **World premiere** Rostock. Georg Kreisler: [Das Aquarium](#) (14 Nov)
- Nov 27  **World premiere** Reims. Xavier Rosselle: [Radeaux](#) (27-28 Nov)
- Nov 29  **World premiere** Erfurt(Theater). Jeffrey Ching: [Das Waisenkind](#) (29 Nov-16 Jan)
Oper in 2 Akten; Libretto by the composer, after an old Chinese story and its European translations

December






- Dec 01  **World premiere** Montpellier(Operas). Gérard Calvi: [La cantatrice chauve](#) (1-6 Dec)
After Ionesco

2010 January


- Jan 01  **World premiere** Gelsenkirchen. Various: [Die Affäre Manon](#) (1 Jan)
Internetoper, Musik: Boulevard Solitude (Henze) und Manon Lescaut (Puccini)








- Jan 18  **World premiere** Tel Aviv. Shohat: [The Child Dreams](#) (18-25 Jan)
A journey of escape towards the unknown, people immigrating into a new land to escape a threatening past as death and despair intertwine with a hope for a better future; After the play by Hanoch Levin
- Jan 30  **World premiere** Darmstadt. Carl Orff: [Gisei Das Opfer](#) (30 Jan)
Musikdrama (composed 1913); Following a prologue in which a man and a woman mourn the loss of their son Totaro, the story of his sacrificial death is told; After the Japanese tragedy 'Terakoya'

2010 February




- Feb 19  **World premiere** Wien(Theater). Johannes Kalitzke: [Die Besessenen](#) (19-25 Feb)
- Feb 22  **World premiere** München(SO). Eotvos: [Die Tragödie des Teufels](#) (22 Feb-9 Mar)
Comic-utopian opera in three parts; Lucifer guides Adam and Eve through a world full of conflict, misunderstanding and uncertainty. In the end, Lucifer parts from his body, and his tragedy becomes Man's tragedy: people cannot assign the evil anymore, and find it in themselves; Libretto: Albert Ostermaier, after 'The Tragedy of Man' by Imre Madách
- Feb 24  **World premiere** Boston(OB). Zhou Long: [Madame White Snake](#) (24 Feb-2 Mar)
A powerful snake demon gives up her immortality to become a woman and experience human love; Libretto: Cerise Lim Jacobs, after Chinese myth
- Feb 25  **World premiere** Braunschweig. Ella Milch-Sheriff: [Baruchs Schweigen](#) (25 Feb)
After a man dies, his daughter discovers his diary and the tragedies of his life, coming to a new understanding; After the composer's own father's diary for 1943
- Feb 28  **World premiere** Wien(SO). Aribert Reimann: [Medea](#) (28 Feb-12 Mar)
Libretto: Aribert Reimann, after Grillparzer

2010 March

- Mar 01  **World premiere** Lyon(Opera). Saariaho: [Emilie](#) (1-13 Mar)
It is 1749 and a dying woman writes a farewell letter to her lover, looking back on the passions of her life; Opéra en neuf scènes; Libretto: Amin Maalouf

- Mar 04  **World premiere** Dessau(Fest). Moritz Eggert: [Bordellballade](#) (4-5 Mar)
A new Threepenny Opera for modern times; Librettist: Franzobel
- Mar 05  **World premiere** Hof. Roland Baumgartner: [Luther](#) (5 Mar-23 May)
- Mar 13  **World premiere** Osnabruck. Nader Mashayekhi: [Nizami](#) (13 Mar)
Libretto: Nadja Kayali and Angelika Messner
- Mar 14  **World premiere** Basel. Beat Furrer: [Wüstenbuch](#) (14 Mar)
The desert as the symbol of the alien and empty, metaphor for nothingness and the loss of memory; Libretto: Beat Furrer and Händl Klaus, after Ingeborg Bachmann
- Mar 19  **World premiere** Bremen(Theater). Bernd Redmann: [Die Gehetzten](#) (19 Mar)
'The Hurried Ones'
- Mar 25  **World premiere** Lisboa. Holszky: [Hybris/Niobe](#) (25 Mar-5 Apr)
Scenic world premiere; Drama for voices, 30' (Schwetzingen, April 2008); Libretto: Yona Kim
- Mar 26  **World premiere** Mannheim. Bernhard Lang: [Montezuma, Fallender Adler](#) (26 Mar)
The meeting of Cortez and Montezuma, and the destruction of the Aztec culture by the Christian Spanish -- an opera about disappearance; Libretto: Christian Loidl





2010 April

- Apr 09  **World premiere** Lisboa. Hugo Ribeiro: [Os mortos viajam de metro](#) (9-11 Apr)
'The Dead Travel by Metro'; Exploration of the drives linking artistic creativity to suicide, set in an abandoned metro station with the shades of Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath and Sarah Kane
- Apr 23  **World premiere** Rouen. Thierry Pecou: [L'amour coupable](#) (23-27 Apr)
Opéra in 5 acts; Libretto: Eugène Green, after the play 'La Mère coupable' by Beaumarchais
- Apr 24  **World premiere** Antwerpen(Vlaamse). Elena Kats-Chernin: [The Rage of Life](#) (24-30 Apr)




Libretto: Igor Bauersima

- Apr 24  **World premiere** Regensburg. Franz Hummel: [Zarathustra](#) (24 Apr-23 Jul)
Libretto: Sandra Hummel, after texts by Nietzsche and his contemporaries
- Apr 27  **World premiere** München(Biennale). Philipp Maintz: [Maldoror](#) (27 Apr)
The author of the source text meets his creation, the epitome of absolute evil;
Libretto: Thomas Fiedler, after 'Les Chants de Maldoror' by Comte de Lautréamont
- Apr 28  **World premiere** München(Biennale). Marton Illes: [Die weiße Fürstin](#) (28 Apr)
Scene polidimensionali XVII; After the first draft of the dramatic poem 'The White Princess' by Rainer Maria Rilke
- Apr 30  **World premiere** Dallas. Heggie: [Moby-Dick](#) (30 Apr-16 May)
An exploration of the lethal power of obsession and the need for human connection




2010 May

- May 04  **World premiere** København(KGL). Edina Hadziselimovic: [Waiting in Nowhere](#) (4 May-7 Jun)
Can love and compassion survive within the confines of four walls in no man's land?; Chamber opera on the experiences of asylum seekers in Denmark; Libretto: Rubén Palma
- May 05  **World premiere** Luzern(Theater). Georg Graewe: [Barbara Strozzi](#) (5-24 May)
A research journey into the life of Barbara Strozzi, a 17th century singer, composer and muse. A musical play with time, perception, reality, memory and speculation.; Musiktheater
- May 07  **World premiere** Kaiserslautern. Helmut Bieler: [Gestohlenes Leben](#) (7 May-4 Jun) The events of the night of the 21/22 October 1940, when 50 Jews were deported from Kaiserslautern
- May 08  **World premiere** München(Biennale). Klaus Schedl: [Amazon](#) (8-12 May)
Music: Klaus Schedl, Tato Taborda; Concept: Laymert Garcia dos Santos, Peter Weibel; Media: Peter Weibel, José Wagner Garcia; Advisors: Davi Kopenawa



(shaman), Bruce Albert (anthropologist)

- May 08  **World premiere** Seattle. Daron Aric Hagen: [Amelia](#) (8-22 May)
Amelia interweaves one woman's emotional journey, the American experience in Vietnam, and elements of the Daedalus and Icarus myth to explore man's fascination with flight and the dilemmas that arise when it is used for exploration, adventure, and war; Libretto: Gardner McFall, after a story by Stephen Wadsworth
- May 09  **World premiere** München(Biennale). Lin Wang: [Die Quelle](#) (9 May)
Problems of preserving and transforming identity, and finding an individual voice in an increasingly multicultural world
- May 16  **World premiere** Köln. Hoffmann,I: [Vom Fischer und seiner Frau](#) (16 May)
Jazzoper für Kinder ab 4 Jahren; Libretto: Barbara Deeken, after the fairy-tale by Philipp Otto Runge

2010 June

- Jun 06  **World premiere** Bonn. Klaus Lang: [Buch Asche](#) (6 Jun)
- Jun 13  **World premiere** Saint Louis. Peter Ash: [The Golden Ticket](#) (13-26 Jun)
Libretto: Donald Sturrock, after Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl
- Jun 18  **World premiere** Warszawa(Wielki). Szymanski: [Qudsja Zaher](#) (18-20 Jun)
A poetic tale of remembrance and death which unfolds underwater; Opera in two acts with prologue; Libretto: Maciej Drygas

2010 July

- Jul 02  **World premiere** Neustrelitz. Gunther: [Luise](#) (2 Jul-1 Aug)
Operetta to mark the bicentenary of the death of Queen Luise; Libretto: Dirk Heidecke, after the childhood of Queen Luise
- Jul 24  **World premiere** Santa Fe. Lewis Spratlan: [Life is a Dream](#) (24 Jul-19 Aug)
Libretto by James Maraniss

Appendix III

Innovation ideas based on other performing arts

1. Composer/writer/choreographer in residence
2. Writer's centres/offices in theatres
3. Associate roles rather than full-time ones for writers/choreographers
4. Studio theatres/spaces available for trialling new work
5. 'Ladders' of opportunities below the main stage for creators of new works
6. One act productions of new works
7. Triple bills of new works
8. Portfolio approach of many new works rather than few
9. Lower production costs/shared production costs across new works
10. Encouraging established performers who want to create
11. Encouraging creators in other sectors like TV and film
12. Festivals of new works
13. Literary department that work with aspiring playwrights
14. Dedicated staff for new work

Appendix IV

Innovation Ideas from Business

1. Don't always aim to please your best customers (Innovator's Dilemma)
2. Large Pipeline of projects
3. Small bets on large number of projects
4. Focus on filtering mechanism between idea generation and execution
5. Fast-failing/early failing
6. Speed to market
7. Open innovation involving customer, employees, and/or other firms
8. Business model innovation
9. Business process innovation
10. Increasing use of IT
11. Increasing use of globalisation

Appendix V

Flow of funds for new opera

What follows is a general description of how a new opera gets commissioned and paid for. Each opera and each opera company is different, and it is not meant to represent any individual commission.

The process of getting a new opera produced usually starts with an existing, generally publicly-subsidised opera house or company. Sometimes it might be a festival. There have been instances where TV companies have commissioned new operas, but these instances are relatively rare. There do not appear to be any film, recording, music publishing or other media companies commissioning new opera, nor does the commercial theatre industry do so.

The desire to commission a new opera is generally artistically-led, rather than commercially or financially driven, although sometimes it is part of a desire to connect with a particular audience. However, it often comes more from a perspective of 'something must be done' i.e. it is the responsibility of a subsidised company to support existing, living composers by encouraging them to produce more work and to add to the operatic repertoire. There is partly a feeling that this is what other generations have done, and what ours ought to do. It is a generally a model of patronage.

There can also be a sense of artistic excitement about working on a completely new piece of work, never done before in the whole world, which helps support this type of model.

Whatever the reason, the senior management team will all have an input into discussing the type of opera desired, and the potential cost.

Assuming the company has made a decision to put on a new opera (principally based on whether or not they can afford to financially), then the artistic or music director will approach a small number of usually well-known composers to see if they have interest in writing a new opera, what topics or themes might interest them, who they might like to work with as librettist and/or director, whether they have time (these composers are often 'booked' years in advance, have 'slots' for when they intend to compose particular works, and composing an opera is likely to be very time-consuming), and what would be the likely fee.

These conversations are likely to closely involve the chief executive or general director, as there are marketing and financial as well as artistic ones to consider.

Discussions with a composer can take a short or long time, as in general there is no time constraint on them. Whatever is commissioned is not likely to be delivered until a few years' hence for the composer's reasons listed above, and because opera companies generally plan many years in advance, partly because their key asset, the singers, are much in demand, but also because the logistics of bringing various key people together on a given project takes a large amount of organization and planning.

Having said that, if a new opera is commissioned for delivery in 4 years' time, but it takes 5 or 6 years, then as long as this is known about enough in advance, an opera company can reschedule its seasons to accommodate the delay.

Such a situation may also occur if the financial position of the opera company has changed significantly in the time period between commissioning an opera and receiving the finished product.

Although the opera company is the 'buyer' of a new opera, it is also possible to describe the general situation as one of 'supplicant' to a composer.

There have been something like 400 new operas commissioned since 1991, although this figure includes many 'studio', workshop and chamber opera commissions. This averages out around 22 per year across the UK, Europe and the USA.

Of these commissioners, there were over 220 different ones, although only 38 had commissioned 3 or more operas.

And of the c. 300+ composers who have written an opera in the past 18 years, only 30 have composed 3 or more operas.

So it's quite a small market of buyers and sellers.

Given the dearth of opera commissions, established composers of opera are generally busy with other commissions. It certainly isn't a case of fending off large numbers of aspirant yet qualified composers anxious for their first or next break, the way it can seem to be in film scripts or songwriting, although perhaps less so in theatre, ballet or classical music more generally.

Assuming a commission has been agreed, then the opera company pays some money to the composer (and librettist), generally with some money down, the rest due in various installments and/or on final delivery of the work. While there is no fixed amount or agreed schedule of fees for a new opera, the total can range from £30,000 - £200,000 and sometimes more.

For this, the opera company receives no rights in the work, other than the right of first performance, and the option of being able to hire out their production to any other opera company that might wish to perform the work in the future with that production. Opera companies don't seem to ask for any more rights, nor do they appear to try to negotiate 'work for hire' agreements as is often the case in musical theatre (where the commissioner retains all the rights to the work commissioned). Very few, if any, operas are composed under an 'option' agreement as happens in the film industry.

When the work is finally produced, the opera company also has to pay the composer Grand Rights i.e. a percentage of the ticket revenue, generally 5-10%. Plus the company also has to pay the composer's music publisher a fee for hiring the actual music (i.e. the orchestral parts, conductor's score, and vocal scores).

Compared to a production of an out-of-copyright opera where the opera company owns its own copies of the music, or can hire them cheaply, all these costs can be significant, and for smaller companies prohibitive. For larger companies, it can amount to 10-20% of a new production's total costs, although this is not always a decisive financial factor as, very roughly, lead singers and production costs account for 60-70% of 'bought-in' costs, before the costs of an in-house orchestra and any chorus, so the actual 'music' costs are not necessarily the ones that break the bank.

What really does appear decisive in the financial decision to put on a new opera is the lowered ticket prices that are necessary in order to attract an audience.

In some cases, lowering of prices and less than full occupancy can mean as much as 50% less revenue per performance than a regular piece of the repertoire. This not only affects the actual revenue for the opera company, but represents a significant opportunity cost of not performing a more popular piece, with the consequent need for higher revenue from other operas that they perform, if any. This can be particularly difficult for companies with high fixed costs and which budget audiences of c.90% of capacity, not uncommon in both subsidised and non-subsidised opera houses.

Another factor in this opportunity cost calculation is the fact that very few new operas ever get performed outside their initial performance run. This means that the cost of the production cannot be amortised or spread over a number of seasons, and that all the financial impact occurs in one financial year.

In rough order of magnitude, these opportunity costs can be as much as the actual cost of the production, making it very difficult financially to put on new opera.

In theory it might be helpful to manage these losses through a system of only commissioning synopses and/or musical treatments before commissioning and committing to production of a full new opera. It doesn't seem to work this way in opera, although opera houses can and often do cancel productions of new operas if the financial condition of the company has changed materially from when it originally commissioned the piece.

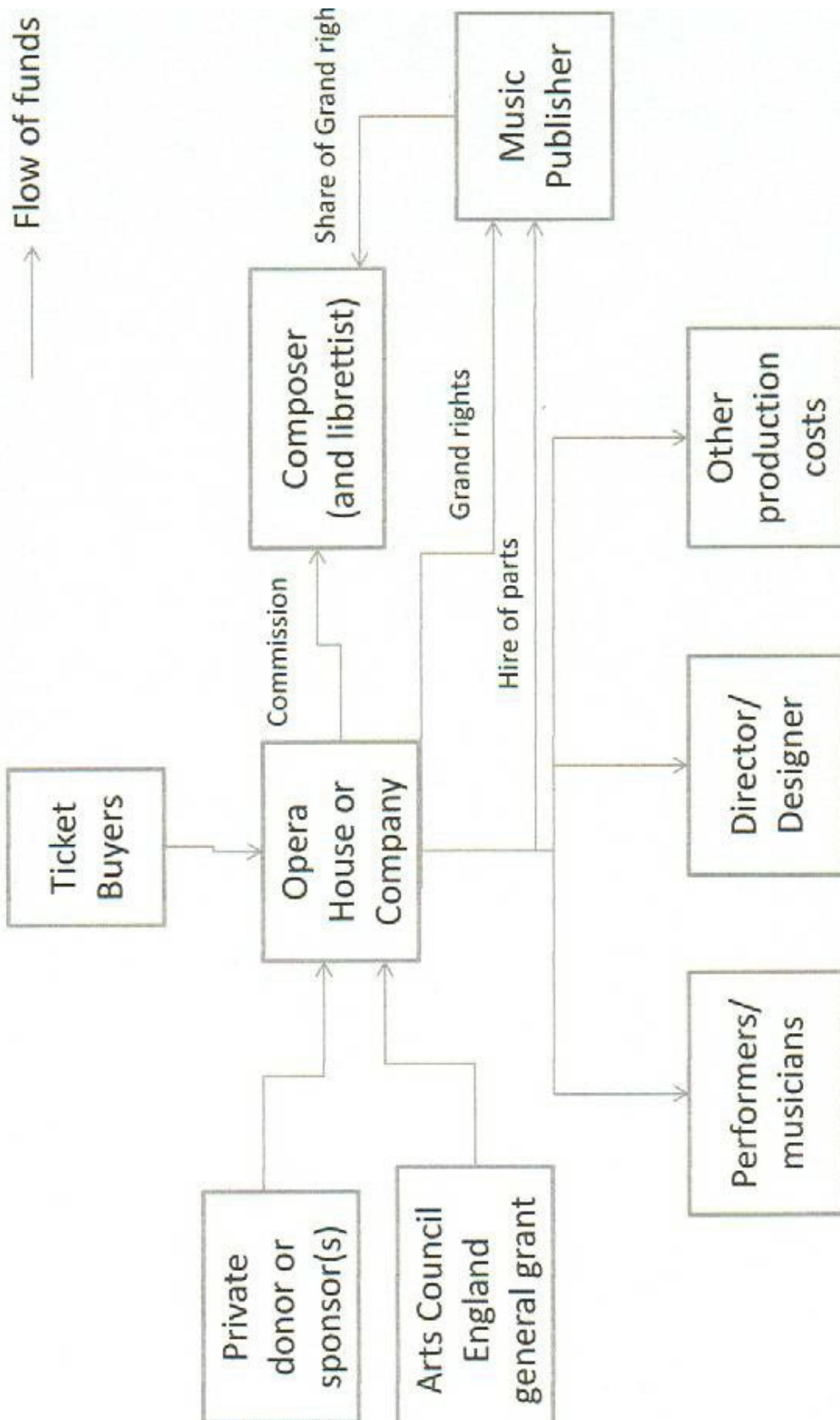
In practice, due to the big financial risks involved in putting on new opera, opera companies only tend to put on new opera if they can get some subsidy, generally from private donors, for the actual commission. Sometimes additional subsidy is available for the actual production, although generally this is not very great.

In all this discussion, it's worth noting that the music publishers (assuming a composer has signed up with a publisher) receive no proportion of the commission fee paid to the composer, and indeed invest significant editorial and other resources in producing the actual sheet music that is to be performed. Apart from Boosey & Hawkes, it seems, these publishers are generally small, under-capitalised and often charitable firms who make these investments in their signed composers in the hope of earning enough money back over the course of the copyright they

share with the composer (for the life of the composer plus 75 years after the composer's death) to pay for the investment today.

It's an interesting thought as to whether such an approach would be a helpful model for public and private subsidy of commissions, at least as a way of generating funds for future commissions, although in the short-run it is unlikely to have any major impact on the amount of work produced.

Flow of funds for new opera



Appendix VI

Historical composers – please see attached table

rank	Name	When Born Year	First Opera Year	Age at First Opera	Last Opera Year	# of years writing opera #	Total # of Operas #	Operas per year #	One opera every x years x	Other works including songs #	Ratio of o to total w %
1	Verdi	1813	1839	26	1893	54	31	0.6	1.7	18	63%
2	Mozart	1756	1767	11	1791	24	22	0.9	1.1	424	5%
3	Puccini	1858	1884	26	1926	42	13	0.3	3.2	7	65%
4	Rossini	1792	1810	18	1829	19	39	2.1	0.5	88	31%
5	Wagner	1813	1832	19	1882	50	15	0.3	3.3	10	60%
6	Strauss, Richard	1864	1894	30	1941	47	15	0.3	3.1	132	10%
7	Donizetti	1797	1816	19	1845	29	75	2.6	0.4	79	49%
8	Bizet	1838	1862	24	1874	12	10	0.8	1.2	0	100%
9	Handel	1685	1705	20	1738	33	47	1.4	0.7	565	8%
10	Janacek	1854	1887	33	1927	40	9	0.2	4.4	0	100%
11	Strauss, Johann II	1825	1871	46	1897	26	17	0.7	1.5	160	10%
12	Gounod	1818	1851	33	1884	33	13	0.4	2.5	18	42%
13	Britten	1913	1941	28	1973	32	15	0.5	2.1	92	14%
14	Massenet	1842	1867	25	1922	55	25	0.5	2.2	220	10%
15	Tchaikovsky	1840	1867	27	1891	24	11	0.5	2.2	80	12%
16	Lehar	1870	1896	26	1934	38	26	0.7	1.5	0	100%
17	Offenbach	1819	1847	28	1881	34	100	2.9	0.3	2	98%
18	Humperdinck	1854	1893	39	1919	26	8	0.3	3.3	0	100%
19	Gluck	1714	1741	27	1781	40	46	1.2	0.9	8	85%
20	Bellini	1801	1825	24	1835	10	11	1.1	0.9	0	100%
	Average	1818	1845	26	1878	33	27	0.9	1.9	95	53%
	Standard Deviation	53.0	56.6	7.7	59.5	12.7	24.1	0.8	1.2	152.0	36%