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MAMZER/BASTARD

Incorporating Jewish Cantorial Music into Contemporary Opera

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ABSTRACT

This practice-based research supports the creation of my opera *MAMZER/BASTARD*, a new operatic work for performance by an Orthodox Jewish Cantor and opera singers, staged by the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. The context for this research project is the doctoral composer-in-residence scheme in association with the Royal Opera House (ROH) and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (GSMD).

The research sets out to explore the juxtaposition of opera and Eastern European Ashkenazi Jewish Orthodox Cantorial Music. It builds upon my personal history and background with Cantorial music traditions and expands on my previous experience in bringing together different genres and musical practices in my stage works.

As this musical tradition is little known in the West, the focus of this practice-based research project was to contextualise this musical world in a theatrical and dramatic environment, specifically: 1) examining the tradition of Cantorial Music, in particular its relation with opera and drama; 2) finding an appropriate dramaturgical framework in which to place this music. The methodology used to examine and establish a relationship between the Cantorial Music tradition and my own compositional operatic practice focuses on four key aspects: Found Material, Jewish Prayer Modes, Heritage and Hauntology and Cantorial Improvisation.

As will be discussed, a historical connection between opera and Cantorial Music exists; however, to the best of my knowledge, this has never been explored in an impactful way that has resulted in significant new work, contributing to new knowledge and offering an insight into a type of musical tradition largely unknown to western audiences.

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Please note:

Alongside this written material, I have submitted an appendix of supporting documents. In order to allow the reader to find supporting materials in order of appearance in the commentary, the appendix is divided into five folders (and subfolders) representing the five chapters in the table of contents (and their subsections). Instructions on referring to relevant folders and documents can be found in the footnotes where appropriate. The name of the relevant folder will appear first, followed by a secondary folder and the title of the document (e.g. SM.XX). For example:

Please refer to Chapter 4 → 4.5 → SM.XX.

These supporting materials are referenced in the commentary. All paper-based materials can also be found in the booklet accompanying the commentary.

Furthermore, I have created an additional folder titled: MAMZER/BASTARD. This folder is provided separately, in order to allow easy, direct access to the opera's core material when necessary. It is divided into five subfolders:

Score, Libretto, Recording, Video, Images

These four subfolders are referenced in the commentary as: SM.A, SM.B, SM.C, SM.D, SM.E

Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank those who helped in the making of *MAMZER/BASTARD* and this research: Prof. Julian Philips my supervisor, *MAMZER/BASTARD* creative team and cast, production team at the Royal Opera House and the Hackney Empire Theatre, and to all the GSMD students who participated in workshops.

Special thanks to the following for their support: John Fulljames, Sarah Crabtree, Jessica Cottis, Rachel Lerman, Ruth Mulholland, Mathilda du Tillieul McNicol, Dominic Wheeler, Armin Zanner, Alex Mermikides, Biranda Ford, Sarah Bell, Jonathan Vaughan and Christian Burgess.

FOR MY FATHER

1. Introduction: Two Research Strands

This is a practice-based research project focused on the creation of a new operatic work for performance by an Orthodox Jewish Cantor and opera singers, staged by the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. The work sets out to explore the juxtaposition of opera and Eastern European Ashkenazi Jewish Orthodox Cantorial Music.

The context for this research project is the doctoral composer-in-residence scheme in association with the Royal Opera House (ROH) and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (GSMD): a unique collaboration between an opera house and a music conservatoire. The scheme, run every two years, offers one composer the opportunity to be a doctoral composer in residence over a three-year period whilst receiving mentorship, support and resources in bringing the work to life. During this time, the composer researches and writes a major work, which is then staged by the ROH at the end of the residency. The performance takes place in year 3 of the residency (in my case, in June 2018).

I have always been interested in the use of found material in my own compositional work and the notion of cross-cultural influences. My recent compositional practice has included works that demonstrate this, for example¹ *Kara-Oke II* (2017), which incorporates the use of live karaoke and challenges the conventions of high and low art; *Black Sand* (2013), which explores 1950s American suburban culture with a sound world incorporating fragments of pop songs and archival television adverts; and *Drowned in C* (2015), originally conceived as a response to 'In C' by Terry Riley, which uses time-stretched extracts from 'In C' to create an acoustic drone piece based on slowly shifting textures. Context plays a major role in how one perceives music, and I was strongly committed to and engaged with the idea of bringing Cantorial Music into a contemporary operatic setting for the first time. This research project builds upon my own personal history and background with this musical tradition and expands on my previous experience in bringing together different genres and musical practices in my stage works².

¹ Please refer to Chapter 1 —> SM.1 for a video of *Kara-Oke II* (2017), SM.2 for audio excerpts of *Black Sand* (2013) and SM.3 for an audio recording of *Drowned in C* (2015).

² For further information regarding previous works, please refer to Chapter 6: References and Bibliography.



Figure 1: Images from previous work *Kara-Oke II* (2017), depicting the use of live karaoke in performance

Growing up in an Orthodox Jewish family in Bnei Brak, one of the most religious cities in Israel, there were a number of focal points in the Hasidic world that suggested music to me and served as a source of inspiration for this research and consequently the final opera. As a result, I started exploring the world of the Hasidut movement as a basis for creating a new dramatic/theatrical work. It is necessary to talk about the context and cultural environment to which Cantorial Music belongs and to allow the reader and audience to enter a specific state of mind, immersing themselves in the language and distinctive world of this music.

Cantorial Music shares many similarities with the recitative that developed in Western art music during the 17th century, yet it remains distinctively different. As this musical tradition is little known in the West, the focus of this PhD was not to create a didactic opera that might familiarise the Western audience with the Cantorial Music tradition but rather to contextualise this largely unknown musical world in a theatrical and dramatic context (clearly, the possibility of presenting a complete commentary reflecting a deeper socio-historical evaluation of Cantorial Music was outside the scope of this practice-based compositional research).

Having this personal, familial and societal experience with traditional religious music, but feeling very much alienated³ from it in more recent years, I knew it would be a challenge to find a dramatic structure that could make possible this largely unknown—at least in the opera world—style of music based on rigid rules, rituals and hierarchies, to be developed in a contemporary, interactive and non-judgemental way. I was looking to develop a structure that could communicate specifically through both texture and the universal aspects of emotion and to enable the Cantorial Music to exist organically as part of a narrative, rather than being a purely decorative element.

In doing so, I aimed to understand the wider cultural context for a work like *MAMZER* and also ascertain the practices, artistic fields or traditions to which it could belong. There were a number of potential research areas: 1) operatic works that integrate music of an unfamiliar culture; 2) use of Jewish materials in the operatic practice of other composers; 3) operas rooted in drone music accompaniment; 4) operatic works that use ‘found material’ as their main compositional source, whether directly or indirectly. Although a detailed analysis of this wider cultural context is outside the scope of this commentary, I feel it is important to address this briefly:

- 1) Since the beginning of operatic history, numerous operatic works have borrowed music from unfamiliar or exotic cultures: Mozart *The Abduction from the Seraglio* (1782), Verdi’s *Aida* (1871), Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Mikado* (1885), Puccini’s *Madam Butterfly* (1904) and *Turandot* (1924), and in more recent years Philip Glass’s *Satyagraha* (1979) and *Akhnaten* (1983), to name but a relevant few. Whilst *MAMZER* could perhaps be broadly viewed in the West as ‘exotic’, my approach in this work was not influenced by these pieces in any discernible way. Instead, *MAMZER* incorporates music directly from my own personal heritage and my own culture.
- 2) The use of Jewish materials in the operatic practice of other composers has most commonly manifested in the subject, themes or libretto of the opera, rather than the source music itself. Examples for this include: David Tamkin’s *The Dybbuk* (1933), Kurt Weill’s *The Eternal Road* (1937), and Arnold Schoenberg’s *Moses und Aron* (1957). These operas are written within the structures and musical vocabulary of Western art music, rather than building on a Jewish musical vocabulary, for example, modes, melismas, ornaments, and harmonic structures.

³ Having left religion at the age of 18.

To the best of my knowledge, there are no mainstream contemporary operas (i.e produced by a major opera house) that have used Jewish music as primary musical source materials.

3) Cantorial music accompaniment is rooted in aspects of drone music, and the nature of the Cantorial biblical text is at times repetitious. As a result, repetition of text in *MAMZER*'s libretto writing was stylistically integral: it was inspired by and in reference to many biblical texts in the form of cumulative songs. These use repetition as a device for expressing certain motifs and teachings, in addition to using Jewish symbolism, metaphors, riddles and allegories, often in a playful manner (a classic example of this can be seen in some of the songs recited in the Haggadah⁴ at Passover, which consists of text structures that are modified only by small progressive additions)⁵. Furthermore, the libretto combines four different languages: Hebrew, English, Yiddish and Aramaic, a mix of narrative alongside biblical and prayer-based texts.

There are a number of examples of operatic works that interweave various text sources through repetition, and that take a minimalist or drone-based approach to the accompaniment, particularly with the rise of American minimalism since the 1970s. Examples include: Robert Ashley's *Perfect Lives* (1984), Meredith Monk's *Atlas* (1987) and Steve Reich's *The Cave* (1993). Despite the broad similarities in set-up, *MAMZER* uses text repetition to allow a closer symbiosis between the libretto and the Cantorial music's text and biblical resources, whilst the works mentioned above use repetition in a more abstract manner; as an integral aspect of the overall musical texture. Thus, *MAMZER* is taking a far more traditional approach in its use of repetition and minimalist structures, primarily to more closely support and evoke the Jewish Cantorial environment.

4) Perhaps the most relatable area of study to my approach are operatic works that have used found material as their main source of composition. Meaning, works that reference and explore existing musical sources in a way that impacts the composition and sound-world as a whole. The existing musical source is not borrowed, but rather forms the building blocks from which the piece is created. Works which I felt had an inspiring approach, especially in exploring such cross-cultural music-drama exchange, include: Heiner Goebbels' *Ou bien le débarquement désastreux* (1995), and William Kentridge and Philip Miller's *The Head and the Load* (2018). Both works incorporate traditional music and instruments, and use text in multiple languages.

⁴ The Haggadah is a Jewish text that sets forth the order of the Passover Seder. Particular examples of cumulative texts within the Haggadah: 'Chag Gadya' and 'Echad Mi Yodea'.

⁵ This will be further discussed in Section 4.4, where examples for repetition are provided.



Figure 2: An image from artist William Kentridge and composer Philip Miller's *The Head and the Load*, presented at both Tate Modern (2018, London, UK) and Park Avenue Armory (2019, New York, USA) Photo © Stella Olivier

The outcome was an authentic sound world, explored through the cultural heritage of its performers. Similarly, in making *MAMZER*, I sought to develop such relationship with my found material (Cantorial music) in a way which would impact my score, vocal writing and overall sound world.

Due to the sensitivity of the subject matter and my proximity to it, I gradually discovered my own personal take on this very specific field of opera-making. This process of creative discovery was very much a collaborative exercise in which I worked closely with the creative team that was built up around me⁶:

- Samantha Newton and Rachel C. Zisser, *librettists*
- Jay Scheib, *director*
- Jessica Cottis, *conductor*
- Yair Elazar Glotman, *soundtrack designer*
- Madeline Boyd, *designer*
- D.M. Wood, *lighting designer*
- Paulina Jurzec, *video designer*

⁶ For a complete personnel list of the production, please refer to Chapter 1 —> SM.4.

The multi-faceted nature of the art form meant that there were many threads to my research: Cantorial Music research, libretto development, cinematic dimension, visual language, sound design and production. With this, in making this piece, my central parallel creative research aims were the following:

1. Cantorial Music research: to examine this vocal tradition from different angles, in particular its relation with opera and drama.
2. Searching for a dramaturgical framework: to contextualise this music in a dramatic, theatrical, operatic setting.

These research aims contributed to the overall objective initially discussed, which was the creation of a new operatic work for performance by an Orthodox Jewish Cantor and opera singers. To reflect this, I have structured the commentary in a way that encapsulates and allows these two creative research aims to coincide side by side—Cantorial Music and dramaturgical framework—in order to allow them to be viewed almost in parallel. Together with the score and supporting materials, I will outline the various creative approaches I have taken in incorporating Cantorial Music into a dramatic, theatrical environment and into my own compositional practice, with the intention of highlighting the different areas in my research that I find most relevant to the opera's composition as a whole.

In Chapter 2: Cantorial Music Research, I will lay out the basic Cantorial Music terminology, essential to overviewing the research, with a focus on the Golden Age of Cantorial Music and the various challenges it imposed on the creative research. In Chapter 3: Searching for a Dramaturgical Framework, I will outline the dramatic research themes (late return, post-trauma, loss and nostalgia, in addition to a social and historical overview) as a background for the creation of the libretto and the dramatic world of the opera.

In Chapter 4: Methodology, I will present the four key aspects that emerged from my research, which I explored to adapt and unify my two creative research strands into a new operatic work. The subsections are 4.1: Found Material, 4.2: Jewish Prayer Modes, 4.3: Heritage and Hauntology, and 4.4: Cantorial Improvisation.

In Chapter 5: *MAMZER/BASTARD*, I will demonstrate how the above four key aspects landed in the final opera in the context of the three-year residency, in addition to providing timelines and highlighting various points in the process. I will conclude with discussing public and critical reception, as well as outlining any issues and considerations for future productions, and end with a personal account and reflection on my research aims and the creative process as a whole.

Perhaps the greatest potential for this practice-based research project lies in the fact that, as discussed in the next chapter, a connection between opera and Cantorial Music exists; however, to the best of my knowledge, this has never been explored in an impactful way that has resulted in significant new work. It would be easy to assume that this is because it is religious music, and the idea of music serving as entertainment was not a common practice and was forbidden in more Orthodox settings. However, the music of other religions, in particular that of Christian liturgical function, has made a successful transition into more secular environments. Jewish Cantorial Music still remains mostly unknown to the wider public. For this reason, as a musician educated in both traditions, I felt that there was significant potential for creating an engaging new work and offering an insight into a type of artistry largely unaffected by popular culture and the modern world.

2. Cantorial Music Research

I spent the first year of the doctoral composer residency scheme immersing myself in and researching the musico-historical aspects of this vocal tradition, and its potential relationship with opera and drama, before I was able to creatively engage with the artistic possibilities it afforded. Since Cantorial Music dates back to the 7th century, it was vital for me to understand the tradition in a deeper sense, in order to be able to determine a specific time period and style that I would like to focus on. What resulted was a focus on the Golden Age of Cantorial Music, in the Eastern European Ashkenazi style. This is perhaps unsurprising, as this is where my family originates from and primarily where my earliest interactions with and knowledge of Cantorial Music lies.

After outlining my two main creative research strands in the introduction (Cantorial Music and a dramaturgical framework), in this chapter, I will focus on my Cantorial Music research, providing an overview and a discussion of the musical systems used, focusing on the Golden Age of Cantorial Music. I will conclude by providing an insight into the collaborative nature of my Cantorial Music practice-based research process.

2.1 Terminology and Overview

The word 'Hazzan' (Cantor) refers to a Jewish musician trained in the vocal arts who helps to lead the congregation in songful prayer. The very basic qualifications demanded of the Hazzan are knowledge of biblical and liturgical literature, prayer motifs, a good voice and an artistic delivery. The starting point for every Hazzan would be training in Nusach Ha Tefilah (a version of the prayers in Hebrew). 'Nusach' refers to the style of prayers and liturgical traditions, which varies across the different Jewish communities.

Jewish Cantorial Music can be divided into two major groups of origin: Ashkenazi (originating in Central and Eastern Europe) and Sephardic (originating in West Asia and beyond). These two groups are completely separate in style and musical language and often follow different systems of musical modes.

For example, the Ashkenazi Cantorial practice distinguishes a number of ‘steigers’ (scales) named after the prayers in which they are most frequently used, whilst the Sephardic Cantorial practice uses scales that are somewhat like the ‘maqamat’ of Arabic music. In both traditions, the scales used may vary both with the particular prayer and with the season. In some cases, the actual melodies are fixed, whilst in others the prayer reader has the freedom of improvisation. More about the Ashkenazi steigers and how I have used them in my own composition will be discussed in Section 4.2: Jewish Prayer Modes.

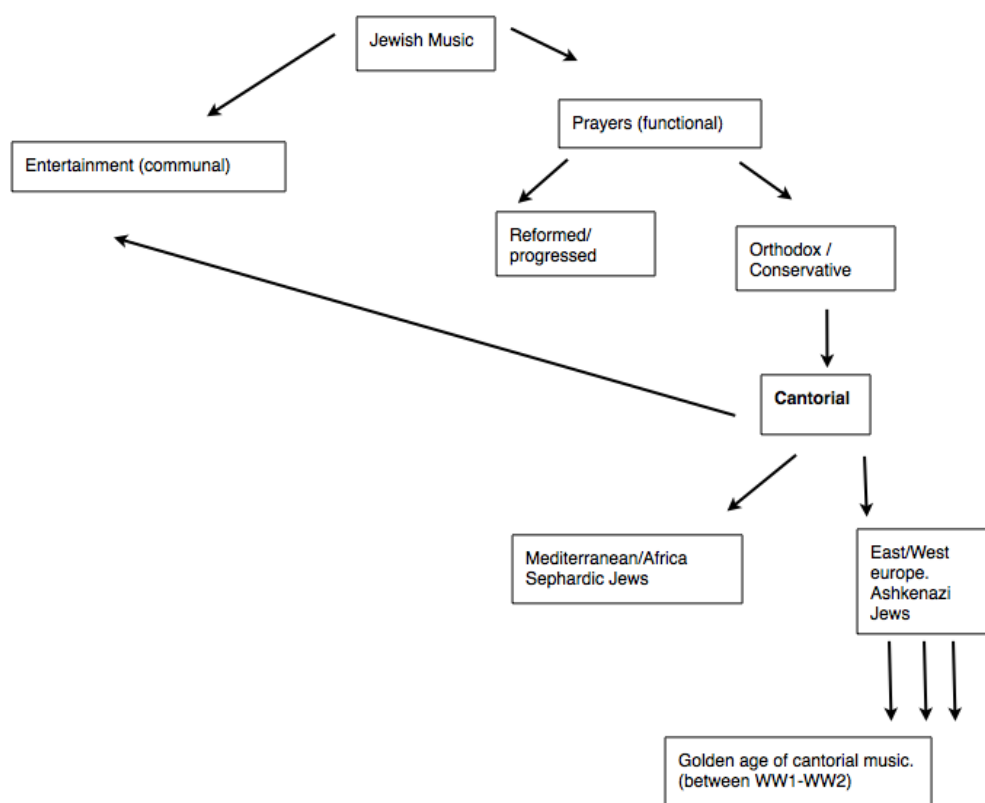


Figure 3: A flowchart situating the Golden Age of Cantorial Music within Jewish music as a whole

To reinforce the message of the prayers with greater emotional impact, Cantors are trained in Cantillation: the ritual use of melodies when chanting or reciting readings from the scriptures, probably the oldest surviving tradition of Jewish music. These melodies were first transferred from father to son, from one synagogue to another, and across different communities. As Chaim Feifel states in the *Journal of Synagogue Music*:

In hazzanut [Cantorial Music], the artistic level of our improvisation will depend on several things: our familiarity with the statutory prayers; our creative capacities; and the musical abilities that we bring to bear. Cantors of previous generations were accomplished improvisers because they had absorbed our musical traditions from a very early age. They were generally masters of the art because in those days there were no recordings and few sources of published music. They had to depend solely on their intimacy with the prayer book and their familiarity with the traditional prayer modes which they had learned by absorbing what they habitually heard in synagogue. By drawing on these inner resources they were able to create artful and memorable musical expressions of our holy texts⁷.

Over time, mainly due to the fading traditions of Jewish people in diaspora, it became necessary to establish a method for Cantors to preserve existing knowledge for future generations. These melodies were denoted by special symbols printed above or below each word in the Hebrew Bible and, once again, differ greatly between the various communities⁸.

	<table> <tr> <th>Ashkenazi</th><th>Sephardi</th></tr> <tr> <td>סוף פסוק U-0503 Sof passuk/silfuq</td><td>סוף פסוק Sof passuk</td></tr> <tr> <td>אתנחתא U-0501 Etanah</td><td>אתנח Etanah</td></tr> <tr> <td>סגול U-0502 Segol</td><td>סגולתא Segolta</td></tr> <tr> <td>שלישלת U-0503 Shalsheliet</td><td>שלישלת Shalsheliet</td></tr> <tr> <td>זקוף קטן U-0504 Zaqef qatan</td><td>זקוף קטון Zaqef qaton</td></tr> <tr> <td>זקוף גדול U-0505 Zaqef gadol</td><td>זקוף גדול Zaqef gadol</td></tr> <tr> <td>טפחא U-0506 Tefcha</td><td>טפחא Tefcha</td></tr> <tr> <td>רביע U-0507 Revia/revi</td><td>רביע Revia</td></tr> <tr> <td>זרקא U-0508 Zarka</td><td>זרקא Zarka</td></tr> <tr> <td>פשטא U-0509 Pashta</td><td>קדמא Qadma</td></tr> <tr> <td>שני פשטין U-0510 Shnei pashtin</td><td>תרי קדמין Trei qadmin</td></tr> </table>	Ashkenazi	Sephardi	סוף פסוק U-0503 Sof passuk/silfuq	סוף פסוק Sof passuk	אתנחתא U-0501 Etanah	אתנח Etanah	סגול U-0502 Segol	סגולתא Segolta	שלישלת U-0503 Shalsheliet	שלישלת Shalsheliet	זקוף קטן U-0504 Zaqef qatan	זקוף קטון Zaqef qaton	זקוף גדול U-0505 Zaqef gadol	זקוף גדול Zaqef gadol	טפחא U-0506 Tefcha	טפחא Tefcha	רביע U-0507 Revia/revi	רביע Revia	זרקא U-0508 Zarka	זרקא Zarka	פשטא U-0509 Pashta	קדמא Qadma	שני פשטין U-0510 Shnei pashtin	תרי קדמין Trei qadmin
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Figure 4: Cantillation marks' appearance in the scripts (left); examples of various types of Cantillation marks (right)

⁷ Feifel, Chaim, 'Seeking the Extraordinary: Improvisation in Jewish Liturgical Music', *Journal of Synagogue Music*, 40(2015), 23–32 (p.23). <http://www.cantors.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/pdf_of_jsm_september_2015.pdf> (accessed 16 April 2019).

⁸ Jacobson, Joshua R., *Chanting the Hebrew Bible: The Complete Guide to the Art of Cantillation* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2002).

In a general sense, each word has a Cantillation mark at its primary accent, which denotes the musical phrase to be used to sing the word. The reality is far more complex, with some words having two symbols, and others none, and the musical meaning often dependent on context.

The melody of a song is based on clearly defined principles involving scales, composition, form and rhythm, following the conventions and rules accepted by various Jewish musical cultures. Often, a melody retains a large measure of independence and can continue to exist separately from the text.

The prime importance of Cantillation is the role it plays in enhancing the words of the prayers. The melody is a combination of motifs that acquire significance only when appended to the text that evokes them. From the standpoint of metre and tempo, the motifs acquire their structure from and are moulded by the syntax and punctuation of the text, as well as by the principles of flow and retention, which are the reader's responsibility⁹.

To make a distinction, Cantorial Music is a style of interpretation or an elaborated version of the traditional Nusach (style of prayer). Social context, knowledge of the compositional intention and performing traditions are some of the elements that should be considered when making an interpretive decision before and during a performance of a Cantorial piece. As with some aspects of contemporary music performance, the creative aspect from the Cantorial performer's point of view would be in the interpretation and realisation of the text and the Cantillation language¹⁰. Over time, Cantorial Music has expanded into an art in its own right, with a rich musical literature. Professional Cantors start by learning the Nusach and leading services and then go deeper into their artistry to become vocal performing artists, specialising in Cantorial Music.

As well as being performers and spiritual leaders, Cantors are largely responsible for the quality and development of synagogue music. Typically, they have gone to great lengths to introduce new melodies into the music used not only in the synagogue but also outside of it.

⁹ Richter, Helmut, 'Hebrew Cantillation Marks and Their Encoding', *Leibniz-Rechenzentrum* (2004). <<http://www.lrz-muenchen.de/~hr/teamim>> (accessed 16 April 2019).

¹⁰ Rothman, Howard B., Jose A. Diaz, and Kristen E. Vincent, 'Comparing Historical and Contemporary Opera Singers with Historical and Contemporary Jewish Cantors', *Journal of Voice*, 14(2000), 205–14.

In essence, a Cantor is the ‘curator’ of his synagogue and one of the most important officials in the house of worship. He is expected to reflect the basic views of his congregation and the society to which he belongs. The Cantor’s responsibility is to increase the emotional impact of the prayers; presumably, the community members are interested in the same objective. They want more than just the passive role of listeners: they want to join in and to be moved and challenged.

As a result, Cantors borrowed musical materials from whatever was at hand, and the Cantorial style began to open up musically. Over time, the role of the Cantor has undergone a transformation from ceremonial leader to vocal artist.

Many Cantors have tried to merge the two worlds, which has proven a challenge¹¹: the more virtuosic, successful and widely known Cantors became, the less connected they were to their communities¹². Some Cantors seemed to go too far: at times, they were blamed for seeking to publicise their talent. The peak of this was the Golden Age of Cantorial Music (circa. 1905–1955), perhaps the most successful and innovative period of Cantorial Music. Due to the burst of outstanding Cantorial artists and significant, impactful original compositions being written at the time, in addition to the richness of harmonic and expressive possibilities and the distinct parallel with Western classical music, I chose to put my compositional focus on this specific musical period.

¹¹ Bohlman, Philip, *Jewish Music and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹² This is due to the fact that Cantors received fame and recognition at the time and were sought after by secular music institutions and opera houses. This pushed them away from being religious spiritual leaders into focusing on their artistic performance. As a result, they drifted from their communities.

2.2 The Golden Age of Cantorial Music

The Golden Age of Cantorial Music (considered that between the two World Wars¹³) was heavily influenced by Western European, particularly Romantic, music. This is unsurprising, as Cantors who sang the Jewish synagogue liturgy during the Golden Age of Cantorial singing (prior to World War II) were from Eastern and Central Europe. This influence can be found in the styles, harmonies and formal structures of the pieces written at that time¹⁴. For the most part, these Cantors received training from other Cantors and peers. As Cantorial Music evolved, Cantors began receiving the same kind of training as opera singers, often studying with the same teachers.

As a result, many Cantors turned into successful opera singers, or vice versa (e.g. Joseph Schmidt, Richard Tucker, Jan Peerce and more), and the idea of the Jewish Cantor as a performing artist became more common in wider culture, notably with Cantor Yossele Rosenblatt starring in the 1927 Hollywood film *The Jazz Singer*¹⁵.



Figure 5: An out-take from the film *The Jazz Singer* (1927), starring Yossele Rosenblatt (pictured)

¹³ Winkler, Joseph. 'Cantor's Song Woo Socialites', Tablet Magazine <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/111372/cantors-songs-woo-socialities> (accessed 16 April 2019).

¹⁴ Heskes, Irene. *Passport to Jewish Music: Its History, Traditions, and Culture* (Westport, CI: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1994).

¹⁵ *The Jazz Singer* (dir. Alan Crossland, Warner Brothers, 1927) is an American musical film.

World War Two created a serious cultural shift in Cantorial Music and Jewish culture in general. Many of its active musicians, composers and notable figures died in the Holocaust and with them their immense musical contributions. Those that managed to survive fled to America or Palestine before or after the war. The Cantorial style did not manage to preserve itself in the same manner, as there was a sense (especially in America) of crisis between the communities and their Cantors: in the post-Holocaust generation, the idea of highly complex vocal music as part of a weekly community service felt alienating and uninviting. The communities demanded a simpler experience and more direct connections to their leaders. It was as if Cantors slowly sang themselves out of jobs.

As a result, in the 1950s, recordings began to be made of non-Cantorial Jewish music, and around the 1960s a new trend emerged that was largely influenced by the Jewish folk music revival of the time. It was a new genre of worship music that grew out of the Reform and Conservative Judaism movement. In stark contrast to Cantillation, this music centred around the use of organs, acoustic guitars and group singing¹⁶. This new style focused on making the music more singable. It was largely sung in Hebrew and playable on guitar. This influence is particularly clear in the music of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach¹⁷, who gained fame for bridging between the folk world and traditional Hasidic Jewish tunes.



*"[He] changed the expectations of the prayer experience from decorous and sombre to uplifting and ecstatic as he captivated generations with elemental melodies and stories of miraculous human saintliness, modesty and unselfishness."*¹⁸ Jonathan Rosenblatt on Rabbi Shalom Carlebach

Figure 6: Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach in performance, Tel Aviv, 1984)

¹⁶ Lowenstein, Steven M., *The Jewish Cultural Tapestry: International Jewish Folk Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ A Jewish rabbi, religious teacher, composer and singer.

¹⁸ Rosenblatt, Jonathan, 'A New Dialogue with the Divine', *Jewish Week*. <<https://www.jta.org/2009/05/22/culture/riverdale-rabbi-makes-two-front-pages>> (accessed 16 April 2019).

Today, there are still many Cantors (mainly within the Orthodox Hasidic communities) who preserve the style of Eastern European Orthodox Cantorial Music. Some of these Cantors are considered world-leading artists and have many followers. However, it is fair to say that this Orthodox Cantorial style is far from being the prevailing custom in Ashkenazi synagogues worldwide.

2.3 Collaborators

Having gained a clearer perspective on the inner workings of Cantorial Music, I then wanted to continue to develop my own fluency and familiarity with this musical tradition. Ornaments, harmonic structures and phrasings, and all the various modes were just some of the tradition's many subtleties I wanted to immerse myself in – a seemingly simple task but one that was to prove far more challenging. In addition, I had the task of choosing existing Cantorial pieces to be featured in the opera and allocating a traditional Cantor to perform them.

I firstly encountered some difficulties in locating scores of Cantorial pieces. Most of the libraries I visited only had small collections, limited to the famous Cantorial pieces. Cantorial Music is not a particularly well-notated genre, and most pieces would not necessarily be notated by the composer and/or performer. Instead, over the years, there would typically be musicians or arrangers who had attempted to transcribe pieces to the best of their knowledge. A number of arrangers have become authorities when it comes to the notation of Cantorial Music, and they have control over most of the existing transcriptions. I have learned that the scores and parts tend to stay within the 'industry', meaning that every well-known arranger tends to keep his transcriptions away from the public eye. Due to competition and stylistically inappropriate use of these transcriptions/pieces, it is extremely difficult to gain access to these source documents, and most arrangers only release their transcriptions amongst their peers and colleagues or during the course of their liturgical activities.

Desperate to find more scores, I visited a number of archives, amongst them the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York¹⁹ and the Jewish Cantorial Archive at the National Library in Jerusalem.

¹⁹ YIVO is an organisation that preserves, studies and teaches the cultural history of Jewish life, based in New York. For further information regarding my research visit, please refer to Chapter 2 → 2.3 → SM.5.

The materials and collections I encountered left a great impression on me and informed my compositional research, especially in realising the richness of the musical possibilities. In particular, Ruth Rubin's extensive field recordings collection had a profound effect²⁰.



Figure 7: A photo of Ruth Rubin's field recordings collection (YIVO RG 620)

The complexity of Cantorial Music barely expresses itself through conventional musical notation for many reasons, such as training or musical education. The outcome of this meant that my own collaborative process had to involve a more 'hands-on' approach, with a considerable degree of improvisation and freedom with the notated material, finding the right balance between uncertainty and confidence.

Following that, I decided to travel to New York and Israel to meet with leading figures in Cantorial Music: from world-leading Cantors and Orthodox Jewish composers to musical directors, educators and ex-Hassidics who had left their communities²¹. The reason why I chose these two places was because the majority of Hasidic Cantors who sang in the style I was interested in (i.e. the Golden Age of Cantorial Music) resided there. I prepared questions in advance and recorded and filmed all conversations²².

²⁰ Ruth Rubin's 135-volume collection of field recordings contains over 2,500 songs, assembled from 78 pm acetate discs, reel-to-reel tapes and cassettes recorded by Rubin from 1946 through the 1970s.

²¹ For excerpts from my research trip diary, please refer to Chapter 2 —> 2.3 —> SM.6.

²² For list of names, please refer to the Chapter 2 —> 2.3 —> SM.10.

I wanted to find out more about Cantorial training and techniques, how Cantors learn new music, their approach to interpretation and improvisation, and of course how much of it relies on notation, if at all. I also wanted to hear about their religious restrictions and how they would feel about narrative and acting in Cantorial Music. Above all, for a community that is notorious for not using technology, it was my only way of reaching out and examining what was out there and what sort of collaborative process I should expect.

Before travelling, I was highly optimistic to think that I could possibly have a cast of Cantorial performers. In reality, I realised that I would be very lucky if I could find even two suitable collaborators. The difficulty was in finding a Cantor who could bring together the authentic experience and flavour of the Golden Age of Cantorial Music whilst being religiously flexible. Leading Hasidic Cantors earn very high salaries; stepping out of this environment could be considered risky. No matter the artistic challenge and worth of such a collaboration, there was a potential risk to their status and reputation within their communities and professional industry. Clearly, issues of stylistic authenticity imposed many challenges that I wanted to consider carefully in the context of collaboration.

On the same trip, I also went to visit Hasidic neighbourhoods in Brooklyn, Israel and London. Visiting these neighbourhoods, encountering the sights, the sounds and the people, gave me strong ideas as to what could work on a dramatic level and where I might take it further (e.g. characters, visual style, time period and location).²³.

Having spent most of the first year researching Cantorial Music by reading relevant literature and essays, listening to archival recordings, gathering manuscripts, visiting archives and libraries, attending Cantorial Music concerts, and conducting interviews and informal workshops, I felt that I had a good sense of direction as to where I might want to take things compositionally and what I was looking for in a Cantorial collaborator. In my meetings with potential collaborators, I asked each Cantor to prepare two pieces. As Cantorial Music is rooted in improvisation, it was also important to explore this notion within the pieces we looked at.

²³ For images, please refer to Chapter 2 —> 2.3 —> SM.7.

In addition, I wrote a straightforward unseen²⁴ musical extract to test how they sight-read in order to ascertain how they might work within an opera rehearsal setting. Based on these meetings, I narrowed my search down to one Cantor, Netanel Hershtik: his is a voice that has been schooled in traditional Cantorial methods, and he is a performer who is comfortable on the concert stage. Once confirmed by the ROH, Netanel and I then started a dialogue exchanging ideas and thoughts about potential Cantorial composers/pieces to feature in the opera.

The process was very open and exploratory. Of course, I had yet to decide on a central dramatic concept, yet, since by that point I had already established a sense of compositional direction and a Cantorial performer, it was at the top of my priorities to go deeper in my dramaturgical research and to look for a frame or structure that would bring this music to life and support it in a homogenous and organic way: in essence, this music was at the very core of my research, and therefore my process at this stage was Cantor driven. In the next chapter, I will explain the research phases in the development of the dramaturgical framework and will demonstrate how these two creative/research strands manifested themselves in the final framework and concept of *MAMZER*.

²⁴ Please refer to Chapter 2 —> 2.3 —> SM.8 for the score and SM.9 for the audio (this unseen extract was later developed into the final Cantorial piece of the opera's 'Goodbye Song', which will be discussed in Chapter 4.1).

3. Searching for a Dramaturgical Framework

In parallel with my research on Cantorial Music discussed in the previous chapter, I spent much of my first year of the doctoral residency engaging in dramaturgical research. My aim was to contextualise Cantorial Music in a theatrical setting; therefore, these twelve months included examining Jewish literature; meeting writers, literary managers and producers²⁵; attending operas and theatre performances; and observing new productions at the ROH²⁶. The first step was to look for a writer to collaborate with on the making of this new opera or to find a potential story to adapt. In the preliminary stages of my dramatic research, I found particular interest in the following as potential dramatic frameworks:

- Jewish literary themes such as late return and homecoming, more specifically in the works of S.Y. Agnon²⁷, which often explore the tension between tradition and modernity.
- Fictional writing informed by Jewish mysticism and existential thought, such as David Shahar's²⁸ *The Palace of Shattered Vessels* (1975), and particularly his haunting novel *Summer in the Street of the Prophets* (1988), which explores memory, identity, creation and the meaning of time through his childhood memories of Jerusalem during the British mandate in the 1930s.
- Jewish philosophical views of reward and punishment and the idea of free will as expressed through some Talmudic cases, in particular the case of the 'Wayward son'²⁹
- Adapting autobiographies of notable figures, such as Shabbatai Tzvi (founder of the Sabbatean movement³⁰) and Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement³¹).

²⁵ For a list of names, please refer to Chapter 3—>SM.10.

²⁶ Productions observed: *Morgen und Abend* (Georg Friedrich Haas, 2015), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Gerald Barry, 2016) and *4.48 Psychosis* (Philip Venables, 2017).

²⁷ Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1887–1970) was a Nobel Prize-winning writer and one of the central figures of modern Hebrew fiction.

²⁸ David Shahar (1926–1997) was an Israeli writer and novelist.

²⁹ The Case of the Wayward Son, 'Ki Tetse' (5767) , Deuteronomy 21:18-21.

³⁰ Sabbatai Zevi (1626–c.1676) was a Sephardic rabbi of Romaniote origin and a kabbalist active throughout the Ottoman Empire. He was the founder of the Sabbatean movement and claimed to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

³¹ Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), known as the Lubavitcher Rebbe. He is considered one of the most influential Jewish leaders of the 20th century.

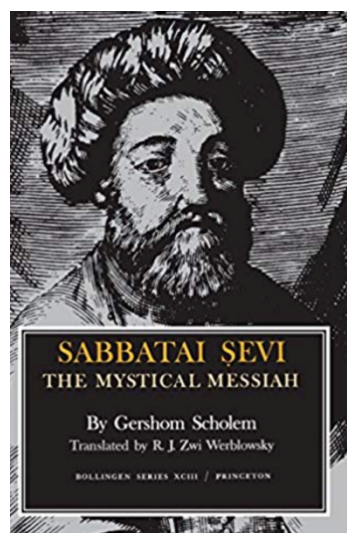
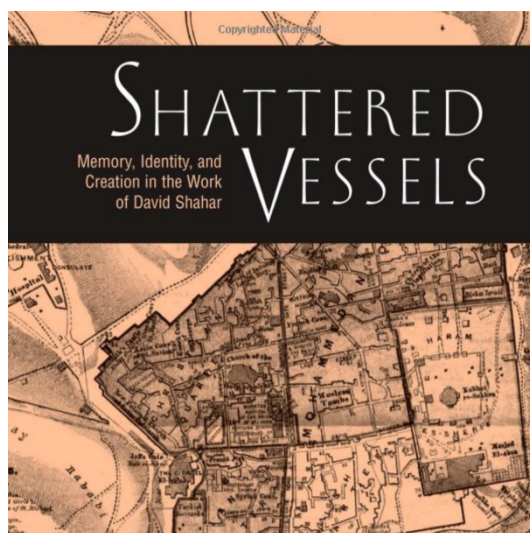


Figure 8: Works considered for adaptation: David's Shahar's *The Palace of Shattered Vessels* and Sabbatai Sevi's autobiography by Gershom Scholem

The above served as points of departure for my conversations with potential writers. I was determined to find a writer with a certain degree of knowledge of Jewish traditions but who might be able to challenge these when necessary.

After a year of research, meetings and valuable conversations³², in August 2016, I created a shortlist of writers. There were two very different options both on creative and practical levels: Lavie Tidhar³³ and writing team Samantha Newton and Rachel Zisser³⁴. I presented them with the themes and points of interest I had so far, and over our conversations, different structural ideas and potential storylines emerged. I worked with each writer/team to develop an idea for a piece. The culmination of this was reflected in two scenarios: *Lightfall*³⁵ and *MAMZER/BASTARD*. These two scenarios were discussed with the supervisory team at the ROH and GSMD, and after giving it considerable thought, I decided to go with the latter. I felt that on a very simple level, *MAMZER* was a piece that I understood better emotionally and was closer to my world and language.

³² For full further information regarding the text/music timeline, please refer to Chapter 5.

³³ Lavie Tidhar (b. 1976) is a London-based, Israeli-born writer working across multiple genres, particularly sci-fi and fantasy.

³⁴ Rachel Zisser and Samantha Newton (b. 1978 and 1983, respectively) are a London-based Israeli/British writing duo, working across film and television.

³⁵ Please refer to Chapter 3 —> SM.11 for a *Lightfall* synopsis, and SM.12 for a *MAMZER/BASTARD* synopsis.

Furthermore, due to my previous working relationship with Samantha, and personal and familial relationship with my sister Rachel, I felt that this connection would allow space for the themes and musical ideas I was interested in to unfold in a more organic way. With confirmation and a green light from the ROH, Rachel, Samantha and I began developing a storyline, which resulted in the following synopsis and description of characters. It was submitted to ROH at the start of my second year of the residency³⁶.

MAMZER

SYNOPSIS

July 13th, 1977, New York faces soaring temperatures, financial crisis and a rampant serial killer known as the 'Son of Sam'. Just when the residents think things can't get worse... all the lights go out, the power turns off and the city slips into chaos. Rioting, looting and vandalism spread like wildfire across the five boroughs as New York suffers one of the biggest black-outs in its history.

On this night Yoel, an ultra orthodox, hasidic young man, is to be married but Yoel isn't ready. He escapes his religious community in Brooklyn and ventures into the inhospitable city. He wanders Manhattan's epic avenues, eerie sounds echo in his wake. What lurks in the darkness?

When Yoel finds himself in danger, he wishes he'd listened to his mother and father instead of being so naive. A mysterious stranger comes to Yoel's rescue. Yoel wants to thank him. The stranger offers a peculiar request. The stranger wants Yoel to return home and go ahead with his arranged marriage. How could a stranger know about Yoel's marriage and why would it matter to him?

Over the course of the night of the blackout, Yoel learns about the stranger who saved him. But the more Yoel finds out about his mystery saviour, the more Yoel realises that the person he never really knew... was himself.

Mamzer literally translates as 'bastard'. A mamzer is a person born from a forbidden relationship according to the Hebrew Bible and Jewish religious law. It is a title declared on a shamed few because of its heavy penalty: "A mamzer shall not enter the congregation of the Lord" (Deut. 23:3). Meaning, it is strictly prohibited for a mamzer to marry. However, if a marriage is contracted the union will remain legally valid.

MAMZER is a hasidic noir. The first opera to feature and reference Jewish cantorial music. Inside a usually closed off community, MAMZER explores how the trauma of war can create unforeseen consequences in future generations. In the darkness, buried memories will be unearthed but as the lights return to the city, our characters will be relieved of the burden of secrecy and perhaps be able to start anew.

Figure 9: first draft of *MAMZER*'s synopsis by Samantha Newton and Rachel C.Zisser

³⁶ For further information regarding the libretto development, please refer to Chapter 3 —> SM.13.

SINGERS/CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

YOEL (10 yrs old & 20s). *Child singer/actor & countertenor.*

Two actors to play the role.

Yoel lives at home with his parents in Borough Park, New York. We meet him in the days before his wedding. He has always felt close to G-d but far from the religious, Hasidic Jewish community in which he was raised. And so it's taken his parents a long time to arrange a suitable wife for him.

Yoel has always felt watched, haunted. As a kid, he believed he had a guardian angel but as he got older Yoel began to fear the ghostly character who's presence was constantly felt in his wake. He has never told anyone about his stalker. It is a secret Yoel keeps to himself. The anxiety of doing this has given Yoel a slight stutter. He wonders, is he special or cursed?

STRANGER (early 60s). *Baritone.*

The stranger escaped WW2 and fled to New York. But an unforeseen conflict awaited him there; expose the truth about his past and give himself a chance at a new beginning or sacrifice his own feelings for the happiness of another. His decision will gradually wear him down to a pale shade of his former self. When we meet him, decades later, he is a tired vagabond living in the sidelines of society, not part of any community. But why does he stalk young Yoel?

DAVID (30s). *Cantor.*

David is our Cantor. He occupies the home next door to Yoel's family's apartment. David is an exemplary religious young man, a WW2 refugee who came to America alone as a child. David is the son, Yoel's father, Menashe, wishes he had.

ESTHER (50s). *Mezzo Soprano.*

Esther is Yoel's mother. She is also a WW2 refugee who fled Poland. Esther lost her entire family in the war. She is racked by the guilt of surviving. During the war, she was a seamstress mending German uniforms. And after, in her despair, she turned to G-d and became more connected to the Orthodox community.

Esther found a new life with her husband, Menashe, in Brooklyn, New York. Due to her age, the couple struggled to create a family, something that Esther wanted more than anything. Eventually, Esther gave birth to Yoel. Yoel is her only child which is unconventional for a Hasidic family.

MENASHE (50s). *Tenor.*

Menashe is Yoel's father. While Esther adores Yoel, Menashe often wishes his son was more like David. When he hears David religiously rehearsing his cantorial music through the thin walls that adorn their apartments, Menashe prays that Yoel will one day find peace and be as devoted as David instead of restlessly roaming the streets each night.

Menashe is not an immigrant. He was born in New York and never saw the horrors of WW2, this sometimes distances him from his wife, Esther. He wishes they had more children.

GIRL (20s). *Pre-recorded voice-over, spoken.*

A pre-recorded, non religious, young American girl who works at the local movie theatre and flirts with Yoel. She is never seen on stage only heard in voice-over as a tantalising taste of the world beyond his community.

Figure 10: first draft of description of characters by Samantha Newton and Rachel C.Zisser

3.1 Themes: Late Return, Post-Trauma, Loss, Cultural Memory and Nostalgia

The above storyline and character descriptions came about after a considerable period of sifting through existing literature and Jewish folktales for inspiration. In my conversations and early discussions with Samantha and Rachel, they were mostly drawn to the theme of ‘the late return’ (‘Nostos’ in Ancient Greek stories) discussed earlier, a theme perhaps popularised by the nomadic history of the Jewish people:

A protagonist returns home from a long journey to discover that their home has irreversibly changed since departure. The homecoming, whether physical or spiritual, often takes place a very long time after the individual left. Such homecomings often bring a level of disappointment and a sense of failure. At times, it gives the individual and those who are left waiting for them new insights about their relationships and mutual past. However, in some cases, the homecoming does not take place, and only the central character is aware of their return. Above all, it expresses the notion that ‘home’ is as much a memory and a product of nostalgia as it is a real place; therefore, it can never be fully returned to. A good example of this genre in Jewish literature (and one we considered adopting) is the novella *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*³⁷ by S.Y. Agnon, which is based on an old Hasidic tale.

During my father’s Shiva³⁸, my aunt told Rachel and Samantha a story she had heard of a modern-day ‘mamzer’ (bastard) born to a mother who mistakenly remarried after assuming her first husband’s death in World War II. The phenomenon of mamzers was most common after World War II, when families rediscovered loved ones they thought they had lost. These recurring scenarios often opened up a Pandora’s box, unleashing family secrets and traumas. This was something I was familiar with: my grandfather had a whole family he lost in the Holocaust, my father did not know about it until my grandfather passed away. When Rachel and Samantha turned to me with this idea, it immediately resonated.

When we talk about the implications of war, we naturally talk about the people who survive it, but not so much about what is inherited within the families. The resulting trauma and sense of loss can be carried forward from one generation to another.

³⁷ Agnon, S.Y. *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight* (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 1912).

³⁸ Shiva (literally ‘seven’) is the week-long mourning period in Judaism for first-degree relatives. It is a time when individuals discuss their loss and accept the comfort of others.

In *MAMZER*, we have a secret that was passed from mother to son, and although Yoel, the protagonist (like my father), does not even know what the secret is, it hinders his life immensely. This idea gave us the point of view for Yoel and the world of values in which he lives.

MAMZER touches on these territories: the tension expressed between the attachment to the old world, physical and spiritual, and the attraction to the new. The old world is epitomised by loyalty and tradition, the Hasidic Eastern European lifestyle, Yiddish speech and Cantorial Music.

MAMZER also tells a wider story of the refugees and immigrants who fled to America before and after World War II. This is a generation who lived double lives. For many, their real lives were the ones they lived before the war; anything afterwards was merely a shadow of their former reality.

3.2 Social and Historical Background

Due to the musical subject matter, it was only natural for the story to take place within a Hasidic community in order to create a homogenous, organic environment for this musical tradition to come to life on stage. The Hasidic philosophy stresses Torah study, prayer and abstention from excessive earthly pleasures in order to achieve purity of heart and mind. To that end, our characters are sheltered from influences deemed wrong in the eyes of their leaders, including most influences from outside their religion. Furthermore, in the Hasidic home, there is a strict set of rules. The possible repercussions if a person breaks these rules gave our narrative its high stakes. We wanted the audience to understand that something as slight as tuning into a popular television show or holding hands with a person of the opposite sex was a sin. In order to achieve this, we understood that it was necessary to place the narrative in a socio-historical context, to represent the outside world and to establish a contrast to the Hasidic community. At this stage, it was unclear to us, however, when, where and why. Every location and time period would naturally have great implications for our storyline.

We looked to a period that could embody this tension between tradition and modernity, the attachment to the old and the attraction to the new. In this respect, the 1970s were a particular source of fascination for representing a pivot of change, culturally and historically. Below are some examples:

- History, politics and social change: the obsession with space and the lunar landings at the end of the '60s, the Vietnam War, the rise of the gay rights movement and the 1975 fiscal crisis of New York City.
- Popular culture: Andy Warhol; Studio 54; disco, punk and rock music; the rise of American minimalism in contemporary music; and the birth of blockbuster films.
- Technology: the Sony Walkman, the first mobile phone call, the first email transmission, microwaves, the first commercial Concorde flight and the establishment of Apple Computer, to name a few.

For all the above reasons, we felt that there was a strong current of nostalgia for the late 1970s, even amongst those who never lived through the period. Enticed by these ideas and the richness of the period, we then started looking through historical events in the 1970s that we could potentially tie the narrative to and came across the legendary blackout night that took place on 13th July 1977.

*'The '77 blackout presented a rare opportunity for the powerless to suddenly seize power'*³⁹ (TIME magazine).



Figure 11: Archival footage of New York newspapers covering the 1977 blackout night

The blackout night of 1977 has served as inspiration to many artworks in popular culture⁴⁰ and has developed its own mythologies. In the middle of the summer of 1977, New York City experienced a power outage that caused much of the city to go dark.

³⁹ Latson, Jennifer, 'Why the 1977 Blackout Was One of New York's Darkest Hours', *TIME* (2015). <<http://time.com/3949986/1977-blackout-new-york-history/>> (accessed 16 April 2019).

⁴⁰ Most notably the film *Summer of Sam* (dir. Spike Lee, 1999), an American crime thriller film about the 1977 Son of Sam serial murders.

The blackout lasted two days, 13th–14th July. As the city was in the midst of a fiscal crisis and the terror of the ‘Son of Sam’⁴¹ loomed over residents, many took to the streets and began looting. Police reported that looting in some areas of the city continued well into the daylight hours, and thousands of people were arrested. Footage shows residents breaking into stores, stealing DJ equipment, plugging themselves into generators and starting block parties, in what was later associated with the birth of hip-hop in the early 1980s.⁴²

The blackout night, as a melting pot of cultures, presented a mix of danger, anarchy, nostalgia and cultural memory. Most importantly, the notion of making a piece that would take place mostly in the dark was powerful and resonant. Once the idea to set the piece in the 1970s urban enclave of New York had settled, the decision to base it in Brooklyn, more specifically Borough Park⁴³, was an easy one: Borough Park has a longstanding tradition of Cantorial Music and to this day is home to some of the greatest Cantors in the world.

With Cantorial pieces dating back to the 1950s or earlier, the post-World War Two mamzers phenomenon and the 1977 blackout night, we ended up creating a storyline that takes place in two time periods in parallel: beginning in 1977 (the present) with scenes that could flashback to 1956 and the early stages of Yoel’s (our protagonist) upbringing. This allowed us to express the tension between old and new and to place the Cantorial pieces as flashbacks in Yoel’s childhood.

⁴¹ David Richard Berkowitz, also known as the ‘Son of Sam’, is an American serial killer who was responsible for eight separate shooting attacks that began in New York City during the summer of 1976.

⁴² Palace, Steve, ‘New York’s 1977 Blackout Shone a Light for the Hip Hop Movement’, *The Vintage News* (2018). <<https://www.thevintagenews.com/2018/07/21/new-yorks-1977-blackout/>> (accessed 16 April 2019).

⁴³ Borough Park is a neighbourhood in the borough of Brooklyn in New York City. It is home to one of the largest Orthodox Jewish communities outside Israel.

3.3 Framework and Concept

Given the discussion in the previous chapter about dramatic contextualisation and Cantorial Music as the background for creating *MAMZER*, we agreed the following set of creative aims and objectives for the opera:

- The opera *MAMZER* was to explore the relationship between Cantorial Music and opera through its composition and sound world, the narrative and dramatic environment, and the collaborative aspects of the piece.
- The original story was to be based on the post-World War II phenomenon of the mamzer. It was to be set in the Hasidic Jewish community of Borough Park, Brooklyn, New York, and to take place on the night of the citywide blackout in July 1977, with flashback scenes to the 1950s.
- The dramatic themes were to be centred around late return, loss, war trauma, nostalgia and self-discovery, framing a coming of age / rite of passage story.
- The storyline was to consist of 24 scenes, out of which five scenes were to feature existing Cantorial pieces focused on the Golden Age of Music, with an additional original composition written for the Cantor⁴⁴.
- Cantorial pieces were to take place mostly in the form of flashbacks.
- The piece was to be written for six singers (including a Cantor and a child singer), a chamber ensemble⁴⁵ and a soundscape.

⁴⁴ For the structure of the opera by scenes, please refer to Chapter 3 —> 3.3 —> SM.14.

⁴⁵ The size of the ensemble was predetermined by the ROH. For a complete instrumentation and personnel list, please refer to Chapter 1 —> SM.4.

4. Methodology

Arriving at the above concept was a major step forward in the collaborative process with librettists Rachel and Samantha. At this point, a sense of compositional direction and focus was established (the Golden Age of Cantorial Music), along with a Cantorial collaborator (Netanel Hershtik) and the aforementioned dramaturgical framework. As Cantorial Music was at the heart of this practice-based research, the next stage had to involve its implementation within the above dramaturgical framework and my own compositional language. This task called for both individual and group development work, where we (librettists Rachel and Samantha and me) allowed the process to become less structured and much more fluid and organic. Based on the agreed synopsis, descriptions of characters and dramaturgical framework, Rachel and Samantha developed the libretto, in addition to us working together on realising the integration of Cantorial pieces within the opera's structure (which included identifying and selecting suitable existing pieces from the Golden Age of Cantorial Music). In parallel, I went deeper in exploring and developing a sound world that merged Cantorial Music with my own compositional language, translating my musical research into practice. Communication went back and forth, where both practices informed each other's process.

During my development phase, a number of key aspects emerged as centres of exploration. The four key aspects were found music, Jewish prayer modes, heritage and hauntology, and Cantorial improvisation. These served as the groundwork for the various approaches I took in merging the Cantorial and operatic musical worlds and where I felt that fluid connections were successfully established. Some of the above key aspects extended existing points of interest that I had explored in my previous stage works and was able to further develop in this research, whilst others emerged from this particular work, musical research and subject. These key aspects have been explored throughout the opera with *MAMZER*'s creative team and will be discussed in subsequent sections. Specific examples of each aspect will be given in the context of other artists' work and my own previous work where appropriate, with the intention that the scores and recordings will provide further in-depth insights into this longer process and the sound world I was gradually building upon. The above can be expressed in the following flowchart⁴⁶:

⁴⁶ For more information regarding the music/text process in the context of the residency, please refer to the timeline provided in Chapter 5.

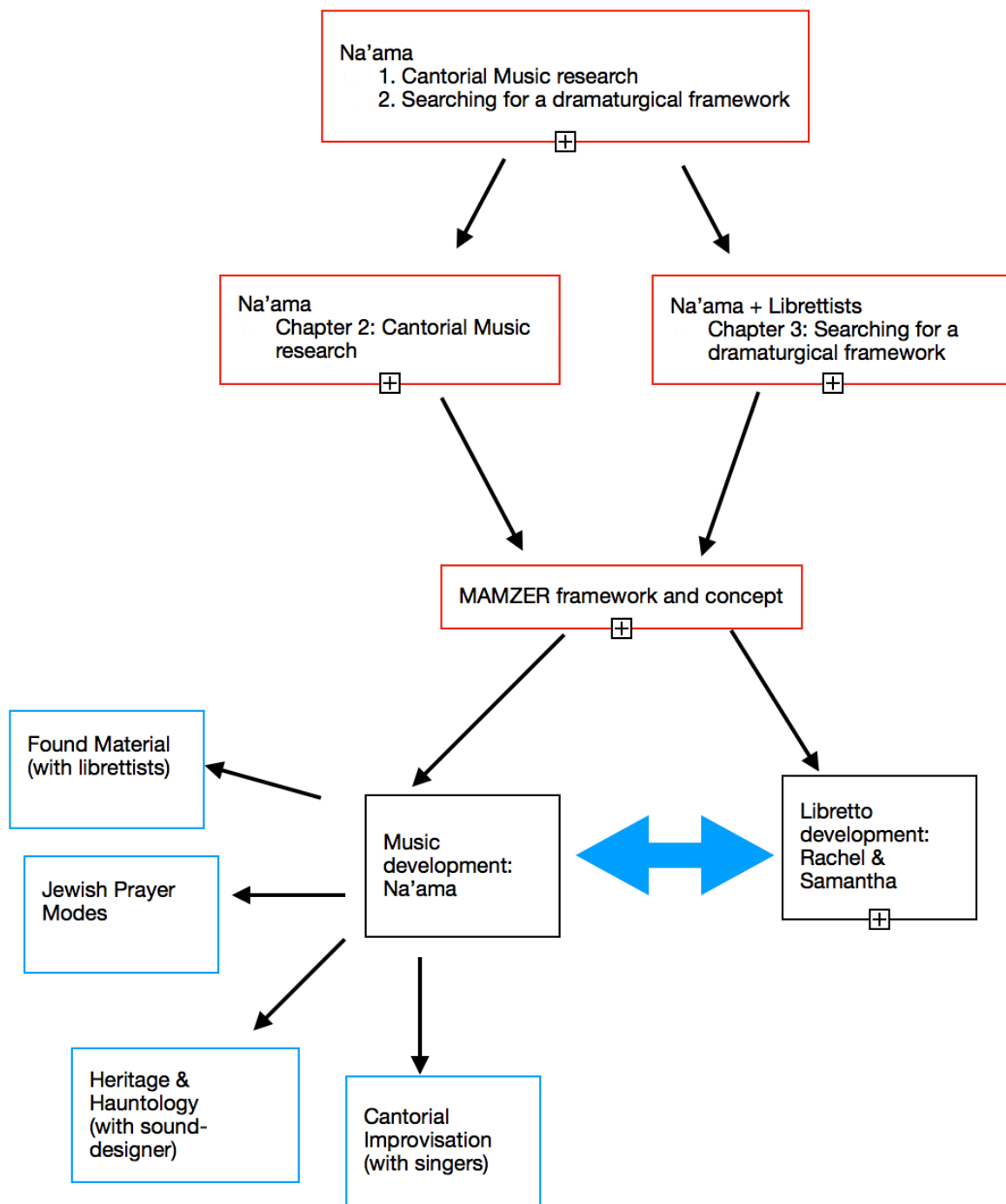


Figure 12: A flowchart expressing the nature of the collaborative process in the context of the practice-based research (fields in **red** refer to research; fields in **blue** refer to my methodology).

4.1 Found Material

Embarking on the process with a prior knowledge of the canon of Cantorial Music, this research opened up new possibilities and directions, especially with regard to learning about composers and pieces with which I was not familiar. As part of my research, I collated an extensive collection of Cantorial pieces for my own future consideration and for discussion with the librettists. The aim was to choose five or six Cantorial pieces to incorporate within the opera, all to be sung by a Cantor. The process of filtering and selecting Cantorial Music was focused on a number of creative objectives, including:

- Presenting the various styles and approaches of Cantorial Music's relationship to operatic vocal writing
- Exposing lesser known Cantorial pieces and composers
- Exploring the Cantorial text's relationship to the narrative

The Golden Age of Cantorial Music offers a broad range of different styles, approaches and relationship to the operatic medium. Yossele Rosenblatt⁴⁷ and Pierre Pinchik⁴⁸, two of the most renowned Cantorial composers of this period, represent two diametric stances in relation to operatic vocal writing.

Rosenblatt, who had a long association with the opera world (as previously mentioned in Chapter 1), composed in a style that was heavily influenced by Classical music traditions. Widely known in the secular world as well, I felt it was important to reference his global significance. I nevertheless struggled to incorporate any of his music as I felt removed from his more traditional musical style. At the early stages of planning, I did not include any of his works, however, most Cantorial educators, performers and scholars I spoke to commented that this seemed an oversight.

This created a certain tension: the gap between his more traditional compositional style and my own aesthetic felt just too wide to bridge. I was nevertheless interested to find a piece that would make sense: it was almost impossible to create a piece exploring the relationship between Cantorial Music and Opera without referring to his work.

⁴⁷ Josef 'Yossele' Rosenblatt (1882–1933) was a Ukrainian-born Cantor and composer, regarded as the greatest Cantor of his time.

⁴⁸ Pierre Pinchik (1900-1971) is considered one of the most original Cantors and composers of all time for his intelligent, interesting interpretations and unique vocal and compositional style, which continue to inspire Cantorial music listeners today.

In essence, I was looking to use one of Rosenblatt's works to establish a starting point and a sense of familiarity to use as the basis for gradually exploring lesser-known cantorial styles. Together with the librettists, we decided to incorporate Rosenblatt's *Shir Ha'Maalot*⁴⁹ (Song of Ascent)—one of his best-known Cantorial pieces, sung both in rituals, synagogues and concert halls to this day—in the opening scene, primarily for its familiarity, both in a Jewish context and also as its harmonic and melodic languages translate easily for Western-Classical music audiences. The text consists of a special group of psalms (120–134) often referred to as 'pilgrim' or 'degree' songs: Jews traveling to Jerusalem for one of the three main annual Jewish festivals sing these songs on the uphill road to the city. Thus, traditionally, the piece symbolises beginnings, hope, optimism and journeys. We aimed for this piece to serve as an introduction to the rich Cantorial Musical tradition.

Keeping in mind the very different approaches to Cantorial Music composition, I aimed to create a musical journey that would gradually invite the audience into the cantorial world: starting with Rosenblatt and moving through less traditional approaches.

At the other end of the spectrum, and in stark contrast to Rosenblatt's relationship to Western opera, Pinchik's⁵⁰ language is largely derived from Middle Eastern roots. His is a unique style based on microtonal vocal vibrato and accompanying organ drones, a musical world closer in style to my compositional interests. It is therefore the last pre-existing Cantorial piece I featured in the opera, followed by my own Cantorial composition which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

My second creative objective in selecting Cantorial works was to expose lesser known works within the Cantorial repertoire. A composer I came across during my research phase, and to whose music I found myself particularly drawn, was Leib Glantz⁵¹. Glantz can be considered the 'outsider' within the selection of composers featured in the opera: the Hebrew texts employed are neither biblical nor religious, and the melody and chromatic harmonies are influenced by Nineteenth century Romantic music. His is not pre-exile music nor Israeli, not classical nor Cantorial: his style stands uniquely within the Cantorial canon.

⁴⁹, For score excerpt please refer to Chapter 4—>4.1—>15, for English translation of the text 15.1, for audio 15.2.

⁵⁰ For score excerpt please refer to Chapter 4—>4.1—>20, for English translation of the text 20.1, for audio 20.2.

⁵¹ Leib Glantz (1898–1964) was a Ukrainian-born lyrical tenor and Cantor, composer, writer and educator. A prolific expert in Cantillation modes, he published many books on the subject that are considered to be milestones in Cantorial education.

I find Glantz's output as a whole fascinating and his recordings emotionally arresting. I was attracted to the artful simplicity of his melodies and his intimate, eerie interpretation of text, the ghostly almost tribal delivery, and the restrained dynamics in both the organ and the voice. I chose to incorporate two of his lesser known works: *Mi Ani (Who am I)*⁵², a short, intimate piece discussing questions of self-identity in a naïve, almost childlike, manner; and *Brich Shmei*⁵³ (*Blessed It Is He*), based on an enigmatic Aramaic prayer taken from the Zohar⁵⁴, recited when the Torah is removed from the holy ark in synagogue in preparation for reading. To the best of my knowledge, these pieces had never received live public performances until *MAMZER*.

The central creative objective in the selection process was the text and its relationship to the narrative and drama. In incorporating existing music, we felt we needed to create an inner logic as to where and how this music should be integrated, and its functionality within the opera. To that end, I found inspiration in S.Y. Agnon's stylistic approach to the use of traditional Hebrew texts in his original writing, as described by Arnold J. Band in the book *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon*. In this extract, Band compares Agnon to Hildesheimer⁵⁵ in the use of traditional Jewish texts in original writing:

*A comparison of Hildesheimer with Agnon regarding the historical transition from tradition to modernity is illuminating since for Hildesheimer this historical transition generated a dialectical, existential situation in which he had practical problems to solve, legal decisions to make, institutions to create, while for Agnon this dialect became instrumental. It provided him with a framework in which to create his fictions. He employed his prodigious knowledge of traditional Hebrew texts of all periods to create a style that, though linguistically traditional, could convey the complex concerns of a modern writer that were often expressed in ambiguities. His penchant for ambiguities was both his vehicle for dealing with the tensions between tradition and modernity that obsessed him, and for creating fictions that embodied these concerns.*⁵⁶

⁵² For score excerpt please refer to Chapter 4—>4.1—>16, for English translation of the text 16.1, for audio please listen at <https://rsa.fau.edu/album/40070>

⁵³ For score excerpt please refer to Chapter 4—>4.1—>17, for English translation of the text 17.1, for audio please listen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfAijuXHJm>

⁵⁴ The Zohar (lit. 'Radiance') is the foundational work in the literature of Jewish mystical thought known as Kabbalah.

⁵⁵ Wolfgang Hildesheimer (1916–1991) was a German Jewish author who incorporated the theatre of the absurd.

⁵⁶ Band, Arnold J., *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S.Y. Agnon* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968).

Undoubtedly, our own artistic motivation for using Cantorial Music was influenced by these approaches, in addition to extending my original dramatic research aims. Together with the librettists, I sought to explore the various pieces' potential relationship to the narrative, their emotional driving forces or dramatic stakes. To that end, some pieces had greater value in their literal connections to the narrative, and therefore were prioritised for their dramaturgical function. This was particularly present *Elu Devorim (These Are Those Things)* by Moshe Koussevitzky⁵⁷ and *Al Tiro (Do Not Be Afraid)* by Moshe Ganchoff⁵⁸.

Elu Devorim, was placed in a flashback scene to Yoel's childhood - his 'Halake' (hair cutting ceremony). This particular ritual marks a boy's entry into the formal educational system and the commencement of Torah study. The text, taken from an ancient prayer from the Talmud, discusses the temporal nature of our being and how one should set intention and focus on the here-and-now, but with an outlook towards the hereafter.

The scene in which it is placed takes place in both the present and the past and features the two Yoels, where the older Yoel observes his young self. As such, *Elu Devorim* is used here as representative of Yoel's past and as a backdrop to the Halake ritual carried out by the Cantor and the family. The text, the dramatic events, and the ritual in itself share a bird's-eye view quality, centred around the notion of time. This quality is also expressed in the composition itself, at times reminiscent of a Passacaglia (for its ground bass ostinato pattern, triple metre and overall feel)⁵⁹.

Al Tiro was chosen through a priority of dramaturgical function. This work was chosen based on its literal connection to the narrative. The composition is in a standard recitative style heavily inspired by the conventions of the Western classical operatic aria, and the text is taken from the morning prayer, and is in essence an encouraging, potent declaration of faith. We placed the piece towards the end of the opera, when Menashe ventures out to the inhospitable city searching for Yoel. In doing so, the piece served as a moment of respite within the action, a structural breath, separating one scene with the next.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Moshe Koussevitzky (1899-1966) is a lyric tenor regarded as amongst the greatest Cantors of the 20th century.

⁵⁸ Moshe Ganchoff (1905-1997), a cantor and composer widely acknowledged as one of the last great exponents of the Odessa tradition of liturgical music

⁵⁹ For score excerpt please refer to Chapter 4—>4.1—>18, for English translation of the text 18.1, for audio 18.2.

⁶⁰ For score excerpt please refer to Chapter 4—>4.1—>19, for English translation of the text 19.1, for audio please listen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsd3bzddS1k>

From very traditional approaches and relationships to opera (*Shir Ha'maalot* and *Al Tiro*) to less traditional relationships (*Raza D'Shabbat* and *Brich Shemi*), it felt necessary to situate myself within these various approaches and find out how I would approach writing for Cantorial voices. In light of this, and in effect drawing together three of my creative objectives, the opera concludes with my own Cantorial composition piece, *Shir Preida (Goodbye Song)*⁶¹.

The rationale behind writing an original composition in this genre goes back to my main research objective. Composing an opera exploring Cantorial singing without writing an original Cantorial composition myself would have felt like a non-holistic, incomplete journey, and perhaps an unconscious statement against Cantorial Music as art that belongs in the past, rather than a living art-form.

The question of which text to use was a challenging one: this specific text, which was written by secular Israeli poet Avraham Halfi⁶², is not religious nor biblical at its core, yet it holds some Jewish mystical meaning alluding to the reduction theory⁶³ taken from the Kabbalah. In relation to creation, the theory discusses the poetic idea of how one force should reduce itself to the very minimum in order for another force to be able to exist. This resonates with the processes and choices characters in the opera experience: The Stranger living on the periphery, deteriorating and reducing himself in order for Esther to have a life with the son for whom she always yearned; and Yoel deciding to go ahead and marry in order for his mother to be set free. The act of sacrifice, a repeating element in the opera, is echoed in the text.

I composed this piece specifically for Netanel Hershtik, using the full range of his voice: starting with unaccompanied voice at the top of his register and gradually descending to the bottom of his range, where it is almost impossible for him to keep singing. This connects with the idea of deterioration, removal and disappearance. He is then joined by the orchestra in unison and disappears within it, signifying renewal and the sense of journey⁶⁴.

⁶¹ For score excerpt please refer to Chapter 4—>4.1—>SM.21, for English translation of the text 21.1, for audio 21.2.

⁶² Avraham Halfi (1904–1980, Tel Aviv) was an Israeli actor and Hebrew poet from Poland.

⁶³ The 'tzimtzum' is a term used in the Lurianic Kabbalah to explain Isaac Luria's doctrine that God began the process of creation by 'contracting' his infinite light in order to allow for a 'conceptual space' in which finite and seemingly independent realms could exist. This process of initial contraction, forming a 'vacant space' into which new creative light could beam, is denoted by general reference to the tzimtzum.

⁶⁴ For MAMZER's Cantorial only score, please refer to Chapter 4—>SM.22.

4.2 Jewish Prayer Modes

One of the primary elements in Cantorial Music is the Jewish prayer modes (as previously discussed in Chapter 1). There are about four prominent modes and various combinations/ variations of them, called ‘manoeuvres’: a term referring to a Cantorial improvisation technique, simply suggesting the notion of travelling from one mode to another at certain points in the prayer. This is done in order to enhance specific words, hidden meanings and timbres; it ultimately affects the delivery and emotional quality of the text, creating greater impact and engagement. Certain modes will only be used in Jewish festivals and high holidays, whilst some are for a specific time of day or particular rituals⁶⁵. Much like in jazz, this Cantorial improvisation technique requires the Cantor to know what his available options are at any given moment and points of departure to other appropriate modal environments.



Figure 13: The four prominent Jewish prayer modes

Cantor, composer and renowned educator Leib Glantz was known for establishing formal teachings for Cantorial artistry. He discusses this technique in many of his lectures⁶⁶ and books, where he refers to a meta-structure scale based on tetrachords, which he often used in his compositions to “*create a sense of antiquity and to redirect the musical material back to its Middle Eastern roots*”⁶⁷. This essentially combined modality with Western common practice brought in from Europe, with oriental elements found in Arabic/Jewish music of non-European origins.

⁶⁵ Major/minor intervals deploy specific meanings too within sentences and phrases.

⁶⁶ Most specifically a famous lecture he gave at the 5th Convention of the Cantors Assembly (1952), which suggested a new path toward the analysis of Jewish prayer modes.

⁶⁷ Glantz, Jerry, *The Man Who Spoke to God* (J. Levine/Millennium, 2008).

The modes were explored through various forms of movement (e.g. diminution and augmentation): from stretching and sustaining every note within the mode to create orchestral clusters and drones to speeding up, fast-forwarding the modes in loops and passing them through the orchestra. The two mindsets allude to the two parallel time periods expressed in the piece: one represents a more contemporary language, whereas the other is rooted in the Cantorial Musical environments. The above can be seen in the following examples⁶⁹:

The image displays a musical score for three instruments: Violoncello (Vc.), Contrabass (Cb.), and Piano. The score is written in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a time signature of 5/4. The music is organized into three systems, each corresponding to one of the instruments. The first system (Vc.) and second system (Cb.) each consist of a single staff. The third system (Piano) consists of two staves, with the left hand (bottom staff) and right hand (top staff) parts. The music features a mix of eighth, quarter, and half notes, with some measures containing rests. The score concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign. The tempo/mood is indicated as 'Andante' at the beginning of the first system.

132

Ten. Sax. *mp* *pp* *mf* *p*

vib./alternate color trill

B. Cl. *mp* *sf* *pp* *f* *mp*

vib.

Hn. *sub p* *mf* *sub p* *f* *sub p cresc. poco a poco*

42



Figure 16: Three score excerpts showing the use of the Jewish prayer modes within the orchestral writing in various forms of movement (slow, fast and a combination of slow and fast within the different layers)

3) Electronics: Jewish prayer modes were used as a base for all soundscape drones, where the focus was on different pitch groups within the Jewish prayer modes. The pitch group given below, in addition to other pitch groups out of the Jewish prayer modes, was used to create tape loops, harmonium drones and organ drones⁷⁰. These contributed to the overall homogeneity of the modal sound world, serving as the glue between Cantorial Music and the orchestra. This will be further discussed in Section 4.3: Heritage and Hauntology.

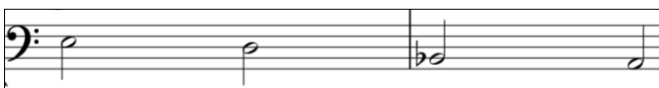


Figure 17: Pitch group within the Jewish prayer mode 'Magein Avot' (shield our fathers) used to generate electro-acoustic drones in the soundscape

⁷⁰ Audio excerpts based on Figure 17's pitch group will be given in the next chapter.

4.3 Heritage and Hauntology

Hauntological music (derived from 'Hauntology', a concept coined by philosopher Jacques Derrida in his 1993 book *Spectres of Marx*⁷¹) is a genre mostly applied to 21-century musicians exploring ideas related to temporal disjunction, cultural memory and nostalgia. As a result, Hauntological works are at times characterised by the use of vintage analogue synthesisers, record players and tape machines and the use of found objects (e.g. sound library music, old television programmes and computer games). Examples of this musical genre can be seen in the works of Ghost Box, The Caretaker, William Basinski, Boards of Canada, Broadcast and the Focus Group, and early Brian Eno electronic works.



Figure 18: Hauntological music works. Left to right: The Caretaker '*Extra Patience (After Sebald)*' (2012), Boards of Canada '*Music Has the Right to Children*' (1998) and William Basinski '*Disintegration Loops*' (2002)

As previously discussed, this musical aesthetic is something I touched on in some of my earlier works, where I used found objects and technological artefacts to explore nostalgia in popular culture. In many ways, *MAMZER* too shares some hauntological characteristics: the composition incorporates an old musical tradition and the use of found music, the narrative centres around real historical events and deals with cultural memory and nostalgia, and the characters are heavily influenced by their own personal ghosts, as well as the collective ghosts of the past in 1970s New York. The hauntology genre's aesthetic infatuation with preserving the past served as an inspiration for me in approaching the sound world of the opera as a whole.

⁷¹ Derrida, J., *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by P. Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1993).

In his article 'On Heritage and Hauntology', Colin Sterling describes his conceptual approach to hauntology, which I found useful in the context of preserving and engaging with old musical traditions (and the emotional baggage that often comes with them):

Ghosts are an unavoidable component of modern social life (Gordon 2008: 7). They interrupt the present and indicate that, "beneath the surface of received history, there lurks another narrative, an untold story that calls into question the veracity of the authorised version of events" (Weinstock 2013: 63). Hauntology recognises that in these ghosts lies the possibility of a renewed politics, a politics of "memory, of inheritance, and of generations" (Derrida in Demos 2013: 43)⁷². Heritage is thus bound to the work of hauntology [...] As Davis suggests, for Derrida, "the ghost's secret is not a puzzle to be solved; it is the structural openness or address directed towards the living by the voices of the past or the not yet formulated possibilities of the future (2005:379) [...] hauntology allows us to work with what Timothy Morton⁷³ calls "the weirdness of things" (2013: 159). The task for heritage then must be to invent wholly new strategies and forms of practice to enact rather than exorcise the spectres that haunt our present moment.⁷⁴

The practical musical hauntological approach I have taken in *MAMZER* should be viewed in light of the two categories of acoustic orchestration and electronic sound world to express the differences in the processes:

1) Orchestration: using elements in the found musical material (i.e. existing Cantorial recordings) to inform the instrumental language and orchestral decisions.

2) Electronic soundworld: applying various analogue techniques and musical processes evident in the found musical material (i.e. the use of tape machines, record players and vintage equipment) to create a sound world derived from a hauntological aesthetic. Both these approaches engage (directly or indirectly) with musical heritage and preservation, which was central to my methodology and musical research aim. I will now introduce and discuss the two separate creative processes in greater detail.

⁷² Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* (1993).

⁷³ Timothy Morton is a professor and member of the object-oriented philosophy movement. His work explores the intersection of object-oriented thought and ecological studies.

⁷⁴ Sterling, Colin, 'On Heritage and Hauntology', *Carmah Berlin* (2017). <<http://www.carmah.berlin/reflections/on-heritage-and-hauntology/>> (accessed 17 April 2019).

4.3.1 Orchestration

As part of my creative research on compositional materials, I started experimenting with old archival recordings. The first piece I chose to experiment with was '*Raza D'Shabbat*' by Pierre Pinchik, one of my favourite Cantorial composers/performers⁷⁵. As a first test piece, I rearranged this piece for the Guildhall New Music Ensemble concert held at Milton Court Concert Hall on 29th November 2016⁷⁶. My purpose with this was to start to engage with this sound world in a manner that I could subsequently build upon.

When I started experimenting with the Cantorial recordings, I realised that many of the recordings from the Golden Age of Cantorial Music have slightly different tunings than standard Western music. I am unsure whether in some cases that was a consequence of the actual '78' recording⁷⁷, the tunings of other keyboard used at the time or a combination of both. Regardless, I had to choose whether to adjust the recordings digitally to match the instrumentalists or whether to make a conscious decision to 'celebrate' the fact that the archive recording (having a different pitch level microtonality) sounds very much out of tune and make this a primary compositional element.

As this was my first attempt in treating Cantorial Music, I decided to respect my own values and preserve whatever was there in front of me. I kept the tuning from the recording, whilst the melodic writing and piano figuration I assigned to different instruments. Very intuitively, I used microtones to match the drone accompaniment on the recordings, trying to bring together the two sound worlds as much as possible.

This made me realise that perhaps a less obvious meeting point between the two worlds could lie in the area of intonation. The non-pitched Cantillation system often results in interesting microtonal vibrati and chromatic vocal ornaments. The accompaniment played on traditional drone-like sounding instruments is often made up of complex layers of the same note, tuned slightly differently than Western musical instruments. In stark contrast to this, the harmonic structure is extremely simple and the vocal delivery is highly emotional and expressive.

⁷⁵ For the original '*Raza D'Shabbat*' recording by Pierre Pinchik, please refer to Chapter 4—> 4.3 —> SM.23.

⁷⁶ For the '*Raza D'Shabbat*' NME first test piece score, please refer to Chapter 4—> 4.2—> SM.24.

⁷⁷ Any flat disc record made between about 1898 and the late 1950s and playing at a speed of around 78 revolutions per minute is called a '78'.

This curious combination of elements offered a slightly strange sound world that I found intriguing, especially in relation to the drama. Another challenge I faced in creating the orchestral language was the fact that Cantorial Music—as previously mentioned—is in essence a non-orchestrated genre. Over time, many orchestral Cantorial Music arrangements have been written and performed, but, in my judgement, these have drifted from the original spiritual intention of the purpose of this music, as well as its ritualistic, meditative quality. The challenge for me was to realise a relationship between the voice and the orchestra: one that would stay loyal to the initial introverted state of mind of Cantorial Music.

Initially, I found it necessary to leave the delivery of the featured Cantorial pieces as close as possible to their origin, in order to keep their authenticity. In practice, this meant that all of the existing Cantorial pieces were accompanied by a keyboard/drone instrument only⁷⁸. I looked into the original instruments used in the old Cantorial recordings, such as various pump-reed organs, B3 Hammonds and the famous Leslie amps with its rotary effects⁷⁹, and sought to replicate that sound world both with a physical representation and through orchestration. In doing that, I realised that in the context of this opera and creative musical research, the only relationship between the Cantorial voice and orchestra that would make sense to me would be to treat the orchestra as a hybrid keyboard instrument.

In translating the Cantorial keyboard accompaniment part to orchestra, I sought to represent two prominent characteristics: the predominance of drones and microtonally differentiated tuning. The detuned, pitch-shift effect from the old Cantorial recordings was expressed in the envelope, production and texture of the orchestral sound. My aim was to evoke a sense of nostalgia to the old Cantorial style but with a certain ambivalence, suggesting a more distorted view of the past. In practice, the change in the envelope of the orchestral sound was expressed by the use of microtones, in addition to subtle, slow-moving glissandi, which became very much part of this work's language. Examples of this can be seen in the following scene⁸⁰:

⁷⁸ In performances we used a Nord-Electro 4D SW1 keyboard.

⁷⁹ 'Rotary effect' originally referred to the use of the Leslie speaker: a combined amplifier and loudspeaker that projects the signal from an electronic instrument and modifies the sound by rotating a baffle chamber in front of the loudspeakers, most commonly associated with the Hammond organ.

⁸⁰ 'Raza D'Shabbat' orchestration (pp.328–48, Figures 94–97); for further information, please refer to the full score. For audio please refer to MAMZER/BASTARD—>SM.C—>C.1—>no. 22.

First excerpt of the musical score. It features four staves: Vln. 1, Vla., Vc., and Cb. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The Vln. 1 staff begins with a *p* dynamic and a glissando. The Vla. staff has a *p* dynamic and a glissando. The Vc. staff has a *cresc. poco a poco* marking and a *mp* dynamic. The Cb. staff has a *mp* dynamic and a glissando. A triplet of eighth notes is marked in the Vln. 1 staff.

Second excerpt of the musical score. It features four staves: Vln. 1, Vla., Vc., and Cb. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The Vln. 1 staff has a *cresc. poco a poco* marking. The Vla. staff has a *cresc. poco a poco* marking. The Vc. staff has a *cresc. poco a poco* marking and a *f* dynamic. The Cb. staff has a *cresc. poco a poco* marking and a *f* dynamic. Glissandi are marked in the Vc. and Cb. staves. The Vc. staff also has a *ord.* marking.

Third excerpt of the musical score. It features four staves: Vln. 1, Vla., Vc., and Cb. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The Vln. 1 staff has a *p* dynamic, a *mp* dynamic, and a *ppp* dynamic. The Vla. staff has a *p* dynamic, a *mp* dynamic, and a *ppp* dynamic. The Vc. staff has a *p* dynamic, a *mp* dynamic, and a *ppp* dynamic. The Cb. staff has a *p* dynamic, a *mp* dynamic, and a *ppp* dynamic. Glissandi are marked in the Vln. 1, Vla., and Vc. staves.

Figure 19: Three score excerpts from the scene ‘Raza D’Shabbat’, demonstrating the use of microtones, in addition to subtle, slow-moving glissandi, as part of the work’s core language

Following up the feeling of time stretch offered in many of the Cantorial recordings, almost as if ignoring the bar lines, I experimented with different methods of recreating the microtonal drones with the ensemble, both semi-improvised and notated. As one of the most central elements to Cantorial Music accompaniment, drones are present throughout both the score and the recorded soundscapes. Below are some representative examples from the opening scene, ‘Father’s Fathers’⁸¹:

This musical score excerpt features five staves: Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), Contrabass (Cb.), and Timpani (Timp.). The strings (Vln. 1, Vla., Vc., Cb.) are playing sustained, microtonal drones in the key of E-flat major, marked with *sub ppp* (sub-very-piano), *dark, soft, blunt*, and *ST non vib.* (sustained tone, non-vibrato). The Timpani part includes a *gliss* (glissando) and a *let ring* instruction, indicating a sustained, ringing sound.

This musical score excerpt features six staves: Horn (Hn.), Trombone (Tbn.), Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The woodwinds (Hn., Tbn.) and strings (Vln. 1, Vla., Vc., Cb.) are playing sustained, microtonal drones. The Horn and Trombone parts are marked with *ppp* (pianissimo) and *vib.* (vibrato). The strings are marked with *ppp* and *fff* (fortissimo) dynamics. The Contrabass part is marked with *p* (piano) and *fff* dynamics.

Figure 20: Two score excerpts demonstrating the use of microtonal drones with the ensemble in the opening scene, ‘Father’s Fathers’

⁸¹ ‘Father’s Fathers’ (pp.1–23, Figures 1–6); for further information, please refer to the full score. For audio, please refer to MAMZER/BASTARD—>SM.C—>C.1—>no. 1 and no.4.

Perhaps a less obvious but important element in the Cantorial Music keyboard part was the expression pedals⁸². To represent the rotary effect of the era, I used orchestral dynamic swells throughout the score in various ways, aiming at creating constantly overlapping dynamic waves that would allow motion and movement in the ensemble's drones. These can be seen in the following examples, taken from the scene 'Yoel/Yoel Transition'⁸³:

The image contains two musical score excerpts. The first excerpt shows four staves: Violin 1 (Vln. 1), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). Each staff has a dynamic swell indicated by a line with a wedge shape, showing a sequence of dynamics: *ppp*, *mf*, *pp*, *mp*, and *pp*. The Vln. 1 and Vla. staves are marked 'ST non vib.'. The Cb. staff is marked 'gliss.' for glissando. The second excerpt starts at measure 138 and shows four staves: Tenor Saxophone (Ten. Sax.), Bass Clarinet (B. Cl.), Horn (Hn.), and Trombone (Tbn.). Above the Ten. Sax. staff is the instruction 'Accel poco a poco.' and below the Tbn. staff is 'Dim poco a poco.'. Each staff has a dynamic swell indicated by a line with a wedge shape, showing a sequence of dynamics: *ff*, *p*, *f*, *p*, *f*, *p*, *f*, *pp*, and *mf*. The time signature changes from 3/4 to 4/4 in the middle of the excerpt.

Figure 21: Two score excerpts demonstrating the use of dynamic swells with the ensemble as a representation of the expression pedals and the rotary effects in the Cantorial Music keyboard accompaniment part

⁸² An important control found on many musical instruments (particularly organs and electronic keyboards), used to control different aspects of the sound, commonly volume.

⁸³ 'Yoel/Yoel Transition' (pp.27–38, Figures 9–13); for further information, please refer to the full score. For audio, please refer to MAMZER/BASTARD—>SM.C—>C.1—>no.3.

Finally, I found particular interest in the voice doublings of the keyboard accompaniment part. Whilst more-standard 3rd and 6th doublings are very common, often, unison doublings will be used, where the voice is doubled by the keyboard in the exact same register, almost treated like an instrument. The relationship of the voice to the accompaniment part can largely be seen in the form of question and answer, or held notes and pads (with the organ, this will mostly be a drone layer with the 1st and 5th highlighted), on which the voice floats on top of an overlay of synagogal choirs.

Figure 22: An excerpt from Leib Glantz's 'Shmaa', demonstrating the question-and-answer format and held drone notes

I tried to play with the extremes of this, embracing unison doublings with the voice and exploring question-and-answer formats in an ensemble context. This can be seen in the following examples⁸⁴:

⁸⁴ 'Father's Fathers II' (pp.38–41, Figures 13–4), 'Raza D'Shabbat' (pp.328–48, Figures 94–7), 'Goodbye Song' (pp.389–94, Figures 109–10); for further information, please refer to the full score. For audio please refer to MAMZER/BASTARD—>SM.C—>C.1—>no.4, no.22 and no.25

163 *relaxed, not fully sung/singing to yourself, a memory, a habit*

Y. *I think a - bout my mo-ther's fa - ther who_____ I*

In. 1

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

The score for Figure 23 shows a vocal line (Y.) and four instrumental staves (In. 1, Vla., Vc., Cb.). The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are "I think a - bout my mo-ther's fa - ther who_____ I". The instrumental staves are in various clefs (In. 1: treble, Vla.: alto, Vc.: bass, Cb.: bass) and feature held drone notes, indicated by long horizontal lines with a small circle at the end. The tempo/mood is "relaxed, not fully sung/singing to yourself, a memory, a habit".

Figure 23: An excerpt from 'Father's Fathers II', showing the format of held drone notes with voice floating on top

95 1367

T. *ord. ro zo di cha - hbae hi cha - hbae*

Vln. 1 *ff p mf p*

Vla. *ord. ff p mf p*

Vc. *p mf p*

Cb. *p mf p*

95

f

The score for Figure 24 shows a vocal line (T.) and five instrumental staves (Vln. 1, Vla., Vc., Cb.). The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are "ord. ro zo di cha - hbae hi cha - hbae". The instrumental staves are in various clefs (Vln. 1: treble, Vla.: alto, Vc.: bass, Cb.: bass) and feature dynamic markings (ff, p, mf, f) and a piano part (95). The tempo/mood is "relaxed, not fully sung/singing to yourself, a memory, a habit".

Figure 24: An excerpt from 'Raza D'Shabbat', showing the format of question and answer within the ensemble writing

1555

T. *ppp* echotone

En. Sax. *ppp* echotone

B. Cl. *ppp* echotone

Hn. *ppp* simple, weightless, soft

Tbn. *ppp* simple, weightless, soft
light bow pressure, non vib.

Vln. 1 *p* simple, weightless, with a flow
light bow pressure, non vib.

Vla. *p* simple, weightless, with a flow
light bow pressure, non vib.

Vc. *p* simple, weightless, with a flow

mf

Figure 25: An excerpt from 'Goodbye Song', showing the format of voice unison doublings in the same register within the ensemble writing

The discussion in this section lays out the foundation of the entire orchestration language of *MAMZER*. Specific examples have been given for the purposes of demonstration and clarity; however, the approaches discussed can be found throughout the score.

4.3.2 Soundscapes

Early on in the sketching phase of my compositional process, I started creating mock-up soundscapes for personal reference and as a quick way of communicating the sound world that was in my head⁸⁵. I envisaged a soundtrack running alongside the acoustic music that was derived from the cinematic nature of the libretto. The soundtrack was set to represent the world outside the Hasidic community, to serve as an auditory, spatial set design of 1970s New York, in addition to encapsulating the musical feel of the old Cantorial recordings of the era (i.e. the pitch-shift and detuned tape machine effects). I sought to work closely with a sound artist to achieve this: ideally, someone with a cinematic approach but also with knowledge of contemporary music and notational language.

In December 2017, I approached Yair Glotman, a Berlin-based sound artist and double bass player working in the fields of film⁸⁶ and experimental music. Yair's skillset combined knowledge of classical contemporary music with working on high-profile film scoring projects. The nature of *MAMZER*'s soundtrack and its functionality can be broken down into two categories, derived from my two research aims:

1) Keyboard drones and soundscapes (Cantorial Music research): encompassing pre-recorded electro-acoustic spectral keyboard drones (using organs, pump-reed organs, harmoniums and accordions) under vintage, analogue tape machines and record player manipulations (in addition to surface noise recordings).

Keeping in mind the notion of a hauntological aesthetic and preservation, Yair recorded acoustic drones based on a set of pitches (previously discussed in Section 4.2) from Jewish prayer modes onto a reel-to-reel four-channel tape machine. He then experimented with various aspects of tape loop manipulations in order to preserve a certain authenticity of sound, as previously discussed. Out of these experiments, we created a drone vocabulary: a bank of tape loop drones, which included the pre-recorded materials under various analogue audio manipulations.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ For an example of a preliminary mock-up soundscape, please refer to Chapter 4 → 4.3 → SM.25.

⁸⁶ Most recently sound designing and contributing additional music for *Mandy* (dir. Panos Cosmatos, 2018) and *Last and First Man* (2018) by the late Jóhann Jóhannsson.

⁸⁷ For examples of the preliminary tape loop drones, please refer to Chapter 4 → 4.3 → SM.26.

Out of these experiments, we decided to focus on pitch gliding manipulations as an expression of the various pitch shifts and detuned effects evident in the old Cantorial recordings. These also communicated with the detuned orchestral language, incorporating slow-moving glissandi and microtones – a field both Yair and I had each explored in some of our previous individual works. The drones serve as an electro-acoustic framework, negotiating between the Cantorial pieces and their accompaniments to the orchestral sound.

2) Cinematic sound FX (dramaturgical framework): encompassing spatial auditory set design, including but not limited to news and archive materials, Foley work, snippets of popular '70s tunes, Hasidic community field recordings and more.

Alongside the work on the soundscapes, we started developing a sound FX catalogue: a mix of pre-recorded, archival and library-sourced materials, which altogether served as our periodic sound library. Community and cultural memory are integral aspects to both the Hasidic lifestyle and the 1977 New York blackout night⁸⁸, and therefore the cinematic sound FX were key in transmitting the urban periodic landscape of 1970s New York, including actual recordings from the blackout night. It was important to us that many of the sound FX should be authentic to the period and to the Hasidic community, and this involved a great deal of 'archaeological' sound work. Below is a basic example, showing the level of detail in the sound FX in the first sound cue only (C1).

The two strands of sound design work discussed culminated in twenty three sound cues, each cue divided into two categories (soundscapes and special FX). The cues were operated live throughout the piece by the stage management team via QLab. The three screenshots below show the beginning, middle and end of our work process:

⁸⁸ For audio excerpts of the soundscape and sound FX, please refer to Chapter 4 —> 4.3 —> SM.27.

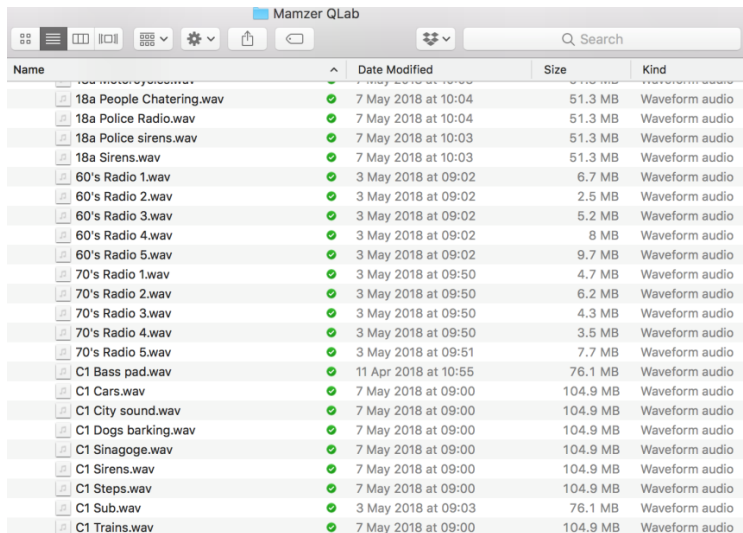


Figure 26: First cue in the 'Father's Fathers' opening scene – sound FX drawbar

Cue no/name	timeline	description	score	drone/soundscape B	soundFX T
1/Father's fathers 69'	00:00	Intro/set up/radio tuning	- Microtonal mid/high sustained strings drone centered around open 5th G and D (and frequencies around it). - Wind and brass shadowing melody very delicately, voice floating on top MIDI REF: 00:00-01:00	Harmonium spectral drone	- New York urban landscape (rambling trains, street life) - Synagogue service - Radio FX

Figure 27: Screenshots depicting the first sound cue description, as part of a working document for the composer and sound designer during development process, and an expression of the collaborative working method

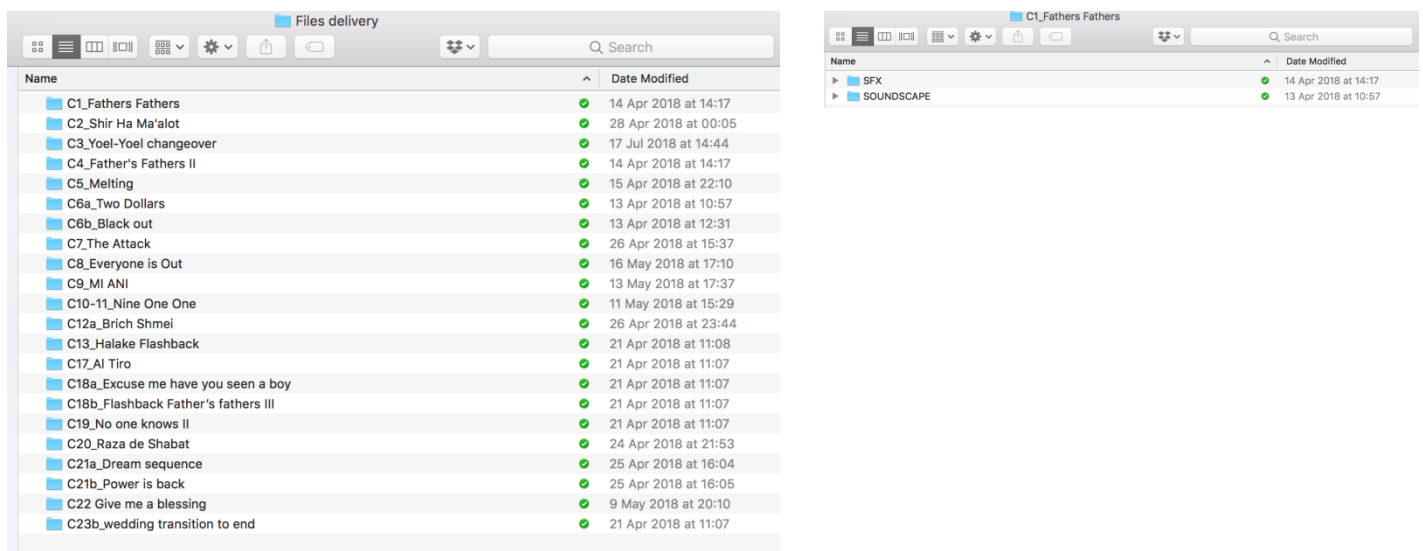


Figure 28: A screenshot showing the delivery of the twenty-three sound cues before implementing them in the live performance setup (QLab), where each folder is divided into the two sound categories

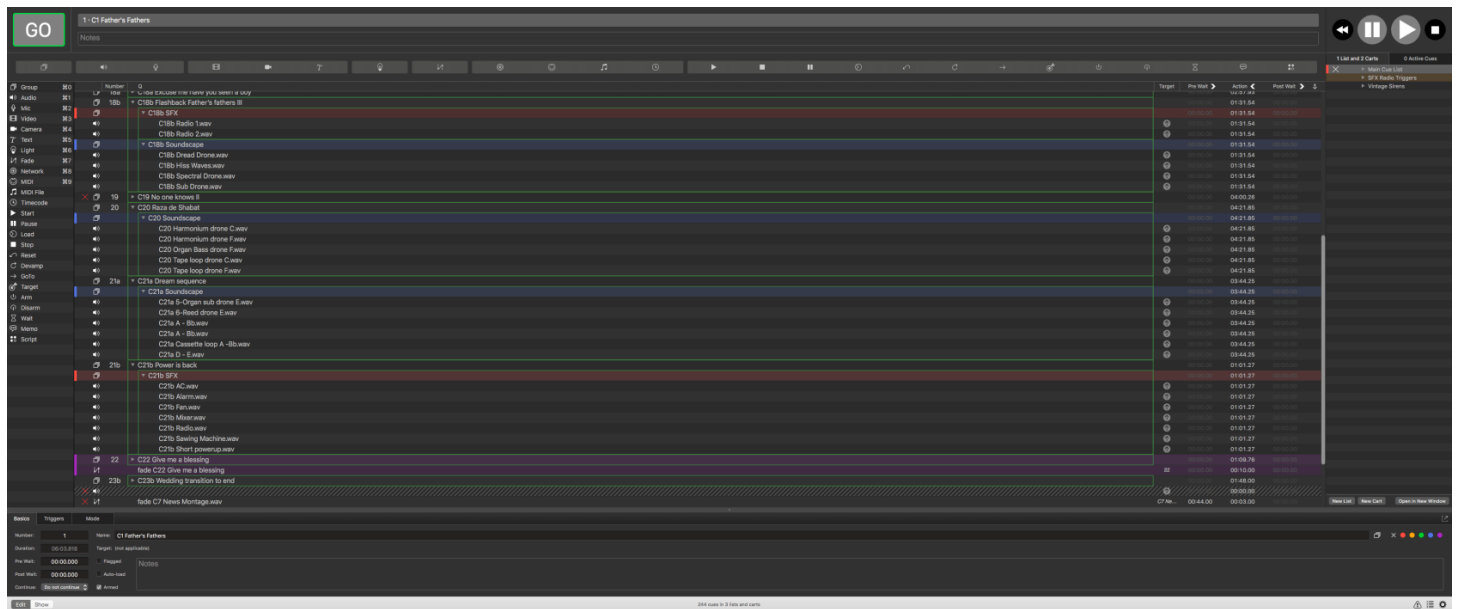


Figure 29: A screenshot showing *MAMZER*'s live performance setup on QLab, where each cue is divided into the two sound categories

For further information regarding the creative sound design process, including: work-in-progress cue lists, audio excerpts from the complete soundtrack and the ROH performance final running list, please refer to the supporting documents⁸⁹ (further information regarding the sound design schedule can be found in Chapter 5).

⁸⁹ Please refer to Chapter 4 —> 4.3 —> SM.28 for a work-in-progress sound cue list, SM.29 for an excerpt from the final soundtrack (drone soundscape), SM.30 for an excerpt from the final soundtrack (sound FX) and SM.31 for the *MAMZER* performance running list.

4.4 Cantorial Improvisation

One of the most challenging aspects for me in making fluid connections between Cantorial Music and opera was in the vocal writing. The two share much in common but arrive from completely different avenues. Cantorial Music is in essence an aural tradition heavily rooted in improvisation; therefore, it was perhaps an elusive task to try to capture the sense of vocal freedom and exploration within the medium of Western classical music notation. This imposed all sorts of challenges, which were explored both in the compositional process (which will be discussed in this section) and during workshops and rehearsals (which will be discussed in Chapter 5). In trying to trace the improvisational language and real-time decision making of Cantorial singing, I found the following by Chaim Feifel useful:

A hazzan (Cantor) is like a monologist who, when expressing ideas, habitually employs contrasts and colours to bring across the message in an interesting way. So, too, does the hazzan use a variety of musical and rhythmic contrasts in order to reveal hidden meaning in the prayers. Effective hazzanut (cantorial singing) requires an intuitive sense of timing. This has to do not only with the chant itself but with the prayer leader's own heartbeat. It is this inner rhythm that triggers the hazzan's ability to impart a poetic rhythm to the prayer text [...] Once the reader realises that all of us possess this innate ability—to a greater or lesser degree—there will emerge a better understanding of: 1. word-spacing; 2. word-sound relationship; 3. sustaining-and-releasing of sounds; 4. syllable-pulsation; 5. the swaying process; 6. melismatic patterning; and 7. balancing the natural rhythm of the words with one's own inner rhythmic flow. Once developed, this ability will hopefully permit them to access spiritual depths previously unexplored—their uninhibited inner imagination—and in the process, to spark the imaginations of those whom they lead in worship, and help the listeners to enter a certain spiritual realm. I have long been searching for such tools, techniques that would enhance a hazzan's ability to effectively communicate to others his or her own inspiration. I have found the most effective means of attaining this end to be through carefully planned improvisation⁹⁰.

⁹⁰ Feifel, 'Seeking the Extraordinary', p.24.

I would like to refer to Feifel's comments and how I have used these aspects of Cantorial improvisation to create vocal characterisation, which I have explored throughout the score. Whilst the vocal writing explores some of the above elements with all characters to various degrees, every character focuses on one particular element, in order to enhance his/her unique inner psychological drama and vocal personification. In the following subsections, I will discuss a number of representative examples.

4.4.1 Word Spacing in the Role of Esther

Space, lack of space and complete silence are naturally essential ingredients in Cantorial delivery, as they hold a special meaning when used in prayers and services. Similarly, I tried in my operatic vocal writing to play with such extremes of word spacing, where each character has a unique way of moving through time: phrases can be split by pauses for certain effects, with or without breaking the logical flow of the phrase; notes can be either stretched or shortened; and ornaments can be used to break up words and sentences or to put a focus and weight on a specific word, sustaining and releasing sounds. This notion of word spacing was influential in shaping the overall vocal language of the opera and in particular Esther's character, which will be demonstrated here:

Esther leads a double life: the life she had in the past before the war, which she never let go of, and the life she is currently living. This is reflected in her two modes of personality:

- 1) Lack of space: this mode of personality represents the present, the autopilot and the mask she wears in her daily life, which is epitomised by control and focus, projecting outwards. In this mode, she is heightened, driven, cutting and short. Examples of this lack of space, firstly musical but also emotional and mental, can be seen in the following scene⁹¹:

The image shows a musical score snippet for two characters, E. (Esther) and Y. (Yehonatan). The score is in 2/4 time and starts at measure 221. The tempo/mood is marked 'poco accel'. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music for E. is in the treble clef and features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplets. The lyrics for E. are: 'a - bout what you want to say and then just say it(ttt) just! say! it!!'. The music for Y. is in the bass clef and features a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplets. The lyrics for Y. are: 'did you diddd you'. The score includes dynamic markings: *f* (forte) and *sf* (sforzando) for E., and *p* (piano) for Y. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words split across measures.

⁹¹ 'Melting' (pp.41–64, Figures 14–22). For further information, please refer to the full score. For audio please refer to MAMZER/BASTARD—>SM.C—>C.1—>no.5.

Figure 30 shows three musical excerpts from the opera 'Melting'. The first excerpt (measures 223-228) shows a vocal line (E) with lyrics 'Ha! dis-rup-ting my work in this' and a piano line (Y) with lyrics 'did you know for cer-tain he was your in - ten-ded ddid ddidd you yyyou know for cer-tain he was'. The second excerpt (measures 229-234) shows a vocal line (E) with lyrics 'when I ma-ried your fa-ther the war just en-ded so much had been lost I'. The third excerpt (measures 235-240) shows a vocal line (E) with lyrics 'I'm right be - hind you just right be - hind'.

Figure 30: Three score excerpts from 'Melting', showing Esther's 'lack of space' mode as expressed in the vocal writing

- 2) Extreme space: this mode represents Esther's past life and is only seen in the rare occasions when she lets her deeper emotions overwhelm her, projecting inwards. In that mode, she moves heavily, in slow motion, completely oblivious to anything else. This expresses itself in the stretching of time, as can be seen in the following example⁹²:

Figure 31 shows two musical excerpts from the opera 'Dream Sequence'. The first excerpt (measures 1452-1457) shows a vocal line (E) with lyrics 'I'm right be - hind you just right be - hind'. The second excerpt (measures 1458-1463) shows a vocal line (E) with lyrics 'you right be - hind be - hind you'.

Figure 31: An excerpt from 'Dream Sequence', showing Esther's 'extreme space' mode as expressed in the vocal writing

⁹² 'Dream Sequence' (pp.350–70, Figures 98–103); for further information, please refer to the full score. For audio please refer to MAMZER/BASTARD—>SM.C—>C.1—>no.23.

4.4.2 Pulsation, Rock and Sway in the Role of Menashe

During Cantorial services, some people may physically rock and sway whilst ‘Davening’ (praying and singing) to establish a sense of inner rhythm of prayer. This is more than a physical gesture: part of the Cantor’s challenge is to turn the liturgical language into a rocking pattern of poetic rhythm. It is necessary to have room for internal (and external) sway or pulse through the chant. Successful Cantorial melodies incorporate a built-in sway rhythm or groove (the pulsation changes intuitively according to the natural build-up of the service).

This natural pulsation was something I was interested in capturing in the notational language to create urgency and a naturalistic feel of speech that would give the vocal lines an inner life. I realised that in order to do that, I had to pursue a greater degree of freedom in my own vocal compositional process and allow the process to become much more intuitive. When possible, I tried to approach the libretto’s text through vocal improvisation and recorded myself singing lines intuitively⁹³. When these settled, I then allowed myself to start transcribing notes to paper. This, in fact, achieved the opposite of freedom, as it created a vocal notational language that was complex rhythmically and often unfriendly on paper, with syncopated rhythms and offbeats crossing over bar lines, pulses changing mid-phrases or -sentences, and more. Finding the right balance between notational clarity, vocal freedom and a naturalistic feel of speech was something I kept crystallising both in the compositional process and more so through vocal workshops with the singers (which will be discussed in Section 5.1). Through this trial and error, I arrived at a point where I felt that I had developed a desired inner pulse and rhythm in the vocal lines, which was a good starting point for further experimentation and exploration with the singers and which was done without compromising notational clarity. The following example⁹⁴ demonstrates this through the character of Menashe:

⁹³ For an audio voice memo demonstrating the use of improvisation during the composition process, please refer to Chapter 4 —> 4.4 —> SM.32 for establishing this scene’s vocal lines and SM.33 for the ensemble’s 2/2 accompaniment.

⁹⁴ ‘Excuse Me, Have You Seen a Boy’ (pp.244–71, Figures 75–80); for further information, please refer to the full score. For audio please refer to MAMZER/BASTARD—>SM.C—>C.1—>no.19.

1070

Menashe. *ex - cuse me have you seen a boy — his eyes al-ways wan-de - ring ne - ver sa - tis-*

Ten. Sax. *ppp soft, sotto voce*

B. Cl. *pp soft, with a flow*

1073

Menashe. *fied is he mine? — is he mine is he mine ex - cuse me*

Ten. Sax. *cresc. poco a poco*

B. Cl. *cresc. poco a poco*

1076 *cresc. poco a poco*

Menashe. *have you seen a boy — his — eyes al-ways wan - de - ring they look spacious*

Ten. Sax. *mp*

B. Cl. *mf*

Figure 32: Score excerpt from 'Excuse Me, Have You Seen a Boy', showing Menashe's pulsation and inner rhythm in the vocal writing against the ensemble's 2/2 metre

4.4.3 *Coloratura in the Role of Yoel*

Coloratura has been one of the most important characteristic parts of Cantorial singing throughout its history. Cantorial coloratura is used to paint words: from a number of notes to a single note, depending on the meaning, emphasis and intention behind the word (and the coloratura itself).

As such, I explored the notion of coloratura throughout with each character to various degrees. I will demonstrate how I approached it through the character of Yoel, who exhibits most prevalently aspects of this style: Yoel suffers from a slight psychological stammer that occurs when he is nervous. As a result, he suffers from a lack of confidence and communicates in an indirect way.

Influenced by Cantorial ornaments, melismas and colouristic effects, I used coloratura to deploy unnatural pauses and silences—with silence as a form of ornamentation—and to affect the natural flow and movement of Yoel's speech, rather than creating an actual stammer in his voice, and consequently text. Sometimes he cuts sentences and swallows words, whilst other times words flow too fast, almost as if from a lack of control. This allowed space for his inner thoughts to come to the surface and/or to represent caught emotions, creating an effect of distress that is more symbolic and emotional than literal. Examples of this can be seen throughout his vocal part (and other characters' vocal parts), but the following scene⁹⁵ touches on these territories in particular.

⁹⁵ 'Two Dollars' (pp.63–91, Figures 22–32); for further information, please refer to the full score. For audio please refer to MAMZER/BASTARD—>SM.C—>C.1—>no.7.

22 Freely [$\text{♩} = 70$]
 No vibrato, clean, plain, simple
mp hesitant, nervous

251 Y. *mp* *p* *mp*
 two do-llars two do-llars Baruh ata that I stole from my fa -

3. Cl. *ppp* echotone

254 Y. *p* *mf* *pp* *mp* *small dynamic waves*
 - thers wa - llet two two do-llars he

Sax. *echotone* *p*
 vib./alternatae color trill

3. Cl. *p*

258 Y. *> p* *simile* *mp*
 he he did not no - tice there

ve-al yedey hupa u'kidushin

Figure 33: An excerpt from 'Two Dollars', showing Yoel's use of coloratura as an expression of his inner emotional state

4.4.4 Unification of Musical and Rhythmic Ideas in the Role of the Stranger

An important element in Cantorial chanting is repetition: it is a common practice in synagogal worship services, which I was able to observe from childhood. This dates back to many biblical formats that use repetition as a device for introducing Jewish motifs and teachings in a memorable and playful manner (which will be further discussed in Section 5.2). In such a context, repetition is often expressed by introducing a single musical idea at a time and developing it consistently over repeating rhythmic and melodic patterns. Injecting space within the variations and repetitions is necessary, as it allows the listeners to prepare for when the pattern is about to change.

This notion was explored through the character of the stranger, as his way of moving through time is epitomised by folk-like repetition, with very gradual changes that are focused on tension and release. Being a character that lives on the side lines, repetition was also used in an abstract way to express an inner psyche that is frozen and stuck in its pattern, almost as if walking in circles. Examples of this can be seen specifically in the following scene⁹⁶:

Stranger. *mf* natural, flowing

be fore the war be fore I came to A me -

Stranger. *pp*

ri ca be fore e - very thing had changed be fore I was mar ried

Stranger.

I was mar ried in Po - land but

Stranger. *soft, esp. step by step*

803 — the war came bet ween us and I came to A me - ri ca sear -

60

Stranger. 807

ching sear ching sear - ching sear ching sear ching sear - ching for a girl

Figure 34: An excerpt from ‘No One Knows I’, showing the notion of introducing a single musical idea at a time and developing it consistently over repeating rhythmic and melodic patterns, as expressed in the stranger’s vocal writing

Clearly, the connections between these improvisatory Cantorial elements (as described by Chaim Feifel) and the operatic vocal writing are much deeper and at times deeply intuitive and unconscious. In this section, I have provided an overview and a few examples of the essence of my creative process, which can be seen in greater detail throughout the score’s vocal writing.

⁹⁶ ‘No One Knows I’ (pp.181–204, Figures 58–63); for further information, please refer to the full score. For audio please refer to MAMZER/BASTARD—>SM.C—C.1—>no.14.

5. *MAMZER/BASTARD*

In Chapter 1, I outlined my two research aims, which were:

1. Cantorial Music research: to examine this vocal tradition from different angles, in particular its relation to opera and drama.
2. Searching for a dramaturgical framework: to contextualise this music in a dramatic, theatrical, operatic setting.

These research aims contributed to the overall objective initially discussed, which was the creation of a new operatic work for performance by an Orthodox Jewish Cantor and opera singers. In adapting my research aims into an operatic, dramatic piece, I arrived at four key aspects, which I utilised as a confluence between the musical traditions of Cantorial Music and drama, in addition to my own sound world and creative research interests. This process was discussed in Chapter 4: Methodology, where I demonstrated how each key aspect expressed itself in the final piece. The four methodology subsections were as follows:

Section 4.1: Found Material outlined my own aims in using existing Cantorial Music in the opera and provided an overview of the six existing Cantorial pieces used, as well as the choices behind embedding each of them in the piece.

In Section 4.2: Jewish Prayer Modes, I demonstrated how Jewish prayer modes were used to represent the pre-exile authenticity sound world, as defined by Cantor Leib Glantz in reference to his meta-structure modal scales.

Section 4.3: Heritage and Hauntology discussed the hauntology musical aesthetic in relation to *MAMZER* and explored the role of musical preservation in informing both the orchestration and soundscape creation processes. Both creative processes were discussed separately in reference to the hauntological aesthetic.

In Section 4.4: Cantorial Improvisation, I examined how certain Cantorial techniques and methods, as defined by Chaim Feifel, were used in the opera's vocal writing to create inner personal drama and characterisation.

In this chapter, I will outline how the above key aspects were arrived at in the final piece *MAMZER/BASTARD*, in the context of the three-year residency. This will be expressed in a full timeline, where various points in the process will be highlighted and discussed, including workshops, auditions and the production period, which allowed me to pursue my research aims in the most effective manner.

I will then continue by addressing critical and public reception and will outline how some of the issues raised could be improved or resolved in future productions, where relevant. I will conclude by providing a personal reflection on the process as a whole.

5.1 Production, Process and Timelines

Unlike any other commissioning model, the ROH and GSMD scheme enables research and development (R&D), workshops, and revisions, in addition to mentorship and support. As previously discussed, the notion of incorporating Cantorial Music into contemporary opera was yet to be explored in a contemporary opera context; therefore, musical exploration played a huge role in my creative process and the development of the piece. To reflect that, the composition process was arranged in short periods to allow time for experimentation, reflection and the inevitable resulting changes. With this, my aim was to write a relatively small selection of music each period that I would then try out, either in a workshop with a small group of singers/instrumentalists or on an individual basis. When possible, I aimed to make a final draft of some sections as I went along and send them over to relevant parties (even if not entirely finalised) to ensure that my collaborators were aware of the nature of the piece⁹⁷. In this chapter, I have enclosed the timeline listing the developing nature of my creative research. The timeline is divided into three sections: my two research strands (Cantorial Music and dramatic research) and the ROH/GSMD production development, which explains the various stages I have gone through within the timeframe of the three-year residency. Following that, I intend to address specific areas on the timeline that are relevant to my research and that I have found valuable in shedding light on the creative and academic process as a whole. Finally, various issues were explored through workshops and research and development which were not relevant to my research and will not be discussed in great detail here; however, they are reflected in the timeline below.

⁹⁷ For logistical reasons, the Cantor was not able to be present for most of the writing process; however, we engaged in a constant dialogue and met twice a year in my first and second years.

Month	Cantorial Research	Dramaturgy	Production and Residency
First Year: Research	- Research trips: New York and Israel, which included: - Visiting archives - Sourcing, playing and listening to manuscripts - Conversations, meetings and interviews - Attending Cantorial Music concerts - Visiting Hasidic communities - Sketching short small Cantorial studies and trying them out with Cantors, as well as trying out existing Cantorial repertoire - Creating soundscapes and electro-acoustic mock-ups to reflect the sound world - Narrowing down compositional research materials to specific areas of Cantorial Music (with a focus on the Golden Age) - Narrowing down a list of Cantorial collaborators - Creating new arrangements for chosen existing Cantorial pieces	- Conversations and meetings with writers, playwrights, directors, producers, literary managers and agents - Shadowing and observing contemporary ROH productions, plus attending theatre shows - Consideration of adapting an existing story: 1) S.Y. Agnon (<i>And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight</i>); 2) S. Ansky (<i>The Dybbuk</i>); 3) <i>Treacherous Son</i> (from the Babylonian Talmud); and 4) Shabbatai Tzvi and Lubavitch Rabbi autobiographies - Setting parameters and drawing a brief for the writers, including themes, fields of interest, mood boards, visual language, limiting factors, structure, style and setting - Narrowing down potential writers - Working with two writing teams to develop synopses/ basic storylines (<i>Lightfall</i> and <i>MAMZER</i>) - Delivery of two different synopses to the ROH and GSMD. Presentation, discussion and feedback	- Introduction meetings and conversations with the ROH and GSMD supervisors, as well as the doctorate, marketing, and education and outreach departments at the ROH - Regular supervisory meetings: discussions of creative process, potential collaborations, timelines, and artistic and compositional direction - Development and submission of revised research proposal - Conclusions and feedback shared with supervisors (GSMD/ ROH) - Key dates of the activity pinned down in conjunction with supervisors - Music specifications and timeline put in place and agreed with the ROH and GSMD - Post-workshop conclusions and feedback

Month	Cantorial Research	Dramaturgy	Production and Residency
Second Year: Composition and Libretto Development	- Summer workshops (Cantorial) and audio/visual mock-ups - Musical thematic and structural development - Cantorial auditions (John Fulljames, New-York and London) - Composition of 1st half; development phase - Preparation for auditions and workshops; selecting scenes - Regular compositional supervision - Composition of 2nd half	- Rachel and Samantha story development with Na'ama - Rachel and Samantha 1st writing period - Na'ama approaches Jay Scheib, with meetings to take place via Skype and in London, in addition to observing Jay's production <i>Bat Out of Hell</i> - 1st libretto draft delivered to supervisory team - Libretto revisions: official title and characters established - Libretto 1st draft formal reading at the ROH, with feedback from ROH and GSMD teams - Libretto amendments and revisions alongside composition period - Full 2nd draft libretto delivered - 1st draft of sound cue list - ROH three-day workshop with director (to be joined by librettists and ROH and GSMD supervisory teams)	- Discussions about creative team and approaching directors - Re-evaluation and creation of new activity timeline - Upgrade preparations write-up and submission followed by mock-up viva - New libretto/music schedule agreed with the ROH and GSMD - Finalise full collaborative creative team and band - Philip Venables opera rehearsal observations - Discussions with the Hackney Empire Theatre as an alternative venue and with the Armel Festival about a potential follow-up performance - Introduction meeting with Jessica Cottis (confirmed conductor) - Hackney Empire Theatre site visit (confirmed venue) - Doctoral GSMD presentation

Month	Cantorial Research	Dramaturgy	Production and Residency
Third Year: Production and Performances	- Vocal workshops with GSMD students (nine scenes workshopped over five days) - Post-workshop vocal revisions - Composition period of missing scenes - Child workshop at the ROH (boy chorister) - Lead role switched from tenor to countertenor - Full opera musical structure in place - Vocal score work completion - Vocal score workshops / full read-through with GSMD students, led by Jessica Cottis - Vocal score revisions and editing: (transpositions for mezzo and baritone, countertenor) - Vocal score draft delivered to singers (without Cantorial) - Orchestration period (2–3 months) - Full vocal score delivered (with Cantorial) - Full score and parts submitted	- 1st meeting with Sound Intermedia (PA) - Final libretto edits - New sound cue list in place - Showcase of 1st design concept over workshops - Final libretto submission - New design and costume showcase - Electronic score development with sound designer - Electronic score engineering mix and submission - QLab live full setup 1st draft - Live electronics revisions during rehearsals	- Establishing potential sponsorships for Cantor - Singers' auditions - Restarting countertenor auditions - PR image finalised and confirmed - Child singer auditions - Jessica, Jay and Na'ama meetings and discussions - Confirmation of Collin Shay in lead role as an outcome of workshops - Child singer coaching with music team (three boys, two of which go forward) - Cast finalised - Ticket sales open - 1st production meeting - Production rehearsals, including: music and staging rehearsals, language coaching, orchestra alone, sitzprobe, tech get in, S&O, S&P and general/dress) - Performances - Studio recording at Milton Court Concert Hall

5.1.1 Vocal Workshops

In September 2017, vocal workshops were held at the GSMD with vocal performance department students (mezzo-soprano, tenor and baritone) and a répétiteur, workshopping seven scenes⁹⁸. This was the first time any of the non-Cantorial material had been sung; therefore, the purpose of the workshops was to first and foremost get a sense of the nature of the operatic writing. In addition, this was an opportunity to engage in experimentation; explore transpositions and improvisation; discuss rhythmic and enharmonic spellings; and get overall feedback from the singers and the ROH and GSMD supervisory teams and staff. The outcomes of these workshops were immensely important, particularly in the following areas:

1) Notation: as previously discussed in Section 4.4: Cantorial Improvisation, I explored various approaches to expressing Cantorial vocal improvisation through the operatic vocal writing. It was challenging to try to transmit the vocal freedom and naturalism in Cantorial Music to fixed Western music notation. Due to the multi-layered nature of the operatic art form, total freedom in the vocal writing as expressed in Cantorial Music was bound to be somewhat limited. To mitigate that, I initially tried to capture the improvisatory notion through various notational methods, which involved some degrees of open score where various elements were left up to the performer's decision.

In practice, this proved not to be useful in achieving my desired sound result. Most singers did not feel confident in engaging in structured improvisation in this specific context and/or would go in a musical direction that was foreign to Cantorial Music language. We talked about this issue at length and sought ways of improving the notational language, in order for it to communicate the desired sound world with singers who might have no previous knowledge of Cantorial Music. I understood that in an operatic context and timeframe, there was no way of achieving the sense of vocal freedom in the Cantorial material in a more-naturalistic way, rather than fully notating it as a suggestive starting point (melismas/ornaments, phrasings and any vocal decorations would be clearly notated on paper). With that, I went off and rewrote the materials, exploring a far more strict and specific type of notation than originally explored⁹⁹.

⁹⁸ For the workshop schedule and list of scenes, please refer to Chapter 5 —> 5.1 —> SM.34.

⁹⁹ For the workshop score, please refer to Chapter 5 —> 5.1 —> SM.35.

2) Transposition/voice types: one of the most important outcomes of these workshops was the realisation that the lead role of Yoel (protagonist), initially perceived as a tenor, should be transposed to a countertenor. The material was sitting well within the tenor's range in the workshop readings; however, something in the colour and quality did not feel right dramatically. The countertenor's range felt more suitable for the fragility and vulnerability reflected in Yoel's character. Despite already auditioning many tenors, these workshops suggested a turn in the lead role's casting. After discussions with my supervisory teams at the ROH and GSMD, a new callout was sent for countertenors. In addition, transpositions were discussed in relation to the mezzo-soprano and baritone parts. These related mostly to the colour and personalities of the characters¹⁰⁰.

5.1.2 Child Singer Workshop

In November 2017, a workshop session was held with a child singer (referred from Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School), led by Amy Lane (staff director), at the ROH. Alongside the vocal workshops, we were making progress with casting the role of young Yoel (child singer), where various options were considered and discussed (type of voice, training, age and musical background). I had no experience in writing for children's voices at the time; therefore, the workshop was absolutely necessary for me to have a better understanding of what was possible. The workshop focused on the opening scene 'Father's Fathers', which featured a solo part¹⁰¹.

The session included a physical warm-up and practical text work / a read-through of the scenes, followed by basic staging and eventually combining the music and drama together¹⁰². This session was extremely positive and gave me a sense of the colour, dramatic quality and potential vocal range to explore.

¹⁰⁰ For a workshop audio excerpt, please refer to Chapter 5 —> 5.1 —> SM.36.

¹⁰¹ For the workshop score, please refer to Chapter 5 —> 5.1 —> SM.37.

¹⁰² For child workshop audio excerpts, please refer to Chapter 5 —> 5.1 —> SM.38 and SM.39.

5.1.3 Read-Through Vocal Workshops

In December 2017, another vocal workshop took place at the GSMD. The workshops lasted five days¹⁰³, covering the complete vocal score (excluding the Cantorial pieces, due to the Cantor's absence)¹⁰⁴, and involved two mezzo-sopranos (Esther) with contrasting voice qualities, two countertenors (Yoel), a tenor (Menashe) a baritone (the stranger) and a répétiteur. The workshop was conducted by Jessica Cottis (production conductor). The creative team were in attendance for some or all of the week, including the director, the designer, the senior producers, and ROH and GSMD management¹⁰⁵. This workshop signified a major step forward for the following reasons:

- The workshop allowed us to get a sense of the piece as a whole, its dramatic and musical structure, and more-specific timings, which were immensely important when developing the soundscape and other production elements.
- Colin Shay, a GSMD fellow who replaced the countertenor in the last two workshop days, was chosen to play Yoel (the lead role).
- Valuable connections with the creative and music team towards the production period were formed (the conductor was able to get a sense of the score, the director was familiarised with the music, etc.).
- The reiterated notational language proved successful. Once the material had settled and the cast got to know the ins and outs of the notational language, the desired more-naturalistic sound effect came to surface.

The workshop culminated in a read-through sharing/presentation of the complete vocal score, attended by GSMD and ROH supervisory teams, staff, fellow composers, and GSMD composition students. Feedback was given later in a free manner.

¹⁰³ For the read-through workshop schedule, please refer to Chapter 5 —> 5.1 —> SM.40.

¹⁰⁴ For the read-through workshop score, please refer to Chapter 5 —>5.1 —> SM.41.

¹⁰⁵ For the read-through workshop recording, please refer to Chapter 5 —> 5.1 —> SM.42.

5.3.3 Auditions

In February 2018, casting for the final role of young Yoel began. Between 15 and 20 children from various musical backgrounds were auditioned. The process involved a first stage of group auditions, with successful applicants going on to a second stage of individual work with the music team. The remaining cast members' auditions (for the roles of Esther, Menashe and the stranger) took place over the first half of the third year. Finding the right dramatic qualities was key, in addition to the ability to sing in different accents. As a result, singers were asked to audition with excerpts from the actual vocal score. To that end, the auditions essentially served as another platform to hear how the material was sitting within different voices and transpositions. Casting was officially completed by March 2018, excluding young Yoel's role, which was completed by April 2018.

5.1.4 Production Period

In early May 2018, we embarked on the production period, with daily rehearsals taking place at the ROH and the Hackney Empire rehearsal space and theatre. Running up to the rehearsal period, many of the cast received individual vocal and language coaching. Various layers had been added over the month (the Cantor joining, costumes, electronics and live camera). The production period included:

- One week of music coaching
- Three weeks of music and staging in the Hackney Empire rehearsal room, leading to a studio run of the opera on the last day, attended by ROH and GSMD teams, with feedback offered afterwards.
- A tech week in the theatre, which included three stage and piano rehearsals, two sessions of orchestra-only rehearsals and one sitzprobe in the rehearsal room.
- Three stage and orchestra rehearsals and one general (dress) rehearsal with around 100 attendees.
- One preview performance on 12th June 2018, a premiere / press night on 14th June 2018 and two subsequent performances on 15th and 17th June 2018.

These dates are reflected in the production timeline below:

- First rehearsal: 7th May 2018
- Get-in (onto set): 6th June 2018
- First stage and piano: 8th June 2018
- First stage and orchestra: 10th June 2018
- Dress/general/preview performance 12th June 2018
- First/premiere performance: 14th June 2018
- Second performance: 15th June 2018
- Final performance: 17th June 2018

The specific challenges previously mentioned (i.e. the integration of the Cantorial vocal style and techniques into Western classical notational language, the structural integration of Cantorial Music and more) had been fully resolved by the time we moved into the production period. However, other challenges emerged, where there were discrepancies between creative intentions and practical outcomes. These were mostly in the fields of live video and amplification and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.3.

On a personal level, the essence of this practice-based creative research was about doing something that had rarely been explored before in the context of opera, and hopefully within a greater artistic context. In doing so, there was an element of risk. Here, the risk was in taking a traditional classical form of Opera and combining it with a style of music and tradition that was, largely unknown outside the Jewish community, making it an outlier to the majority of contemporary music styles.

To that end, I understood that I was perhaps situating myself within riskier or more-vulnerable territory, where my work did not sit within a particular medium/genre and therefore could not be judged by clearly defined, conventional parameters. This element of artistic risk-taking was reflected in the opera's reception: it provoked strong responses and divided opinions, which provided much food for thought and raised important questions, more often than it provided answers. This, for me, was an extremely valuable outcome in itself, as it signified what making new art is about.

Clearly, it is outside the scope of this commentary to address comments in all avenues; however, I will attempt to address those of particular relevance to my research, in addition to some that I felt responded to particular lessons I learned in the course of making this piece.

5.2 Critical and Public Reception

MAMZER received much attention, with a number of very positive write-ups appearing in high-profile newspapers written by journalists who had visited the rehearsals, as well as interviews on radio stations (e.g. *The Guardian*, *BBC Radio 4*¹⁰⁶ and *The Jewish Chronicle*¹⁰⁷, amongst others).

We're crammed in along one wall of a rehearsal studio in Hackney, east London [...] The vocal lines are lyrical, but hesitantly so, fixating on just a handful of notes [...] It's powerful, painful to watch, even in this raw form – but it's also constantly evolving [...] There's certainly no space for operatic clichés in the Hackney rehearsal. Flora Wilson, *The Guardian*¹⁰⁸

Following that, the audience response was extremely positive and enthusiastic. All shows were sold out, with a standing ovation at every performance. I did not engage in any official procedure of gathering audience responses, but was able to observe some of the following on social media¹⁰⁹ (with the awareness that negative comments will normally not tag any relevant parties):

I bloody loved #MamzerBastard Claustrophobic immersive sound world and theatre. Huge congratulations @JessicaCottis @NaamaZisser @TheRoyalOpera et al. [Tweet] 17 Jun 2018, (@MezzoRosie)

#MamzerBastard new opera via @RoyalOperaHouse and @guildhallschool at the glorious @HackneyEmpire. Composer @NaamaZisser. Both insular and massive in its themes and historic references. At times, challenging and uncomfortable recitative and visuals; at others melodic and extremely moving. The music for and performance of the Cantor was exquisite. Well executed by all. Exciting debut.

¹⁰⁶ BBC Radio 4, 'Interview with Na'ama Zisser', *TODAY* (2018). <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0b5qnjq>> (accessed 15 June 2018).

¹⁰⁷ Duchén, Jessica, 'Preview: The Royal Opera's Upcoming Premier, *Mamzer Bastard*', *The Jewish Chronicle* (2018). <<https://www.thejc.com/culture/features/mamzer-bastard-na-ama-zisser-royal-opera-hackney-empire-1.465247>> (accessed 17 April 2019).

¹⁰⁸ Wilson, Flora, "'We've Got to Open Minds": Meet the Composers Reshaping Opera', *The Guardian* (2018). <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/jun/08/tansy-davies-emily-howard-naama-zisser-opera-modern-makeover>> (accessed 17 April 2019).

¹⁰⁹ For further information, please refer to Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, using the hashtags #MamzerBastard and handles @RoyalOperaHouse and @HackneyEmpire.

Well worth the schlep to Hackney #mamzerbastard #royaloperahouse#hackneyempire. [Instagram]

17 Jun 2018, (@ann.oldroyd2)

Furthermore, conversations are currently in place regarding potential future productions with other companies, venues, which overall suggests a positive reception.

Critical response was polemicised, with the majority of reviews leaning towards the negative. Below, I enclose a number of representative examples, covering a range of leading newspapers and websites¹¹⁰. Of particular relevance to my Cantorial Music research, the following reviews commented on the contextualisation of my main research aim, Cantorial Music within an operatic environment.

Zisser embeds the narrative in a constantly shifting soundscape of darkening harmonies and subtle textural gradations that create continuously evolving patterns of tension and release. Cantorial Music, introduced into opera for the first time, punctuates the narrative with moments of communal reflection. Tim Ashley, *The Guardian*¹¹¹

Zisser's work evokes that Jewish environment fluently and confidently in that she embeds a selection of Hasidic Cantorial songs within her continuous score [...] the first time this has been done in the medium of opera. In a sense they serve as moments of lyrical reflection [...] but as a repository of religious musical expression, they also function as a deeper, ritualistic framework [...] They sit well in the musical context of Zisser's score [...] acting as a fulcrum on which the melody turns and organically extends itself. Curtis Rogers, *Classical Source*¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Reviews were collected from the first fifteen entries of an opera review search on Google.

¹¹¹ Ashley, Tim, 'Mamzer Bastard review – haunting Hasidic opera illuminates '77 New York blackout', *The Guardian* (2018). <<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/jun/15/mamzer-bastard-review-naama-zisser-hackney-empire>> (accessed 17 April 2019).

¹¹² Rogers, Curtis, 'The Royal Opera at Hackney Empire – Na'ama Zisser's *Mamzer Bastard*; directed by Jay Scheib; conducted by Jessica Cottis', *The Classical Source* (2018). <http://classicalsource.com/db_control/db_concert_review.php?id=15536> (accessed 17 April 2019).

*Relatively bearable is the Cantorial Music framing the action [...] mostly by other composers – only the last of the six numbers is by Zisser [...] More surprising to read is that Zisser hoped for homogeneity between the religious numbers and her own music-theatre; the contrasts are extreme. David Nice, The Arts Desk*¹¹³

*The melodic mode is standard-issue atonal modernism, with a chamber accompaniment strikingly lacking in character. The music becomes beautiful when the cantor sings out with ringing grace – then the score becomes briefly anchored in tonality, but for the rest of the time it's a heavy slog. Michael Church, Independent*¹¹⁴

*An incredibly ambitious work from Na'ama Zisser [...] The incorporation of Jewish Cantorial Music alongside the contemporary classical undoubtedly works. The traditional Cantorial songs [...] are among the most affecting moments in the opera. Their intimacy, otherworldliness and longing brilliantly sets the tone. Simon Fearn, A Younger Theatre*¹¹⁵

It was interesting to observe how the merging of the two musical worlds, Cantorial music and opera, affected the way each genre was individually perceived. This goes back to an earlier discussion in the Introduction regarding the notion of context, and how it plays a role in how one might perceive music. Here, we have a religious, tonal, largely unknown genre of music, placed next to contemporary operatic writing. Many of the reviews mention a successful merging of the two worlds. However, those that didn't find the combination successful compare my compositional language as "standard-issue atonal modernism" with Cantorial music as "banal".

There is of course no objective truth, but nevertheless, I felt that the dissonance in these reviews raised a relevant question about how well adapted the juxtaposition of two musical worlds was for a non-Jewish audience. This is of course a much larger cultural context question quite beyond the scope of this research, which may involve many parameters, for example:

¹¹³ Nice, David, 'Mamzer Bastard, Royal Opera, Hackney Empire Review – Inert Hasidic Music-Drama', *The Arts Desk* (2018). <<https://theartsdesk.com/opera/mamzer-bastard-royal-opera-hackney-empire-review-inert-hasidic-music-drama>> (accessed 17 April 2019).

¹¹⁴ Church, Michael, 'Mamzer Bastard, Hackney Empire, London, Review: Pretentiously Chaotic Direction Makes This a Heavy Slog', *Independent* (2018). <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/classical/reviews/mamzer-bastard-review-royal-opera-hackney-empire-guildhall-school-a8400121.html>> (accessed 17 April 2019).

¹¹⁵ Fearn, Simon, 'Review: Mamzer Bastard, Hackney Empire', *A Younger Theatre* (2018). <<https://www.ayoungerteaatre.com/review-mamzer-bastard-hackney-empire/>> (accessed 17 April 2019).

Would we have the same response had there been a degree of familiarity with either the musical material, subject matter, dramatic environment or even languages? If so, are there more gradual or delicate ways to consider leading non-jewish audiences into this aural musical journey? Was there enough set-up in the gradual changes of style within Cantorial pieces?

Some reviewers found a connection between modernist composition and specific elements in Cantorial music. For example, the following reviews commented on the use of a microtonal language amongst other devices (previously discussed in Section 4.3), resonating with my research aims.

Zisser's musical coup is to integrate the microtonal ululations of a Jewish Cantor, Netanel Hershtik, providing an archaic penumbra that is both comforting and chilling. Nick Kimberley, *The Standard*¹¹⁶

Her music, combining traditional Jewish melodies and quarter-tonal trills with all the expanded sonorities and extended techniques of 20th century composition, is sensuous without being trite; subtle without being slight. Through a deft skein of small gestures, Zisser is able to build up a sound world high on atmospherics, gossamer-light and richly engrossing. Robert Barry, *Van Magazine*¹¹⁷

The divided opinions between reviewers and audience members were pushed further when a number of critical freelance writers felt compelled to comment and express their own personal opinions (on various independent formats such as blogs and personal websites). Below I enclose a representative response which I felt was relevant to the discussion in this chapter:

¹¹⁶ Kimberley, Nick, 'Mamzer Bastard Review: Dense and Disorientating Drama Sheds Light on Jewish Past', *The Standard* (2018). <<https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/arts/mamzer-bastard-review-dense-and-disorientating-drama-sheds-light-on-jewish-past-a3865256.html>> (accessed 17 April 2019).

¹¹⁷ Barry, Robert, 'Uncanny Songs', *Van Magazine* (2018). <<https://van-us.atavist.com/uncanny-songs>> (accessed 17 April 2019).

Zisser's sound world is far from standard-issue modernism: it is distinctive for its keening strings in quarter-tones, off-centre effects that destabilise the scene as if from within the characters themselves; electronics are seamlessly integrated, uncompromising chunky chords measure out emotions to match, and resonant percussive effects create chilling auras of sound [...] It's possible, of course, that Mamzer Bastard is simply too niche, too bizarre a world for some Londoners [...] If you are familiar with this environment to any degree, you'll recognise elements of it all too clearly. If you're not, though, it could be a steep learning curve [...] We have to face up to the fact that the music world of the UK is rooted heavily in the Anglican church. Choir, organ and early music therefore have a natural home here and the most eminent people in the business tend to have had a grounding in that sphere [...] The English choral tradition has produced some glorious music and musicians, but it is also, inevitably, quite limiting [...] By the way, I have not yet seen any other reviews of Mamzer/Bastard by critics who happen to be female. Jessica Duchen¹¹⁸ (writer/journalist)

When combined, these altogether serve as an interesting testimony to new art reception and criticism, in addition to offering a number of useful observations on the production and the score as a whole.

5.3 Issues for Future Productions

Many questions arise out of the discussion in Chapter 5.2. At the forefront stands the accessibility for a non-Jewish audience. Any change for future productions could be tackled from a number of different angles: edits to the composition in order to better draw audiences towards the introduction of the Cantorial style, revisions to orchestration in order to create more musical homogeneity, re-staging/different production and, crucially for non-Jewish audiences, editing and revisioning the libretto.

From my current standpoint, I believe that there should be a holistic review of the piece regarding these aspects in order to better understand issues such as musical accessibility and homogeneity in a broader cultural context. Any changes and revisions either to music or drama (especially text) should be made accordingly.

¹¹⁸ Duchen, Jessica, 'Secrets, Lies and Star Wars', *Jessica Duchen's Classical Music Blog* (2018). <<https://jessicamusic.blogspot.com/search/label/Na%27ama%20Zisser>> (accessed 17 April 2019).

However, at the time of writing, I feel it is too soon to say exactly what might be the necessary revisions, and if revived under different directors or productions, it is certainly possible that some questions will resolve themselves through staging and dramaturgy immediately; whilst other will need a certain distance, to allow time for reflection and gaining perspective. Therefore, I am withholding commenting on any potential compositional or libretto revisions, reflections, or conclusions, any comment made on these matters at this point will be premature; as my current view on it is very dynamic, it continues to grow, change and shift.

Nevertheless, on the subject of future productions, I would like to address two specific technical issues in greater detail and outline how they might be improved or resolved: live video and amplification. The reason for focusing on those two issues specifically was due to them being particularly central to my methodology, and therefore integral to my creative research as a whole.

5.3.1 Live Video

Live video was integrated in the rehearsal room mid-way through the production period, executed by video designer Paulina Jurzec under Jay Scheib's direction. During rehearsals, a small TV monitor was provided for this purpose, and the process ran smoothly and effectively. The logistical mechanism of opera productions meant that we had only several days to adapt everything we had achieved in a small rehearsal room into the very big, challenging space of the Hackney Empire Theatre, transitioning from the TV screen monitor to enormous floor-to-ceiling wall projections. Such a process requires time and a considerable amount of trial and error, which we could not allow due to schedule limitations, in addition to having technicians changing from one day to another, which damaged the continuity of the process. An unexpected bug in the Hackney Empire software created a time lag during performances, which caused the entire system to freeze for 15 minutes in one incident, in addition to continuous delays that were out of the control of the creative team. These only occurred in the live performances and never in rehearsals. The end result of that was putting into question the use of live video in the production as a whole.

If and when future productions take place, I will be open to using live video in a similar manner, but only if a considerable amount of tech time is allocated just to video and sound and dedicated technicians are sourced. If that is not possible, I intend to explore options of creating different interpretations that will not be reliant on PA or live video and will seek other ways of conveying the initial state of mind of the piece and production.

In addition, further work can be done in realising the full potential and possibilities of *MAMZER*'s live cinema element and the interaction of characters and space to affect the drama. I am continuing to engage in conversations with Paulina (video designer) and Jay (director), and the option of further experimentation in this field. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the video design for *MAMZER* was nominated for the 2018 Knight of Illumination Award for Projection Design¹¹⁹, the ultimate showcase of entertainment lighting and video design work in the UK, which suggested it received recognition.

¹¹⁹ Knight of Illumination Awards, '2018 Theatre Shortlist' (2018). <<https://knight-of-illumination.com/the-knight-of-illumination-awards-reveals-theatre-shortlist/>> (accessed 17 April 2019).

5.3.2 Amplification

The Hackney Empire Theatre has a capacity of 1,275 seats; the size of the theatre as opposed to the size of the cast and ensemble (six singers and 11 players) meant that we had no choice but to amplify the orchestra and singers. The space and equipment in use were not suitable for creating the more-nuanced, immersive, delicate experience I was after, nor what the music demanded; rather, it was the type of equipment that could support this size of space. The opera featured intimate, personal music, and I found that the amplification offered a reduction of sound, rather than enrichment or thickening. From my perspective, the amplification creative choices made by the PA company (Sound Intermedia) in this instance were not fully thought through, and this was a source of much frustration and stress. In addition, the only sound operator provided to run all the shows did not have any previous experience working in opera, which did not aid in addressing the overall challenges. This issue only came to the surface during the final few days leading up to the show when we transitioned to the theatre. Microphones were replaced after the first stage and orchestra rehearsal in an attempt to improve the overall sound. However, with only two stage and orchestra rehearsals, it was almost impossible to do much about it at that stage.

There are various ways of potentially preventing this in future productions, including requiring to see the equipment list and amplification plan well in advance; seeking consultation and advice from experts in the field; insisting on extra time to resolve all potential PA issues; and asking to hear the equipment and sound system beforehand, if at all possible. In addition, current discussions are being held in regard to potential performances in an intimate space with no amplification, where PA is used for the soundscape only.

Cinematic sound design as a means of storytelling in opera is something I touched on to some degree in making this piece but was not explored to its full potential. We were particularly interested in spatial sound design and its inner psychology in an operatic/dramatic context (especially composing for more sophisticated surround/immersive systems), and I continue to explore this with Yair Glotman (sound designer) through a number of grants and residency applications.

Finally, *MAMZER* operates in a more traditional manner, in which the core of the piece relies on the score, story/libretto and soundtrack. As a result, the previous production's artistic decisions should not necessarily dictate the choices of any future productions and should remain open for discussion for a new creative team to tackle them from new perspectives.

5.4 Evaluation of the Research

This chapter will include a personal evaluation of the process of the residency as a whole.

The application of various aural musical traditions, genres and practices onto contemporary classical composition, and the collaborative process it suggests was a personal research target of mine, which I have explored previously in a number of other works (as discussed in Chapter 1).

With that, my research aims allowed me to extend this existing interest in the fields of found material and its contextualisation within a dramatic context. This has been expanded and developed here with Cantorial Music, and will continue to be explored in future projects in the following ways:

- Cross-cultural collaborative work with non-classically trained singers, bringing together different practices and genres
- Further development of notational approaches to Cantorial Music and improvisation
- Cinematic spatial sound design as a means of storytelling in opera (particularly working with sophisticated surround immersive systems)
- Use of technological artefacts within operatic context, as a way of distorting and manipulating stage reality, alternating the perception of the drama and its inner psychology

From my point of view, I feel that this project's research aims were largely fulfilled: I explored the relationship between Cantorial Music and opera in a deeper sense, and I made valuable collaborative connections that allowed me to immerse myself wholeheartedly in this language and musical tradition. I then contextualised this musical tradition in a dramatic environment to create a great impact, which spoke to many people and, importantly, revealed this genre to a world outside the Jewish community. This expressed itself in audience responses, industry and professional interest, public media attention and finally ticket sales. The above are in addition to other more-immediate personal outcomes that are central to my own professional development, such as:

- Learning to how to be a team player and let go of control in a creative process.
- Making valuable artistic connections, which I continue to explore and nourish.
- Receiving an insight into the inner workings and mechanisms of big organisations such as the ROH and how to work under pressure within these environments.
- Tackling much bigger musical forms and structures and completing my longest and most ambitious work to date.
- Acquiring a much better understanding of PR, which included giving interviews, presenting my music, creating work with a greater impact and dealing with criticism (on both a professional and personal level).
- Most important of all was the lesson in artistic risk-taking in this early stage of my career and the value of emotional authenticity within that process.

The making of *MAMZER* would simply not have been possible in a standard commissioning process. It required thorough, nuanced research in a relatively unknown field; a considerable amount of experimentation; a great level of support and resources; and an honest desire to think and work in new ways, collaborating with opera singers and Cantorial performers to develop a work that was personal and unique to the abilities of the performers, the social context, the restrictions and the dramatic interest. This model of creative work is normally unavailable to composers, allowing for the exciting possibility of seeing a work transform over time and learning from the experience. In doing that, the GSMD and the ROH have allowed me to pursue my research aims in a genuinely organic manner, and engage in creating new work which offers an insight into a type of artistry largely unaffected by popular culture and the modern world. To me, this signifies a contribution to the extant knowledge, which is the essence of all successful research projects, but, above all, it has significant value in contributing to change in the cultural landscape of the opera world.

6. Appendix

6.1 References and Bibliography

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6.2 Supporting Materials

All paper-based materials can be found in the accompanying booklet of supporting materials.

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SM.A.2 Vocal score

SM.A.3 Cantorial score

SM.B MAMZER libretto

SM.B.1 Structure of the opera by scenes

SM.C MAMZER recording (full)

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SM.18 Score excerpt Elu Devorim/These Are Those Things by Moshe Koussevitzky

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SM.19 Score excerpt Al Tiro/Do Not Be Afraid by Moshe Ganchoff

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