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**Preparing for Operatic Roles by Combining Elements of  
Stanislavsky's System with Alfreds' Actioning**

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

**Doctor of Musical Arts**

at

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by

**JUNE DAMS**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the process of preparing for operatic roles by combining elements of Constantin Stanislavsky's 'system' with Mike Alfreds' Actioning. The research is presented as a report of a practice-led experiment, using myself as subject, to test the efficacy of Actioning within my Stanislavskian-influenced dramatic character preparation process for operatic roles.

This study was undertaken by the singer-actor/researcher as four applied case studies which integrate dramatic character preparation within the early preparation stages of the music/role-learning process. The purpose of this study is to encourage the development of dramatic self-sufficiency for the singer-actor by testing the validity and adaptability of Actioning to improve the efficiency of their dramatic character preparation in the practice studio (general private practice/rehearsal space).

This research follows a practice-led methodology presented through four applied case studies on the roles of Carmen (*Carmen*), Carlotta Giudicelli (*The Phantom of the Opera*) in two productions, and Micaëla (*Carmen*) with particular focus on her aria *Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante* for the Final DMA Recital.

Chapter One introduces the focus of the thesis and an overview of the research. Chapter Two covers the relevant literature and justifies the research inquiry. Chapter Three establishes the methodological approach. Chapter Four comprises the four applied case studies of Carmen, Carlotta and Micaëla; and Chapter Five discusses the findings and limitations of the thesis, and offers suggestions for future research.

This study makes three important contributions to the growing literature surrounding dramatic role preparation for the singer-actor. Firstly, this research tests the efficacy of Actioning in combination with Stanislavskian techniques specifically for the operatic singer-actor. Secondly, the process of Actioning is adapted to suit the singer-actor's dramatic preparation process in the practice studio, establishing it as a valid and practical preparatory technique for the singer-actor. Thirdly, this thesis provides an expedient and practical model for

dramatic character preparation, increasing dramatic self-sufficiency for the singer-actor as well as revealing the practice studio as a valid space for dramatic character preparation.

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Academic research and writing can be an isolating experience, but I have been fortunate to count on my family, friends and colleagues for their social and moral support. I would particularly like to thank my brother, Jarvis Dams, for countless hours of reading over various drafts of this thesis, discussing ideas, offering feedback, his insights as a singer, as well as extensive technological assistance. Thank you also to Michael Potts, for his feedback and insightful comments on my research and singing, as well as his unfailing encouragement and moral support. Special acknowledgements also to Dean Sky-Lucas for his guidance, teaching, exuberant encouragement and good humour.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Tables and Examples.....	ix
Glossary.....	x
<b>Chapter One: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1    Focus of the thesis.....	2
1.2    Background: Acting theory for singer-actors.....	4
1.2.1    Vocal recital.....	6
1.2.2    Dramatic character and the voice.....	7
1.3    Research objectives and research questions.....	10
1.4    Selecting the case studies.....	11
1.5    Original contribution to knowledge.....	12
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review.....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1    Stanislavsky’s ‘system’ and the singer-actor.....	14
2.2    Psychophysical acting.....	24
2.3    Experiencing and Flow Theory.....	32
2.4    Actions.....	39
2.5    Actioning.....	43
2.5.1    Actioning as a rehearsal technique.....	47
2.6    Dramatic character preparation for the singer-actor.....	52
2.7    Character analysis.....	55
2.7.1    Literary character analysis.....	56
2.7.2    Physical character analysis.....	62
2.8    Integrating voice with the dramatic character.....	65

2.9	Self-sufficiency, preparation and practicing skills.....	69
2.10	Summary.....	72
<b>Chapter Three: Research Method.....</b>		<b>74</b>
3.1	Practice-led research.....	74
3.1.1	Starting point.....	76
3.1.2	Research output.....	77
3.2	Research strategy.....	78
3.2.1	Case study research.....	78
3.2.2	The applied case studies.....	81
3.2.3	Creative Journal.....	83
3.3	Reporting and data collection.....	83
3.4	The singer-actor/researcher.....	84
3.5	The research design.....	85
3.6	Ethics and limitations.....	94
<b>Chapter Four: The Applied Case Studies.....</b>		<b>96</b>
4.1	Applied Case Study One: Carmen (2012).....	97
4.1.1	Character/Role.....	97
4.1.2	Analysis.....	98
4.1.3	Development.....	105
4.1.4	Reflection.....	113
4.2	Applied Case Study Two: Carlotta (2014).....	117
4.2.1	Character/Role.....	117
4.2.2	Analysis.....	118
4.2.3	Development.....	123
4.2.4	Reflection.....	137
4.3	Applied Case Study Three: Carlotta (2016).....	142



4.3.1	Character/Role .....	142
4.3.2	Analysis.....	142
4.3.3	Development.....	143
4.3.4	Reflection .....	152
4.5	Applied Case Study Four: Micaëla (2015/2016).....	155
4.5.1	Character/Role .....	155
4.5.2	Analysis.....	155
4.5.3	Development.....	160
4.5.4	Reflection .....	169
4.6	Summary.....	173
<b>Chapter Five: Conclusion.....</b>		<b>175</b>
5.1	Limitations of the research.....	181
5.2	Future recommendations.....	182
Bibliography .....		183
Appendix 1: DMA Recitals One to Four .....		197
Appendix 2: Final DMA Recital Programme.....		199
Appendix 3: Review Excerpts .....		209
Appendix 4: Creative Journal Extract .....		210

## List of Tables and Examples

### Tables

Table 1: The applied case studies .....	82
Table 2: Actioning for the singer-actor .....	92
Table 3: Fundamental Questions <i>Who?</i> , <i>Where?</i> and <i>When?</i> .....	104
Table 4: Fundamental Questions <i>Why?</i> and <i>For what purpose?</i> .....	106
Table 5: Fundamental Questions <i>Who?</i> , <i>Where?</i> and <i>When?</i> .....	122
Table 6: Fundamental Questions <i>Why?</i> and <i>For what purpose?</i> .....	124
Table 7: Fundamental Questions <i>Why?</i> and <i>For what purpose?</i> .....	143
Table 8: Fundamental Questions <i>Who?</i> , <i>Where?</i> and <i>When?</i> .....	159
Table 9: Fundamental Questions <i>Why?</i> and <i>For what purpose?</i> .....	161

### Examples

Example 1: Verdi, <i>Rigoletto</i> , Act 1, no. 9, "Caro nome", bars 19-27 .....	30
Example 2: Transitive verbs for Carlotta. Lloyd Webber, <i>Phantom</i> , Act 1, Scene 7, "Il Muto", bars 22-68b.....	132
Example 3: Transitive verbs for Carlotta. Lloyd Webber, <i>Phantom</i> , Act 1, Scene 6, "The Manager's Office", bars 76-140.....	147
Example 4: Transitive verbs for Micaëla. Bizet, <i>Carmen</i> , Act 3, no. 22 "Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante", bars 1-87 .....	164

## Glossary

<b>A cappella</b>	Singing without instrumental accompaniment.
<b>Aria</b>	A solo usually found in opera.
<b>Breeches role</b>	A theatrical convention where a young male character is played by a female performer.
<b>Cadenza</b>	A florid vocal passage, displaying coloratura, usually placed at the end of an aria.
<b>Coloratura</b>	Florid vocal passages that require agility.
<b>Fach, Fächer</b>	A commonly used German term meaning ‘vocal specialisation’. The fach system is a method of classifying singers according to the range, weight, and timbre of their voices. For example: soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto, countertenor, tenor, baritone, bass-baritone and bass.
<b>Fermata</b>	Italian term for a pause in the music.
<b>International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)</b>	A system of symbols and letters designed to phonetically write and speak any language.
<b>Marking</b>	Marking is a way of singing quietly or down the octave during rehearsals to protect one’s voice.
<b>Practice studio</b>	A general private practice/rehearsal space
<b>Recitative</b>	Sung dialogue in opera.
<b>Sitzprobe</b>	A German term literally meaning “sitting rehearsal” which is commonly used in opera and musical theatre to describe a seated rehearsal, often indicating the first rehearsal between the conductor, singer-actors and orchestra. This type of rehearsal focuses on integrating the orchestra with the voices.
<b>Tessitura</b>	The range of the majority of the vocal part.
<b>Vocal Coach</b>	Also known as a collaborative pianist. A person who teaches the musical, language and dramatic demands of the vocal repertoire.

**Vocal mechanism**

A collaborative term used to describe the various organs used to sing.

**Voice teacher**

A person who teaches vocal technique.

## Chapter One: Introduction

My research had its origins in a simple problem: how could the singer-actor prepare their dramatic characters actively in the practice studio? And would incorporating dramatic character preparation within the initial role-learning process increase dramatic self-sufficiency? As a singer-actor, I wanted to investigate this issue, not just for the sake of curiosity, but also to inform my own praxis, role preparation and dramatic characterisation choices.<sup>1</sup> Singer-actors are, by definition, both musicians and actors; however, their training focuses predominantly on vocal technique and while vocal technique is essential, it does not encompass their complete artistry. This research investigates how the singer-actor can integrate dramatic character development and preparation within their own initial role-learning process, while aiming at increased dramatic self-sufficiency.

My research approach originated in my interest in Konstantin Stanislavsky's<sup>2</sup> 'system',<sup>3</sup> which began during my undergraduate studies when I was given a copy of *Stanislavski on Opera*. Since then, I have gradually incorporated elements of the 'system' within my dramatic preparation for operatic roles. In 2014, I was introduced to Mike Alfreds' *Different Every Night*, and was particularly fascinated by his rehearsal technique Actioning. Exploring this technique led me to question if Actioning would be useful and adaptable for the singer-actor, particularly as a preparatory tool combined with elements of Stanislavsky's 'system'.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Appendix 1 for the programmes of my first four Doctoral Recitals, and refer to Appendix 2 for the programme of my Final DMA Recital.

<sup>2</sup> There are various common spellings of Stanislavsky's name in English such as 'Konstanin Stanislavsky' and 'Constantin Stanislavski', or other variations. His surname is often transliterated 'Stanislavski', as if it were Polish. In keeping with Russian transliteration, this thesis adopts the spelling 'Konstantin Stanislavsky' unless a source is quoted using alternate spelling. For more information see Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus: An Acting Master for the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd edn (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> I am using Stanislavsky's preferred spelling 'system' as it stresses the provisional nature of his approach to actor-training. An exception is made when quoting a source that uses alternate spelling. For more information see Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor: The Method of Physical Action*, Kindle Edition (London: Routledge, 2013), locations 87-98.

This thesis explores my preparation for operatic roles through a practice-led experiment, by amalgamating Stanislavskian techniques with Alfreds' Actioning, informing my own practice<sup>4</sup> as singer-actor while also providing a model for a practical and active dramatic character preparation process.

### **1.1 Focus of the thesis**

This thesis examines the process of preparing for operatic roles by combining elements of Stanislavsky's 'system' with Alfreds' Actioning. The research is presented as a report of an experiment, using myself as subject, to test the efficacy of Actioning within my usual Stanislavskian-based dramatic character preparation process. Using Stanislavsky's psychophysical acting theories as a starting point for this process provides an essential theoretical basis for my experiment on the efficacy of Actioning for operatic roles. In simple terms, an operatic role can be defined as "a role in an opera",<sup>5</sup> a role resembling opera, a role which has operatic characteristics, or a role which requires operatic vocal training.<sup>6</sup> This research takes the additional position that a role can also be considered operatic if it requires operatic vocal ability and quality of sound.<sup>7</sup>

This study, undertaken by the singer-actor/researcher through four applied case studies, integrates dramatic character preparation within the early preparation stages of the music/role-learning process. The purpose of this study is to encourage the development of dramatic self-sufficiency for the singer-actor by testing the efficacy and adaptability of Actioning to improve dramatic character preparation in the privacy of the practice studio.

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<sup>4</sup> In this thesis I am adopting the American convention of using the spelling 'practice' to indicate both a noun and a verb as a means to simplify and avoid confusion between the different usages amongst primary texts.

<sup>5</sup> Blanche Thebom, 'A Singer's Preparation of an Operatic Role', *The Opera Quarterly*, 11.2 (1995), 5–8 (p. 5) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/11.2.5>>.

<sup>6</sup> William A. Everett, *The Musical: A Research and Information Guide*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. xii.

<sup>7</sup> It is possible to study classical techniques common for operatic training, such as the 'Bel Canto technique', without sounding operatic. For example, singer-actors can have classical and operatic training and sing non-operatically, or play non-operatic characters.

Currently, within an academic context, the term “self-sufficient” is rarely used in relation to the singer-actor, musician or actor. Leading vocal pedagogue, David L. Jones, who discusses self-sufficiency and self-supervision in relation to vocal pedagogy and musical preparation, considers a self-sufficient singer-actor as someone who can develop vocal confidence through practice skills that improve vocal technique.<sup>8</sup> Although Jones’ article focuses on self-sufficiency from a vocal pedagogical perspective, this research follows a similar premise and aims to assess how preparing the character dramatically using elements of the ‘system’ combined with Actioning could assist the singer-actor with developing their dramatic self-sufficiency.

This research follows a practice-led research method and is conducted and presented by the singer-actor/researcher through four applied case studies:

**Applied Case Study One:** Carmen in *Carmen* by Georges Bizet, performed as self-directed concert production, conducted by Adam Maha, The University of Waikato, Conservatorium of Music Graduate Opera Production, 16 — 17 August 2012;

**Applied Case Study Two:** Carlotta in *The Phantom of the Opera* (*Phantom* hereafter) by Lord Andrew Lloyd Webber, directed by Warren Bates, The New Plymouth Operatic Society, 3 July — 25 July 2014;

**Applied Case Study Three:** Carlotta in *Phantom*, directed by Grant Meese, The Amici Trust with Amici Productions, 11 February — 5 March 2016;

**Applied Case Study Four:** Micaëla in *Carmen*, with a particular focus on her aria “*Je dis que rien ne m’épouvante*”, The University of Waikato, Final Doctor of Musical Arts Recital, 23 October 2015 and 11 November 2016.

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<sup>8</sup> David L. Jones, ‘Self-Supervision and the Singer: The Safety of Intelligent Practice’, *Classical Singer Magazine*, 2004, para. 8  
<<http://www.classicalsinger.com/magazine/article.php?id=889>> [accessed 8 August 2013].

## 1.2 Background: Acting theory for singer-actors

The question arises, why should singer-actors act at all? It would be simple to quote vocal pedagogue Richard Miller (1926-2005) and say: “Singing machines are uninteresting”<sup>9</sup> however the topic needs more explanation. Strong acting technique is becoming essential for singer-actors in the twenty-first century, as stated by David L. Jones: “In the operatic world today, acting is a skill requirement not an optional extra”.<sup>10</sup> It is no longer acceptable for singer-actors to “park-and-bark”<sup>11</sup> or completely rely on making a beautiful sound. The voice, however, is the singer-actor’s primary means of expression, as discussed in further detail later in this chapter. It has become a necessity that young singer-actors not only sing with great flexibility but also have a very strong acting ability “that opera did not demand fifty years ago”.<sup>12</sup>

Another reason for the rising demand for a strong acting technique is because nowadays opera directors have a greater influence on casting and they often come from theatre or film backgrounds.<sup>13</sup> There are several theatre and film directors who also direct opera such as Julie Taymor, Sofia Coppola, Peter Sellars, Robert Wilson, Neil Armfield, Sir Peter Hall, Barrie Kosky, Phyllida Lloyd, Sir Johnathan Miller, Georgio Strehler to name a few.<sup>14</sup> Therefore they expect

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Miller, *On the Art of Singing*, Kindle Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 152.

<sup>10</sup> Jones, para. 85.

<sup>11</sup> W. Stephen Smith, *Naked Voice: A Wholistic Approach to Singing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 178.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Kirke Mechem transcribed in: Mark Ross Clark and Lynn V. Clark, *Singing, Acting, and Movement in Opera: A Guide to Singer-Getics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 98.

<sup>13</sup> Roger Parker, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 279.

<sup>14</sup> Some notable productions: Taymor (*Oedipus Rex* by Stravinsky, 1992, *The Flying Dutchman* by Wagner, 1995 and *Die Zauberflöte* by Mozart, 1993, 2004-07, 2012); Coppola (*La Traviata* by Verdi, 2016); Sellars (Mozart’s *Così Fan Tutte*, 1986, *The Marriage of Figaro*, 1988, and *Don Giovanni*, 1980, 1990); Wilson (*Einstein on the Beach* by Glass, 1976, Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, 2000/1; *La Traviata*, 2015). Armfield (*The Eight Wonder* by Alan John, 1995, *Jenůfa* by Janáček, 1998 and Britten’s *Peter Grimes*, 2009); Hall (Britten’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 1981, Strauss’ *Salome*, 1986 and Tippett’s *New Year*, 1989); Kosky (*The Marriage of Figaro*, 1991, *The Golem* by Larry Sitsky, 1993 and *Rusalka* by Dvořák, 2009); Lloyd (*La Bohème* by Puccini, 1993, and Britten’s *Albert Herring*, 2002 and *Peter Grimes*, 2013); Miller (*The Marriage of Figaro*, 1978, 1998 and *La Traviata*, 1989, 2009); Strehler (*Cavalleria Rusticana* by Mascagni, 1966 and Verdi’s *Macbeth*, 1975 and *Falstaff*, 1980).



singer-actors to be at the same level of acting as either film or theatre actors and the standard should not be any less, as opera is a form of dramatic theatre. The expectation is for singer-actors to be well-rounded artists, with a good voice, strong acting ability and even a basic understanding of dance. A well-rounded singer-actor is able to take on the director's instructions and interpretation and make the characters come to life on stage. It is important to consider, however, that although the stage director is in charge of the overall dramatic presentation of the production, and their input is crucial, the level of their involvement with the singer-actor's performance can vary. Different stage directors have different working styles. Some give considerable direction, blocking out each movement and gesture; others give an overall outline and expect the singer-actor to 'fill in the gaps'; yet others prefer to work collaboratively: "The best productions — and certainly the most rewarding experiences — are often the result of collaborations, not a series of dictations from conductor and director to the singer."<sup>15</sup> As a performer it is important to keep in mind that "no matter how much input you get from conductors, coaches or directors, eventually the singer is responsible for the output of the character. Therefore it is crucial that singers should stay open to the input of others but make it their own".<sup>16</sup>

Another argument is put forward by Matt Bean in relation to the applicability and usefulness of actor training for the singer-actor. He argues that although many singer-actors go to acting classes to improve their performance skills, these skills help them to prepare scenes or monologues from dramatic texts but are rarely applied to performing songs or scenes from opera or musical theatre.<sup>17</sup> Bean claims that — unlike theatre, which deals only with text — opera and musical theatre rely on the integration of text and music, as it is the music which expresses the specific thoughts and feelings of the stage character.<sup>18</sup> Bean follows an argument similar to that of Wesley Balk, that "it is no denigration of

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew Latta in Clark and Clark, p. 97.

<sup>16</sup> Carroll Vaness in Clark and Clark, p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> Matt Bean, 'Why Is Acting in Song so Different?', *Journal of Singing*, 64.2 (2007), 167–73 (p. 172)<<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ejh&AN=27478051&site=ehost-live>> [accessed 17 August 2014].

<sup>18</sup> Bean, p. 172.

acting classes to say that they are very often of little benefit to the singing actor, for they deal with the rules of the theatre, not of roles of music-theatre, and the singers may emerge from them even more confused about the problems of singing-acting.”<sup>19</sup>

Another factor to consider is that modern opera audiences expect a higher level of acting, as they are increasingly influenced by television, theatre, film and other audio-visual entertainment. They are educated, follow translated surtitles, and are often familiar with the story and music prior to attending an operatic performance. Furthermore, they have a pre-set expectation for a complete experience of the drama and want the kind of satisfaction that they would attain from a film. The singer-actor must engage with their audience to “gratify their aesthetic sensibilities and touch their feelings.”<sup>20</sup> If the singer-actor creates a believable character it is possible to elicit empathy from the audience. The audience seeks an instant connection with the performer on stage and can sense whether or not the singer-actor is giving a well-acted performance.<sup>21</sup>

### **1.2.1 Vocal recital**

Most singer-actors will perform recitals in both their studies and careers. A recital requires the singer-actor to confidently present a multitude of characters in quick succession. Stanislavsky highlights the difficulties of recital singing in his observation that “acting beside a piano is a most subtle and difficult thing to do. The reason is that that all depends on fantasy, on yours as an artist, and ours as spectators”.<sup>22</sup> Vocal recitals, however, have many functions in our modern musical society; they are often used as fund-raising events, examination recitals, or as part of a competition. As with a full production, recital singing should be

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<sup>19</sup> H. Wesley Balk, *The Complete Singer-Actor: Training for Music Theater* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> David F. Ostwald, *Acting for Singers: Creating Believable Singing Characters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 82.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Constantin Stanislavski and Pavel Romyantsev, *Stanislavski On Opera*, trans. by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, Kindle Edition (New York: Routledge, 1998), location 964.

equally connected, meaningful and theatrical. Another similarity to opera is that vocal recitals are expected to be performed from memory. This convention was established around the beginning of the twentieth century, as it became increasingly important for the singer-actor to communicate more freely with the audience.<sup>23</sup> Although there are such substantial similarities between opera and the vocal recital, it is surprising that few sources discuss dramatic preparation within the recital context. One of the most fundamental challenges for a recital performance is the sudden and abrupt switching of the characters, a challenge for any accomplished singer-actor, which would certainly benefit from an integrative dramatic character preparation process.

### **1.2.2 Dramatic character and the voice**

While vocal pedagogy is beyond the scope of this research, the voice is the singer-actor's primary means of expression and therefore it should be discussed in relation to dramatic presentation.

Singing, even without acting, is complex and many factors contribute to an expressive and emotive singing voice. This is, however, often forgotten by young singer-actors, who focus on producing a beautiful and well-rounded sound, rather than on the reasons why they are producing that sound in the first instance. Each singer-actor's voice is a unique and authentic vessel of expression and ideally they should have the courage to present their authentic voices.<sup>24</sup> W. Stephen Smith notes that there is a common habit among singer-actors and other voice-related professionals to compare rather than focus on authenticity. It is important to point out that "successful singers are those who continually seek to free their voices so they say it clearly, honestly and beautifully."<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, unlike a musical instrument, which is an inanimate object, the

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<sup>23</sup> Brent Jeffrey Monahan, *The Art of Singing: A Compendium of Thoughts on Singing Published Between 1777 and 1927* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1978), pp. 214, 220.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, p. 180.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, p. 180.

singing voice is alive and must take on many roles. Therefore voices are required to be instrumental, articulate, physical and emotionally communicative.<sup>26</sup>

The communication of emotion as a singer-actor is possibly one of the most controversial topics in singer-actor training. A common argument is that the health and beauty of the sound is affected if the singer-actor becomes too emotionally involved while performing. Smith asserts that “if [the singer] felt the emotions on stage the way we experience emotion in everyday life, [their] voices would become very tight.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Miller states that “while believing in the emotions of the character in which she has been cast, the singer remains the vehicle for its expression, not its personal embodiment.”<sup>28</sup> On the contrary, however, Mark Ross Clark and Lynn V. Clark mention that there are singer-actors who believe they must feel the emotions they want to express and that this type of method acting<sup>29</sup> can produce very powerful performances.<sup>30</sup> Colin Baldy suggests that actor-singers should use emotion memory<sup>31</sup> so that they can identify their individual appropriate responses to portray their character.<sup>32</sup>

Although both arguments have their valid place, I do not believe that the relationship between emotion and the voice can be defined in such a black and white manner. First, from a physiological perspective, it is suggested that emotion is present at the start of phonation since speaking as well as singing is creative and every time we make a sound or speak a word we are creating.<sup>33</sup> Emotional expression is a fundamental part of singing because it is impossible to still the diaphragm or prevent emotion without severely immobilising the vocal

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<sup>26</sup> Peter T. Harrison, *The Human Nature of the Singing Voice* (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic, 2006), p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, p. 178.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 159.

<sup>29</sup> Method Acting in this context refers to the American Method acting developed by Lee Strasberg which is based on the psycho-analysis techniques of “emotion memory”. This is discussed further later in the thesis.

<sup>30</sup> Clark and Clark, p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> Emotion Memory is the memory of one’s own experiences to create an emotional context for a character’s situation. Based on the work of Stanislavsky, this is discussed in further detail later in the thesis.

<sup>32</sup> Colin Baldy, *The Student Voice: An Introduction to Developing the Singing Voice* (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic, 2010), p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, p. 29.

system.<sup>34</sup> However, expressing emotion while singing does not mean losing control or being overwhelmed by it. It is crucial for the singer-actor to learn how to control their emotions while singing and still give an emotive and truthful performance. Harrison explains that if the singer's voice is free<sup>35</sup> it allows for unpredictability and creativity on stage; it lets the singer-actor truly be their character in the moment.<sup>36</sup> Finally, vocally expressive and emotional singing is created through purpose and motivation. As composer Jake Heggie observes, "I think one thing that is missing in many singers' performances is the sense of motivation and purpose. It is so important that a singer feels he or she has a reason to sing what they are singing, and that it be sung rather than spoken".<sup>37</sup> Smith suggests that "[t]he real key to acting for singers is simply *to mean what we say when we say it*. We don't need to indicate the meaning through overly dramatic gestures or facial expressions – we simply mean what we say and let the voice, face and body communicate with sincerity".<sup>38</sup> Each sound that is made is gone as soon as it is created. Harrison asserts that no expression is more present than the singing voice, and this is one of the primary reasons why techniques trying to control the moment are never satisfactory. If the singer-actor simply *means what they say* while singing, they are, in fact, acting with intention and therefore, by default, with emotion. Consequently, the only way to achieve consistency in characterisation is to completely understand the meaning of the work; it must be incorporated and intended if it is to be successfully and spontaneously re-created or re-lived in the moment.

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<sup>34</sup> The diaphragm is the primary muscle used at inhalation. When we inhale with ease, the glottis must open. Therefore there is a direct connection between opening of the glottis and the diaphragm.

<sup>35</sup> Vocal freedom refers to a state of singing in which the singer is not bound by unnatural or unnecessary physiological and/or psychological tension.

<sup>36</sup> Harrison, p. 183.

<sup>37</sup> Jake Heggie in Clark and Clark, p. 97.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, p. 178. Original emphasis.

### 1.3 Research objectives and research questions

This study follows a practice-led research method by placing my own experience and practice as a singer-actor at the heart of my research enquiries. Brad Haseman suggests that in practice-led research the process of enquiry may start with a strong passion, and that the actual research questions could emerge through this practice:

[M]any practice-led researchers do not commence a research project with a sense of 'a problem'. Indeed they may be led by what is best described as 'an enthusiasm of practice': something, which is exciting, something, which may be unruly, or indeed something, which may be just becoming possible as new technology or networks allow (but of which they cannot be certain). Practice-led researchers construct experiential starting points from which practice follows. They tend to 'dive in', to commence practicing to see what emerges.<sup>39</sup>

The starting point of my research came from 'an enthusiasm of practice' as well as a strong desire to contribute to the dramatic preparation skills of the singer-actor by testing the efficacy of Actioning within my Stanislavskian-influenced dramatic character preparation process. This creates a model of my dramatic character preparation process which addresses the perceived gap in the current literature. During the course of my research, the following questions emerged:

- i. How can the singer-actor actively prepare their dramatic characters in the practice studio?
- ii. How can Actioning be adapted as a suitable preparatory tool and rehearsal technique for the singer-actor within the initial role-learning process?
- iii. How might Actioning improve the singer-actor's dramatic self-sufficiency?

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<sup>39</sup> Brad Haseman, 'A Manifesto for Performative Research', *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy, Themed Issue 'Practice-Led Research'*, 118 (2006), 98–106 (pp. 100-01) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X0611800113>>.

## 1.4 Selecting the case studies

In 2012 I was cast as the title role in *Carmen*, which provided an opportunity to document and test my dramatic character preparation within my own initial role-learning process. *Carmen* is included as a case study because it presents my earlier Stanislavskian-based dramatic character preparation process, pre-Actioning. In addition, it highlights the need to keep learning and developing new skills as a performer and illustrates how my dramatic preparation process has developed and changed *through* and *within* my own practice.

I was in the unique position of playing the role of Carlotta in *Phantom* twice, which provided an opportunity to: (a) apply my research twice on the same character and (b) test it within two separate professional production settings. It should be noted that although *Phantom* is classified as musical theatre, the role of Carlotta can certainly be categorised as operatic and therefore fits within the spectrum of my research. The vocal range for this role spans from Bb3-E6, has a high tessitura, and requires significant vocal agility for multiple coloratura passages. It should be noted that this role is commonly played by professional opera singers who have had extensive vocal training. For example, the role was premiered in 1986 by soprano Rosemary Ashe in the original London production;<sup>40</sup> in 2011 for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Phantom*,<sup>41</sup> Carlotta was played by soprano Wendy Ferguson; New Zealand born soprano Andrea Creighton played Carlotta in the Asia Pacific touring production of *Phantom* in 2007-09 and 2013-15;<sup>42</sup> the current Carlotta in the Broadway production<sup>43</sup> is soprano Michelle McConnel and Lara Martíns plays Carlotta in the current West End production.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, in the 2004 film adaptation, the role of Carlotta was played by

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew Lloyd Webber, *The Phantom of the Opera*, Original London Production, dir. by Harold Prince (Her Majesty's Theatre, London, 1986).

<sup>41</sup> *The Phantom of the Opera at the Royal Albert Hall*, dir. Nick Morris and Laurence Connor (Really Useful Theatre Company, 2011), [on DVD].

<sup>42</sup> Andrew Lloyd Webber, *The Phantom of the Opera*, Touring Production, dir. by Harold Prince (Asia Pacific, 2007-09, 2013-15).

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Lloyd Webber, *The Phantom of the Opera*, Broadway Production, dir. by Harold Prince (Majestic Theatre, New York, 2017).

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Lloyd Webber, *The Phantom of the Opera*, West End Production, dir. by Harold Prince (Her Majesty's Theatre, London, 2017).

Minnie Driver, and although she is a strong singer, her voice is not operatic and therefore her singing voice was dubbed by soprano Margaret Preece.<sup>45</sup>

The role of Micaëla is included as a case study with a specific focus on recital preparation rather than role preparation. Recital preparation is a vital and common aspect of any singer-actor's career, so it seemed like a natural progression of my research which needed to be addressed. The case study on Micaëla provides the benefit and experience of testing and comparing the functionality of my preparation process, and particularly Actioning, between the previous role preparations and recital preparation.

The context that draws together these four case studies within my research is the focus on the development of my dramatic character preparation process and how it grows through my own practice and application. In addition, I selected these four specific cases to give examples of performance situations that many singer-actors will encounter throughout their performing life: a graduate-level University production, two professional productions of the same work but with different companies, and a recital performance.

### **1.5 Original contribution to knowledge**

This study makes three important contributions to the growing literature surrounding dramatic role preparation for the singer-actor.

Firstly, this research conducts a practice-led experiment on the efficacy of Actioning in combination with Stanislavskian-techniques specifically for the operatic singer-actor. Secondly, the process of Actioning is adapted to suit the singer-actor's dramatic preparation process in the practice studio, establishing it as a valid and practical preparatory technique for the singer-actor. Thirdly, this thesis provides an expedient and practical model for dramatic character

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<sup>45</sup> *The Phantom of the Opera*, dir. Joel Schumacher (Warner Bros, 2004), [on DVD].



preparation, increasing dramatic self-sufficiency for the singer-actor as well as revealing the practice studio as a valid space for dramatic character preparation.

By using a practice-led approach, testing and experimenting for my own role-preparation, I am able to draw from first-hand experience as a singer-actor/researcher and singer-actor/participant. In doing so, I hope to provide an illustration of complete submersion within the research. There are risks in my position as singer-actor/researcher and sole participant which are addressed further in Chapter Three.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

The first section of the literature review situates the theoretical basis of this research project by offering a discussion and overview of three crucial elements: Stanislavsky's acting 'system' for the singer-actor; psychophysical acting; and the connection between Stanislavsky's concept of Experiencing and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory. This is followed by an introduction and discussion of Action and Actioning as a preparatory tool and rehearsal technique. The second section of the literature review discusses dramatic character preparation for the singer-actor, explores the two common forms of character analysis for the singer-actor, and is followed by a discussion of the integration of the singing voice and the dramatic character. It should be noted that although this research acknowledges the importance of vocal technique for the singer-actor, vocal pedagogy and voice science are beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, the voice and vocal production are addressed exclusively in relation to the dramatic character. The third and final section of the literature review addresses self-sufficiency, preparation and practice skills for the singer-actor.

### 2.1 Stanislavsky's 'system' and the singer-actor

Opera is a union of arts – music, singing, theatre, acting, and dance – and its artistic challenges attracted Stanislavsky's interest. While his acting 'system' is well established within the theatre community, Stanislavsky's work on the operatic genre is often overlooked, and remains underused by singer-actors.<sup>1</sup> Stanislavsky began his work with the Bolshoi Theatre Opera Studio in 1918, where he trained the singer-actors in voice, diction, movement, dance and acting.<sup>2</sup> His training approach was practical and imaginative and perceived no

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<sup>1</sup> Experience Bryon, 'Stanislavsky and the Classical Singer: Is It Madness to Apply The Method to Opera?', *Classical Singer Magazine*, October 2000, para. 1  
<<http://www.classicalsinger.com/magazine/article.php?id=784>> [accessed 5 November 2011].

<sup>2</sup> Sharon Marie Carnicke and David Rosen, 'A Singer Prepares: Stanislavsky and Opera', in *The Routledge Companion to Stanislavsky*, ed. by R. Andrew White (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 120–38 (p. 126).

fundamental difference between teaching acting to the actor and the singer-actor, as he believed the laws of music and drama overlapped. As noted by Edward Latham, Stanislavsky “saw opera as a new and greater challenge for the director, and despite his efforts, it remains so today”.<sup>3</sup>

Stanislavsky adapted his ‘system’ to suit the singer-actor, overcome a lack of dramatic skills, while still acknowledging the physiological conditions specific to singing. When working with singer-actors, Stanislavsky insisted upon two initial primary objectives: first, to achieve expressive but incisive diction that would help the singer-actor project the words; and second, to help the singer-actor free the body of unnecessary tensions.<sup>4</sup> As Romyantsev notes:

He was always on the watch for those unnecessary tensions in the body, the face, the arms, the legs of a singer, while performing. When an artist is performing in accordance with his inner feelings he must not be impeded in his movements by muscular contractions. The singer’s whole attention must be centered on his actions.<sup>5</sup>

As with his actor training, Stanislavsky also emphasised the psychophysical interconnection between the mind and body for the singer-actor. This implies that the singer-actor’s initial attention must be on action, not Inner emotions. Alfreds describes that in its most simple form “the Stanislavsky ‘system’ is: WANT, DO, FEEL. I want something. Therefore I do something. Consequently I feel something”.<sup>6</sup> At its core, the ‘system’ is built of actions, based on Given Circumstances and Imagination which then spark an emotional response, collectively aiming towards creating a truthful performance.

Stanislavsky criticised the unilateral opera singers who focused only on vocal technique, and instead urged singer-actors to have perfect control over their creative nature and strive for the ultimate performance, allowing their

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<sup>3</sup> Edward David Latham, *Tonality as Drama: Closure and Interruption in Four Twentieth-Century American Operas* (Texas: University of North Texas Press, 2008), p. xii.

<sup>4</sup> Stanislavski and Romyantsev, location 239.

<sup>5</sup> Stanislavski and Romyantsev, location 239.

<sup>6</sup> Mike Alfreds, *Different Every Night: Freeing the Actor*, Kindle Edition (London: Nick Hern Books, 2007), p. 42.

multifaceted talents to portray true human emotions within the opera. He further asserted that the focal point of the singer-actors on stage should always be on their partner or anything else on the stage rather than the audience. Therefore, during his work with the Bolshoi Theatre Opera Studio, he established three aspects of acting crucial to the singer-actor: the first is that singer-actors must always fill their roles, their stage presence and their musical performance with rich content, by performing with their whole self;<sup>7</sup> the second that the orchestra is an essential aspect of the dramatic plot, as the music reflects the character's inner emotions and functions as the emotional prompter for the singer-actor;<sup>8</sup> and the third is that the singer-actor must consider themselves "as an artist painting [their] own figure within the framework of the whole scene".<sup>9</sup>

A specific difference between the training of the actor and the singer-actor is regarding Emotion Memory.<sup>10</sup> This relates to one of the most commonly misunderstood aspects of Stanislavsky's work: the confusion between his acting 'system' and the American Method, as developed and defined by Lee Strasberg (1901-1982).<sup>11</sup> This confusion has stemmed from the fact that both methodologies are focused on Emotion Memory, a technique first developed by Stanislavsky which featured predominantly in *An Actor Prepares* as translated by Elizabeth Hapgood. The fundamental difference between the two interpretations is that Stanislavsky's 'system' focuses primarily on action; that is, what the actor is doing within the specific dramatic situation, which can evoke Emotion Memory. The American Method, on the other hand, focuses directly on Emotion Memory: the actor is required to use emotional recall and consciously bring up personal feelings that match the character's emotions.<sup>12</sup> As Bella Merlin notes, practitioners either dismiss Stanislavsky's teachings on Emotion Memory or place

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<sup>7</sup> Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, location 2499.

<sup>8</sup> Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, location 2462.

<sup>9</sup> Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, location 2986.

<sup>10</sup> Also known and referred to as: Affective Memory, Emotion Recall and Sense Memory.

<sup>11</sup> The American Method evolved in the USA after the Moscow Art Theatre visited the States in the 1920s. Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*, ed. & trans. by Jean Benedetti, Kindle Edition (London: Routledge, 2008), location 248.

<sup>12</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, locations 247-53.

too much emphasis on it.<sup>13</sup> However, Sharon Marie Carnicke and David Rosen state that while Stanislavsky developed many techniques for the actor to access Emotion Memory within their performances, he did not do the same while working with singer-actors, as the mention of such techniques is absent from all of his discussions about opera.<sup>14</sup> For example, while rehearsing Tatyana's *Letter Scene* in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, Stanislavsky disagreed with a stage direction in the libretto which describes the character as pensive: "After such an emotionally upsetting experience can one be merely pensive? Listen to the cello. It clearly speaks of suffering, sighs, tears".<sup>15</sup> This indicates that the singer-actor should allow themselves to connect with the music, listen to the composer's musical nuances and use it to stimulate the character's emotions:

How lucky you singers are...The composer provides you with one most important element – the rhythm of your inner emotions. That is what we actors have to create for ourselves out of a vacuum. All you have to do is to listen to the rhythm of the music and make it your own. The written word is the theme of the author but the melody is the emotional experience of that theme.<sup>16</sup>

For the singer-actor, Stanislavsky believed that the music functions as the character's emotional drive, their inner feelings, and in effect the music prompts and becomes the singer-actor's Emotion Memory.

Another specific difference between the work of an actor and a singer-actor is the constraints placed on the singer-actor by the music through its tempo and rhythm. Actors can concentrate their full attention on the other characters and their actions on the stage, however the singer-actor must follow the clearly defined musical phrases, intervals, rests and the conductor (who is also bound by the score). Stanislavsky noted that "the art of an actor in opera consists in his achieving,

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<sup>13</sup> Bella Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 60.

<sup>14</sup> Carnicke and Rosen, p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> Stanislavski and Romyantsev, location 2322.

<sup>16</sup> Stanislavski and Romyantsev, location 673.

despite these limitations, a sense of being free and maintaining the unbroken line of his life as the character he is playing”.<sup>17</sup>

Stanislavsky's acting theory is based on everyday life; he strongly believed that an audience would be most affected by the actor/singer-actor who behaves most like a real human being. For example, when we speak our speech is imprinted with our personality; this is not something we add to our speech, it is just there. If a character's behaviour can become as natural as our own behaviour then it becomes human, it becomes real and believable. For Stanislavsky “the essential factor is *belief*”;<sup>18</sup> if the singer-actor believes it is true and follows the natural consequences of that belief then it naturally becomes *true*, allowing the audience to then also believe it.<sup>19</sup> The singer-actor's basic task is to ask themselves “*What if...they were true?*”<sup>20</sup> Using the What If, or alternately named the Magic If, requires the singer-actor to question “what would I do if I were in that situation?” as a means to establish the reality of that moment. The more detailed and precise the singer-actor can be about this, the more natural their response will seem. To begin this process Jean Benedetti and Merlin recommend using Stanislavsky's Fundamental Questions as a means to establish the Given Circumstances (*Who?, Where?, When?*) and begin the process of imagination (*Why?, For what purpose? and How?*). Simply defined, they are a set of six basic questions the singer-actor can use to gather information about the play and character.<sup>21</sup> In simple terms, the character's Given Circumstances can be defined as the dramatic circumstances within the opera that were created by the composer and librettist, which the singer-actor must accept as real. This reality also includes any production details such as the direction, set, costume, sound and so forth.<sup>22</sup> The Imagination, on the other hand, allows the singer-actor to fill in any blanks in their reality on stage, to enrich emotions or stimulate actions. Stanislavsky believed that the purpose of the Fundamental Questions was “to stir

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<sup>17</sup> Stanislavski and Romyantsev, location 6959.

<sup>18</sup> Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> The Fundamental Questions are explained in detail in Chapter Three: 3.5 The Research Design.

<sup>22</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, p. 693.

up our imagination, [and help] us create a picture of our imaginary, illusory life with greater and greater definition.”<sup>23</sup>

In relation to learning and rehearsing a role, Stanislavsky believed that “every new role, in all of its physical actions and objectives, must be studied afresh as if it were one’s first part”.<sup>24</sup> He criticised singer-actors who simply replicate mechanical performances and presentations of human emotions. Instead, he insisted that singer-actors must build a logical sequence of physical actions for each role, which will gradually become second nature and an integrated part of the psyche, through practice and rehearsal. He adds that, at the same time as the music learning process, the singer-actor must consider and be knowledgeable of what their role involves, and how the musical and dramatic preparations for a role interact and influence each other:

Make it a rule: When you are learning the text and music of a role, be extremely careful not ever to go over it by rote, but always combine it with the inner course of your part. Relate the enunciation, the text, the music, all to the through-line of action that goes through your whole role. Your artistic creativeness lies in your showing us: This is how I interpret this thing. A role is not made interesting by words alone but by what the actor puts into them.<sup>25</sup>

Stanislavsky believed that for the singer-actor on the operatic stage to create a psychophysical or “connected” character, they must follow the “*musico-dramatic line*”<sup>26</sup> in which they will first discover the meaning of the words, then reinforce them through imagination, and finally let music enhance the entire artistic context.

The heart of Stanislavsky’s ‘system’ was the continuous dialogue and connection between the physical body and inner psychology. As humans we are psychophysical beings: our bodies send constant information to our inner lives,

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<sup>23</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, p. 83.

<sup>24</sup> Stanislavski and Romyantsev, location 5037.

<sup>25</sup> Stanislavski and Romyantsev, location 6769.

<sup>26</sup> Stanislavski and Romyantsev, location 5435.

such as our emotions and imaginations, while these can only communicate and express themselves through our physical body. The more expressive and responsive the singer-actor's body can be, the more nuanced, intricate and expressive their dramatic characters can become. The value of Stanislavsky's 'system' is its equal focus on the actor's body and psychology which are trained together "to achieve a sense of inner-outer co-ordination",<sup>27</sup> meaning that the mind and body are not only inseparable but also dependent on each other. Stanislavsky's teachings in character preparation for the singer-actor focus on the interconnected nature of the singer-actor's voice, body and mind, and have therefore become one of the main pillars in my own praxis as a singer-actor.

It should be noted that Stanislavsky's own publications (*An Actor Prepares*, 1936; *Building a Character*, 1949; and *Creating a Role*, 1961) have a long history of misinterpretations due to publishing delays and problematic editing and translations by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood.<sup>28</sup> Benedetti, Merlin and Carnicke acknowledge that the significant differences between the original Russian editions of Stanislavsky's books and Hapgood's English translations are the result of Soviet censorship.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, for the purpose of my research, Benedetti's translations are used whenever possible as they provide the most recent, accurate and comprehensive translation of Stanislavsky's work.<sup>30</sup> An exception to this is *Stanislavski on Opera*, compiled by Pavel Ivanovich Rummyantsev and translated by Hapgood, as it is one of the primary sources on the effect of Stanislavsky's 'system' for the singer-actor. This publication provides a detailed

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<sup>27</sup> Bella Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, Kindle Edition (London: Nick Hern Books, 2014), location 395.

<sup>28</sup> Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (London: Methuen Drama, 2008); Constantin Stanislavski, *Building a Character*, trans. by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (London: Methuen Drama, 2008); Constantin Stanislavski, *Creating a Role*, trans. by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (London: Methuen Drama, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Konstantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*, ed. and trans. by Jean Benedetti, Kindle Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. xvii; Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus: An Acting Master for the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Taylor and Francis, 2009), p. 104; Bella Merlin, 'An Actor's Work Is Finally Done' - A Response to the New Jean Benedetti Translation of Stanislavski's *An Actor's Work* (New York/London: Routledge, 2008), p. 23.

<sup>30</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*; Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work on a Role*, trans. by Jean Benedetti (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).



account of Stanislavsky's remarks, instructions, teachings and conversations with his pupils at the Bolshoi Theatre Opera Studio. It was only published outside of the Soviet Union and in English translation in 1975 and has become a valuable resource for the study of Stanislavsky's approaches, principles and techniques applied to music and opera in the West.

The importance of Stanislavsky's contribution to actor training is evident in the immense amount of literature that addresses his life, career and collective work. Some of the most prolific authors who have documented Stanislavsky's life, acting 'system' and teaching practices include Benedetti,<sup>31</sup> Merlin,<sup>32</sup> Carnicke,<sup>33</sup> and Sonia Moore.<sup>34</sup> As result, there are several permutations and variations of his 'system', which are too extensive to discuss within this literature review. However, Merlin's *Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, and Benedetti's translations of *An Actor's Work* and *An Actor's Work on a Role* offer comprehensive insights and explanations on the application process of Stanislavsky's 'system'. Additionally, while many scholars discuss Stanislavsky's work in journal articles, their research, albeit informative, is aimed at actors and not necessarily towards singer-actors.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*; Jean Benedetti, *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work on a Role*; Konstantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, trans. by Jean Benedetti (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008); Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*; Jean Benedetti, *The Art of the Actor: The Essential History of Acting, from Classical Times to the Present Day*, Kindle Edition (New York: Routledge, 2007); Vasilii Osipovich Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, trans. by Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 2004); Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction, Revised and Updated* (London: Routledge, 2005); Jean Benedetti, 'A History of Stanislavski in Translation', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 6.23 (1990), 266–78 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X00004577>>.

<sup>32</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*; Bella Merlin, *Beyond Stanislavsky: The Psycho-Physical Approach to Actor Training*, Kindle Edition (New York: Routledge, 2011); Bella Merlin, *Acting: The Basics*, Kindle Edition (New York: Routledge, 2010); Merlin, *Stanislavsky*.

<sup>33</sup> Carnicke; Carnicke and Rosen.

<sup>34</sup> Sonia Moore, *The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of an Actor*, 2nd edn (New York: Penguin, 1984).

<sup>35</sup> Natalie Crohn Schmitt, 'Stanislavski, Creativity, and the Unconscious', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 2.08 (1986), 345–351 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X00002359>>; Marc Silberschatz, 'Creative State / Flow State: Flow Theory in Stanislavsky's Practice', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 29.01 (2013), 13–23 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X1300002X>>; Maria Shevtsova, 'Stanislavsky to Grotowski: Actor to Performer/Doer', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 30.04 (2014), 333–340 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X14000670>>; Bella Merlin, 'This Side of Reality', *Stanislavski Studies*, 3.1 (2015), 53–67 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/20567790.2015.11428611>>; Bella Merlin, 'Using Stanislavsky's Toolkit for Shakespeare's Richard III, Part I: Research on the Text and the Play', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 29.01 (2013), 24–34 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X13000031>>; Bella Merlin, 'Using Stanislavsky's Toolkit

Stanislavsky's acting 'system' is a prominent influence within a variety of singer-actor guidebook sources.<sup>36</sup> The most dominant theme which emerges from this leading literature is the need for singer-actors to present "believable" or "truthful" characters on stage.<sup>37</sup> The commonly suggested elements for achieving this are mostly based on Stanislavsky's acting theories, including the Fundamental Questions,<sup>38</sup> the Magic If and Given Circumstances. In addition, setting Tasks and a Supertask are also commonly suggested.<sup>39</sup> Tasks, for example, may be defined as the character's goals; if the singer-actor sets clear, specific and vivid Tasks, it will provide them with their character's Inner active motivations.<sup>40</sup> The Supertask, on the other hand, refers more specifically to the

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for Shakespeare's Richard III, Part II: Research on the Self in the Play', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 29.02 (2013), 159–69 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X13000262>>; Merlin, 'An Actor's Work Is Finally Done' - A Response to the New Jean Benedetti Translation of Stanislavski's *An Actor's Work*; Charles Marowitz, 'Getting Stanislavsky Wrong', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 30.03 (2014), 210–12 <[http://journals.cambridge.org/article\\_S0266464X14000438](http://journals.cambridge.org/article_S0266464X14000438)> [accessed 7 November 2014]; J. Ellen Gainor, 'Rethinking Feminism, Stanislavsky, and Performance', *Theatre Topics*, 12.2 (2002), 163–75 <[http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/journals/theatre\\_topics/v012/12.2gainor.html](http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/journals/theatre_topics/v012/12.2gainor.html)> [accessed 19 March 2012]; Cynthia Baron, 'Stanislavsky's Terms for Script Analysis: Vocabulary for Analyzing Screen Performances', *Journal of Film and Video*, 65.4 (2013), 29–41 <[http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/journals/journal\\_of\\_film\\_and\\_video/v065/65.4.baron.html](http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/journals/journal_of_film_and_video/v065/65.4.baron.html)> [accessed 2 September 2014]; Rose Whyman, 'The Actor's Second Nature: Stanislavski and William James', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 23.02 (2007), 115–23 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X07000024>>; John Gillett, 'Experiencing through the Voice in Stanislavski's Psycho-Physical Approach', *Stanislavski Studies*, 4.2 (2016), 157–73 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/20567790.2016.1234021>>; John Gillett, 'Experiencing or Pretending - Are We Getting to the Core of Stanislavski's Approach?', *Stanislavski Studies*, 1.1 (2012), 1–18 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/20567790.2012.11428584>>; Fabio Polanco and Diane B. V. Bonfiglio, 'Stanislavski's Objectives, given Circumstances and Magic "if"s through the Lens of Optimal Experience', *Stanislavski Studies*, 4.2 (2016), 205–16 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/20567790.2016.1234023>>; Heleen Van Den Bosch, 'Anatomy of a Psycho-Physical Technique: The Underlying Structure of Stanislavski's "system"', *Stanislavski Studies*, 2.1 (2013), 3–43 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/20567790.2013.11428593>>; Gillett, 'Experiencing or Pretending?'

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Alan E. Hicks, *Singer and Actor: Acting Technique and the Operatic Performer* (Wisconsin: Amadeus Press, 2011); Ostwald; Clark and Clark; Leon Major and Michael Laing, *The Empty Voice: Acting Opera* (Wisconsin: Amadeus Press, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> Ostwald; Clark and Clark; Major and Laing; Hicks.

<sup>38</sup> Depending on the source, this can vary from between five to seven basic questions. Benedetti explains that there are six in Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*.

<sup>39</sup> *Task* and *Supertask* are Benedetti's variants to *objective* and *super-objective* in the Hapgood translations. Benedetti uses the terminology that was used in Stanislavsky's studio.

<sup>40</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, p. 144.

action or desire that drives and motivates the character throughout the entire plot. It also refers to the theme or subject of the play and establishes the reason why the work was written.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, Stanislavsky's work has also been discussed in relation to opera singer-actor training and musical theatre singer-actor training. These sources, however, are either based on Hapgood's translations (excluding *Stanislavski on Opera*) instead of Benedetti's more accurate translations, or they refer more specifically to American Method acting. For example, Bryon and co-authors Levin and Levin discuss Stanislavsky as Method Acting,<sup>42</sup> while David Ostwald, Clark and Clark, Leon Major and Michael Laing, and Alan Hicks have based their interpretation of Stanislavsky's work on Hapgood's translations.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the literature aimed specifically at the musical theatre singer-actor tends to give primacy to acting over singing, rather than aiming towards an incorporative process.<sup>44</sup>

There are also various dissertations and theses which discuss Stanislavsky's 'system' in relation to the singer-actor and how it might be applicable for operatic training.<sup>45</sup> Jennifer Coleman, for example, discusses operatic character

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<sup>41</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, p. 693.

<sup>42</sup> Bryon; Irina Levin and Igor Levin, *Working on the Play and the Role: The Stanislavsky Method for Analyzing the Characters in a Drama* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> Ostwald; Clark and Clark; Hicks; Major and Laing.

<sup>44</sup> These sources are discussed in further detail in 2.6 Dramatic character preparation for the singer-actor.

<sup>45</sup> Jennifer M. Coleman, *Operatic Character Development: A Teaching Method Approached Through Three Examples of Female Characters in Opera — Desdemona in Otello, Mimi in La Boheme, and Ellen Orford in Peter Grimes — Designed for Use in a University-Level Opera Workshop Course*. (unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Kentucky, 2005).; Kayla Bussell, *Acting in Opera: A Stanislavsky Approach* (unpublished Honors thesis, East Tennessee State University, 2012).; Bogdan Andrei Minut, *Applying Constantin Stanislavski's Acting 'System' to Choral Rehearsals* (unpublished Doctoral thesis, Ball State University, 2009). Daniel Somerville, *Body Opera: In Search of the 'Operatic' in the Performance of the Body* (unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 2014); Michael Anthony Barry, *Acting in Opera, A Consideration of the Status of Acting in Opera Production and the Effect of a Stanislavski Inspired Rehearsal Process* (unpublished Masters thesis, University of Birmingham, 2012).; Jesse Adam Koza, *A Beginning Guide to Acting While Singing* (unpublished Masters thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2009).; Oliver J Torr, *Emotional Truth In Opera Performance* (unpublished Masters thesis, Monash University, 2014); Thomas Patrick Vanafreddo, *A Blended Pedagogy: Synthesizing Best Practices of Opera and Musical Theatre Programs to Promote a Holistic Approach to Training the Singing Actor* (unpublished Masters thesis, San Diego State University, 2012); Tara Diane Warfield, *A Voice Teacher*

preparation and development. Although she does not directly discuss Stanislavsky's 'system', his influence is evident within her work, as her methodology applies the "Basic Questionnaire" by Clark and Clark which is based on Stanislavsky's teachings.<sup>46</sup> Kayla Bussell and Michael Barry both discuss acting in opera with specific reference to Stanislavsky's 'system'.<sup>47</sup> Barry's comparative study tests Stanislavskian-influenced methods of preparation to rehearsals and a production of *Dido and Aeneas* and *Acis and Galatea*, while Bussell uses Stanislavskian rehearsal techniques within her own performance preparation for the roles of the doctor and lawyer in *Gianni Schicchi*. From another perspective, Bogdan Minut applies elements of Stanislavsky's 'system' to choral rehearsals, identifying the system as a concrete and transferable rehearsal methodology and performance phenomenology for the field of choral music.<sup>48</sup>

## 2.2 Psychophysical acting

Throughout his career, Stanislavsky wanted his acting 'system' to overcome the divide of "mind from body, knowledge from feeling, analysis from action",<sup>49</sup> as he searched for "theory and practice in organic unity".<sup>50</sup> Zarrilli explains that Stanislavsky was the first person to use the term "psychophysical" (psikhofizichneskii) to describe an acting method which focused equally on the actor's psychology and the actor's physicality.<sup>51</sup> Stanislavsky's integrative psychophysical actor-training approach fundamentally aims to instil the actor with an interdependent sense of their Inner-personal psyche and their Outer-physical characterisation. Stanislavsky defined the Inner as the study of the internal motivations, actions, feelings and thoughts of a character, while the

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*Prepares: Using Art Song as a Teaching Tool for the Role of Sophie in Der Rosenkavalier* (unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Iowa, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Coleman, p. 122.

<sup>47</sup> Barry, pp. 30–44; Bussell, pp. 2–21.

<sup>48</sup> Minut, pp. 156–209.

<sup>49</sup> Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, p. 89.

<sup>50</sup> Benedetti, *Stanislavski*, p. 90.

<sup>51</sup> Phillip B. Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 13.

Outer is the physical creation of those Inner elements.<sup>52</sup> This concept follows the belief that physical actions create psychological reactions, and in the same way, psychological actions generate physical reactions.<sup>53</sup>

Throughout his lifetime, Stanislavsky continuously worked on establishing and discovering the relationship between the psychological and the physical in his approach to actor-training. At the beginning of his career, the analytical and psyche-based techniques of the 'system' were prominent, while the physical techniques focused primarily on grounding the actor's emotional state. Later in his career, he feared that this could result in mechanical reiterations of his acting process and therefore he stressed the importance of Experiencing (*perezhivanie*), a concept which highlights the interconnected and ongoing relationship between both the mental and physical aspects of his psychophysical acting technique. As Stanislavsky explains, the actor's first step to creating a character is to establish "the inner aspect of a role [...] its psychological life which we create by using the process of Experiencing".<sup>54</sup> He believed that the actor's "prime task is not only to portray the life of a role externally, but above all to create the inner life of the character and of the whole play, bringing [their] own individual feelings to it, endowing it with all the features of [their] own personality".<sup>55</sup>

While Stanislavsky is mostly known for his Inner technique due to the publication delays mentioned previously, his Outer technique is equally important, as "acting is action— mental and physical."<sup>56</sup> Stanislavsky explains that the Outer of the character should not only match the Inner but grow from it. It must be considered that, as humans, our physicality does not always reflect our mental state, and therefore the actor usually has to invent suitable characteristics for the character. It is important, however, that they relate to the character's Inner

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<sup>52</sup> Stanislavsky referred to the collective aspects of performance (If, Given Circumstances, Imagination, Concentration, Truth, Tasks, dramatic potential) of performance as elements. For more information see Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, p. 58.

<sup>53</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, locations 435-97.

<sup>54</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, p. 19.

<sup>55</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, p. 19.

<sup>56</sup> Stanislavsky, p. 40.

life, as the character's external characteristics must generate the character's psychological reactions, and vice versa.<sup>57</sup> It should be noted that some practitioners believe that the interconnected dualism between the Inner and Outer of the character does not exist.<sup>58</sup> In support of Stanislavsky's psychophysical approach, however, Rose Whyman argues that "all acting and performance is psychophysical. It cannot be anything other as in all human activities, practically speaking, 'mind' and 'body' are inseparable".<sup>59</sup> In Stanislavsky's own words: "in every physical action there's something psychological, and there's something physical in every psychological action".<sup>60</sup>

Since Stanislavsky's innovative work, the term psychophysical in relation to acting and actor training has been widely used by practitioners and theatre scholars and is particularly addressed in discussions on how to train the post-Stanislavskian performer.<sup>61</sup> Merlin, for example, describes and teaches psychophysical actor training as a method in which the "body and [the] psyche are trained together to achieve a sense of inner-outer co-ordination",<sup>62</sup> because what the actor "experiences *internally* is immediately translated into an outer expression, and conversely what [the] body manifests *physically* has a direct and acknowledged effect on [the actor's] *psychological* landscape".<sup>63</sup> In simple terms, this means that it is almost impossible to consider the brain and the body (including the voice) as separate entities, as they are all interconnected and interdependent. She further identifies four main beneficial outcomes of psychophysical training for the actor: first, it provides the actor with the opportunity to listen to their instrument and become more aware of its possibilities and versatility; second, a psychophysical process allows the actor to respond in a manner that corresponds more closely to everyday life; third, the actor can use the emotional energy of acting itself to connect with the dramatic

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<sup>57</sup> Benedetti, *The Art of the Actor*, p. 141.

<sup>58</sup> Bruce McConachie, *Theatre and Mind* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 29–30.

<sup>59</sup> Rose Whyman, 'Explanations and Implications of "Psychophysical" Acting', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 32.2 (2016), 157–68 (p. 168) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X16000051>>.

<sup>60</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, p. 180.

<sup>61</sup> Whyman, 'Explanations and Implications of "Psychophysical" Acting', p. 157.

<sup>62</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 395.

<sup>63</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 396. Original emphasis.

character; and fourth, the range of the actor's psychophysical proficiency can offer a director significantly more versatility and scope.<sup>64</sup> From another perspective, Zarrilli's psychophysical teaching style uses non-Western performance techniques, and his research questions whether the "psychologically-based notions of self, behaviour, experience, role and character assumed by most students of acting are clear and adequate paradigms for understanding performance as an embodied psychophysical activity".<sup>65</sup> He further explains that in Western training, the mind and body are considered as a dualist notion, which he believes to be a misunderstanding in relation to performance; he therefore suggests that instead of questioning the relationship between mind and body, we should question what the relationship between mind and body will become. One of the primary ways in which both the actor and the singer-actor can begin to create a psychophysical character is through the use of breath. Gillett explains that "we breathe automatically from a physical need for air – and from a psychological impulse to express a thought, feeling or action".<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Merlin describes this as "the significance of breath",<sup>67</sup> meaning that although breathing is a physical reflex, its purpose within the text is to stir up the actor "from the inside out".<sup>68</sup> However, following Merlin's perspective it is evident that the breath has an Outer-Inner-Inner-Outer effect, as breathing is first a physical action that sparks the imagination process, resulting in an Inner psychological response, and this in turn generates a physical reaction. In the case of the singer-actor, this perspective not only fuels the singer-actor's voice but also functions as the character's emotional Inner catalyst which generates an Outer physical response. The breath connects the actor and singer-actor "through the working of the diaphragm, to the solar plexus, to physical and emotional experience".<sup>69</sup> Stanislavsky, influenced by eastern thought and yoga,

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<sup>64</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 498-502.

<sup>65</sup> Phillip B. Zarrilli, 'Thinking and Talking About Acting: Re-Reading Sonia Moore's Training an Actor', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 3.2 (1989), 37–51  
<<https://journals.ku.edu/jdtc/article/view/1711/1675>> [accessed 30 October 2015].

<sup>66</sup> Gillett, 'Experiencing through the Voice', p. 165.

<sup>67</sup> Merlin, 'Using Stanislavsky's Toolkit for Shakespeare's Richard III, Part I', p. 25.

<sup>68</sup> Merlin, 'Using Stanislavsky's Toolkit for Shakespeare's Richard III, Part I', p. 25.

<sup>69</sup> Gillett, 'Experiencing through the Voice', p. 165.

stresses that the solar plexus, the complex network of nerves located in the abdomen, is the “radiating centre of *prana* energy stimulated by breath”.<sup>70</sup>

In the same way that the breath is the foundation of the acting process,<sup>71</sup> the breath is also the primary energy source for the vocal mechanism. Therefore it may be argued that the breath and/or respiratory system is the most important element of the singer-actor’s body. Without breath and awareness of breathing there is no sound. As Smith states, “breathing is literally an essential part of life, with profound implications as big as life and death. Through breathing, we calm our emotions, eliminate pain, focus our minds, and connect to our souls.”<sup>72</sup>

Zarrilli too considers the breath as the energising life force of the character and actor’s body and mind; however, for him the intention of the breath is “to enliven and alter the encounter with the immediate environment so the direction is outwards”<sup>73</sup> rather than inwards. Both Zarrilli and Merlin view the breath as the first step in creating a clean slate for the actor. Zarrilli, for example, takes his inspiration from a non-Western source and views the breath as the actor’s energy source:

*[P]rana* and *qi/ki* identify both the material reality of the breath-as-breath, as well as the enlivening quality that can be present as a process of engaging the breath-in-action as a circulating energy. Energy is that which animates and activates the actor.<sup>74</sup>

Merlin adds that to breathe well, the actor must relax the physical body, as every person has physical tensions. She reasons that if the physical body is tense, it is likely that the psyche is tense too.<sup>75</sup> Merlin asserts that it is essential for both the mind and body to be relaxed if the actor is to access their inner Creative State.<sup>76</sup> In simple terms, breathing is the foundation of life and the human body.

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<sup>70</sup> Gillett, ‘Experiencing through the Voice’, p. 165.

<sup>71</sup> Merlin, ‘This Side of Reality’, p. 56.

<sup>72</sup> Smith, p. 34.

<sup>73</sup> Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting*, p. 56.

<sup>74</sup> Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting*, p. 19. Original emphasis.

<sup>75</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 264.

<sup>76</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 264.



Likewise, Stanislavsky also viewed breathing as a fundamental aspect of his acting system:

[R]espiration plus rhythm forms the foundations of all your creative work... rhythm and breathing will never be carried out in full consciousness, that is to say, as it should be carried out, in a state of such complete concentration as to turn your creative work and 'inspiration'.<sup>77</sup>

The breath, combined with rhythm, results in an emotional response because “muscular memory ignites...emotions purely all from the alterations [made] to [the] breathing pattern”.<sup>78</sup> This allows the actor to work psychophysically from the outside in, rather than the inside out. Interestingly, Merlin argues that breathing and emotion are so entwined within us, that when an actor works psychophysically, creating a character’s emotional field is as simple as changing the physical breathing pattern and relying on muscle memory.<sup>79</sup> One might question whether this would also benefit the singer-actor. While the singing voice, like the speaking voice, is also sustained by air pressure, singing requires a greater amount of air and significantly longer sustained even air pressure compared to speaking. In addition, breathing to sing is more dynamic, athletic and exaggerated.<sup>80</sup> Therefore purposely changing a breathing pattern would need to be approached carefully so that it is not detrimental to vocal production and vocal health. However, certain composers strategically place rests in musical phrases to specifically (or seemingly so) change the breathing pattern of the character, thereby creating a particular emotional effect. An example of this is in Gilda’s aria *Caro nome* from Giuseppe Verdi’s (1813-1901) *Rigoletto*:

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<sup>77</sup> Konstantin Stanislavsky, *Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage*, trans. by David Magarshack (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), p. 168. Also quoted in Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 672.

<sup>78</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 683.

<sup>79</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 697.

<sup>80</sup> Michael S. Benninger and Thomas Murry, *The Singer’s Voice* (San Diego: Plural, 2008), p. 188.

**Example 1: Verdi, *Rigoletto*, Act 1, no. 9, "Caro nome", bars 19-27<sup>81</sup>**

Gilda

Ca - ro no - me che il mio cor fe - sti pri - mo pal - pi - tar, le de  
li - zie del - l'a - mor mi dei sem - pre ram - men - tar!

Verdi has carefully placed rests between “nome che il mio” (name that my); “primo palpitar” (for-the-first-time beat); “(de)lizie dell’amor” (delights of love); and “sempre rammentar” (always remind).<sup>82</sup> The sixteenth note rests between the syllables of Gilda’s words highlight both her excitement and her own heartbeat at the mention of her young lover’s name. Verdi presents her broken melodic line as a palpitating declamation of love and naivety.

Another psychophysical perspective through which the singer-actor could consider altering breathing patterns is to view the breath as their most emotionally evocative tool. Breath pressure controls not only the length of each musical phrase but also the dynamics, range (to an extent) and nuances of the voice. Benninger, Murray and Johns take the perspective that the vocal mechanism should be free enough (from tension) to reflect the needs of the character. They add that “the actor’s psycho-physical awareness should be such that the actor’s voice and body respond to the thought with spontaneous changes in the pitch, rhythm, dynamic, and tonal variety, rather than following a prescribed approach.”<sup>83</sup> The singer-actor’s work lies in the clarity of the thought, and that to achieve this their vocal technique “involves a balance of technical freedom, a ‘clear channel’ and the psycho-kinaesthetic mechanism’s ability to

<sup>81</sup> Vocal-line example transcribed in Sibelius from Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto*, Vocal Score (Milan: Ricordi, 1882), p. 111.

<sup>82</sup> An idiomatic translation of this text would be “Dear name that first caused my heart to stir, you will always remind me of the delights of love”, a literal translation would be “Dear name that my heart made for the first time to beat, the delights of love me you must always remind”. Bard Suverkrop, ‘Caro Nome’, trans. by Bard Suverkrop, *IPA Source*, [n.d], pp. 1–2 <<http://www.ipasource.com/caro-nome.html>> [accessed 15 September 2015].

<sup>83</sup> Benninger and Murry, p. 133.; Michael S. Benninger, Thomas Murry, and Michael M. Johns, III, *The Performer’s Voice*, 2nd edn (San Diego: Plural, 2015), p. 315.

respond simultaneously to the thought".<sup>84</sup> The thought itself, whether about vocal technique or characterisation (or both), is more important than aiming to achieve it in a physical manner. Therefore, they urge the singer-actor to specifically focus on the text and attach meaning to it as a means of achieving vocal expression rather than attempting to physically push the sound or aim for greater volume.<sup>85</sup>

Additionally, Benninger, Murray and Johns also identify the psychophysical connection between the singer-actor themselves and their vocal instrument. Although vocal pedagogy and voice sciences are beyond the scope of this research it is valuable to consider that:

One cannot separate the person from the voice; the voice reflects the person's intention, need and thought. Tension in the voice, unless caused by some malfunction, generally reflects tension in the person, or at least a lack of understanding of the text. Unless one fully takes into account the specifics of each thought, one cannot realise his or her vocal potential. It is not enough to free the sound, but the actor must sculpt the ideas with precision, commitment, and a full kinaesthetic relationship to the language.<sup>86</sup>

From a psychophysical perspective, expressive singing is the culmination of the physical act of breathing, phonation, resonance and articulation. As Dudley Appleman explains:

Psychophysically, artful singing and speaking is the dynamic (ever changing) act of coordinating instantaneously the physical sensations of the respiration (the will to breathe), phonation (the will to communicate by forming both vowel and consonant) into disciplined (and expressive) utterance.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Benninger, Murry, and Johns, III, p. 319.

<sup>85</sup> Benninger, Murry, and Johns, III, p. 319.

<sup>86</sup> Benninger, Murry, and Johns, III, p. 319.

<sup>87</sup> Dudley Ralph Appelman, *The Science of Vocal Pedagogy: Theory and Application* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1967), p. 9.

### 2.3 Experiencing and Flow Theory

Carnicke and Gillett believe that the modern relevance of Stanislavsky's psychophysical acting approach lies in his core belief of Experiencing. Gillett explains that Experiencing means to "go through an organic process, using one's own natural mental, physical, emotional being, as opposed to constructing an external form through a cerebral set of choices".<sup>88</sup> Benedetti has similarly noted that the purpose of Experiencing is to create the life of the human spirit on stage and to show it in an artistic theatrical form.<sup>89</sup> According to Gillett, when an actor is in an Experiencing state on stage, they are focused, engaged and absorbed in the world of the play, the fictional circumstances and the predicament of the character "as if" the situation is real.<sup>90</sup> It is conceived through a spontaneous process, which is flexible and free given the circumstances and discipline of the particular art form. It is created through Imagination, rather than intellect, which crucially places the actor in the situation of the character rather than being objectively removed from it. Gillett further explains that once the actor has made this basic connection with the action in a scene, they can begin to integrate all other aspects of acting such as their "full sensory awareness, feeling flowing from and through the action, development of the imaginary world of the script, atmosphere, the vocal and physical aspects of characterisation, the shape and balance of the role, the relationship to the audience."<sup>91</sup> When all of these elements fall into place, the full Experience of a role will be achieved.

Once the actor is in this Experiencing state and their 'make-believe' takes on a childlike naivety, their focus is only on the other characters/actors in the scene, but the interaction is as natural as real life,<sup>92</sup> and it is then that the actor achieves the Creative State (or 'I am being').<sup>93</sup> Van Den Bosch explains that the actor "reaches the (general) Creative State when the inner and the outer

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<sup>88</sup> Gillett, 'Experiencing or Pretending?', p. 1.

<sup>89</sup> Benedetti, *The Art of the Actor*, p. 118.

<sup>90</sup> Gillett, 'Experiencing through the Voice', p. 158.

<sup>91</sup> Gillett, 'Experiencing or Pretending?', p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> Gillett, 'Experiencing or Pretending?', p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> Gillett, 'Experiencing or Pretending?', p. 2; Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, p. 29.

Creative State come together as a whole”.<sup>94</sup> Gillett takes this concept a step further, observing that the Creative State “arises when the borderline between the actor and character is blurred”.<sup>95</sup> Zarrilli too considers the Creative State as the performer’s ultimate state of internal experience and outer expression. Similarly, Marc Silberschatz describes this level of connection with the dramatic character as a point at which “the actor’s whole creative apparatus, all its separate parts, all its, so to speak, internal ‘springs’ and ‘knobs’ and ‘pedals’ function superbly, almost the same as, or better than, in life”.<sup>96</sup>

Silberschatz also connects Stanislavsky’s Creative State with Flow Theory, a state identified thirty years ago by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Flow Theory is the study of the “positive aspects of [the] human experience”<sup>97</sup> and in particular the “joy, creativity, the process of total involvement with life”.<sup>98</sup> Csikszentmihalyi describes Flow as a “state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it”.<sup>99</sup> He further explains that Flow is a state of higher consciousness, during which all psychic energy is focused on the task at hand.<sup>100</sup> Fabio Polanco and Diane Bonfiglio state that overall, these characteristics of Flow mean that once the actor has experienced such “an exhilarating, efficient, completely connected moment in performance, [they] are motivated to pursue that feeling again”.<sup>101</sup>

Csikszentmihalyi explains that there are nine primary conditions which can create a Flow state:

- (1) There are clear goals every step of the way;
- (2) There is immediate feedback to one’s actions;
- (3) There is a balance between challenges and

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<sup>94</sup> Van Den Bosch, p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, p. 153.

<sup>96</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*. p 295.

<sup>97</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), p. xi.

<sup>98</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, p. xi.

<sup>99</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, p. 4.

<sup>100</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, p. 39.

<sup>101</sup> Polanco and Bonfiglio, p. 207.

skills; (4) Action and awareness are merged; (5) Distractions are excluded from consciousness; (6) There is no worry of failure; (7) Self-consciousness disappears; (8) The sense of time becomes distorted; (9) The activity becomes autotelic.<sup>102</sup>

These conditions that make Flow possible suggest that if an activity is an enjoyable experience it will assist in expanding creative potential.<sup>103</sup>

Csikszentmihalyi further explains that during Flow, the process of creation becomes automatic: “his body disappears from his consciousness, because he doesn’t have enough attention, like none of us do, to do something that requires a lot of concentration, and at the same time feel that he exists. So existence is temporarily suspended”.<sup>104</sup> He further elaborates that this “automatic, spontaneous process [...] can only happen to someone who is very well trained and who has developed technique”.<sup>105</sup> because Flow activities are characterised by a balance between enjoyment, capability and challenge, they require the highest level of performance from the individual.<sup>106</sup>

Although Stanislavsky may not have had the words to describe a Flow state of being, Silberschatz explains that the developments in Stanislavsky’s acting ‘system’ created conditions in which Flow could more easily occur. The Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis, two similar processes which are often grouped together, both further increase the chance of achieving a Flow state in performance. Polanco and Bonfiglio also identify that several foundational aspects of Stanislavsky’s ‘system’ lend themselves to creating the optimal experience or Flow state for the actor.<sup>107</sup> They found that Tasks, Given Circumstances and the What If, for example, help the actor to focus attention, initiate clear goal setting, allow access to appropriate feedback and decrease

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<sup>102</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Imagination* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), pp. 111–13.

<sup>103</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, pp. 349–50.

<sup>104</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, ‘Flow, the Secret to Happiness’ (unpublished TEDTalk, TED2004, 2004), para. 8, minutes 8:44 <[https://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly\\_csikszentmihalyi\\_on\\_flow](https://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow)> [accessed 3 November 2014].

<sup>105</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, ‘Flow, the Secret to Happiness’, para. 9, minutes 9:54.

<sup>106</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, p. 49–53,74.

<sup>107</sup> Polanco and Bonfiglio, pp. 205–6.

self-consciousness.<sup>108</sup> In addition, they state that “recognising these flow components as being closely connected to the effectiveness of the application of Stanislavski’s techniques gives us reason to reciprocally borrow from the psychological literature on flow to further research, support, and enhance the effectiveness of the techniques”.<sup>109</sup>

Importantly, however, Silberschatz also identifies the difficulties with Stanislavsky’s methods in relation to Flow Theory. Even though they bring acting closer in line with Flow, they also present two fundamental flaws. First, the fixed script, which is rehearsed and performed repeatedly: “while a fixed, repeatable performance score might initially feature high challenge in the mild high skill as it is rehearsed, the challenge of executing it diminishes with repetition, leading to a situation where the actors’ skill exceeds the challenges presented to them by the score”.<sup>110</sup> The second flaw is the division of consciousness of the actor: “one half of you is moving towards the Supertask, the Through-action, the Subtext, mental images, the creative state and the other half is concerned with your psychotechnique.”<sup>111</sup> Stanislavsky, however, suggested that divided consciousness enables the actor to create the character more skilfully: “So, as you develop the role we have to bear in mind two perspectives, one belonging to the role, the other to the actor himself.”<sup>112</sup> He further asserts that “we are split into two in the real world. But that doesn’t stop us living or feeling deeply.”<sup>113</sup> It is important to note that Silberschatz’s study aims to describe a state of performance that Stanislavsky sought, to “prepare the soil for this kind of genuine, subconscious creation”,<sup>114</sup> whereby the actor’s performance happens automatically rather than being directed by conscious thought.

Similarly, Gillett remarks that Stanislavsky’s holistic approach to acting is based on natural processes which use conscious work to arrive at an intuitive and

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<sup>108</sup> Polanco and Bonfiglio, p. 213.

<sup>109</sup> Polanco and Bonfiglio, p. 213.

<sup>110</sup> Silberschatz, p. 21.

<sup>111</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, p. 456.

<sup>112</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, p. 456.

<sup>113</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, p. 456.

<sup>114</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, p. 18.

spontaneous performance. Even though both Gillett and Silberschatz are seemingly discussing the same concept from different perspectives, certain contraries are also established. Although Gillett does not refer directly to Flow Theory, he does point out that the foundation of the Experiencing process is what he refers to as a “*dynamic of action*”, in that “exploration of the action in a script will often be the source of the flow.”<sup>115</sup> In this context, Flow refers to the continuity and movement of the play, rather than the actor’s Inner state. Silberschatz, on the other hand, more specifically explains that although Flow Theory allows for the merging of action and awareness,<sup>116</sup> the structure of a play, in contrast to life, is controlled and planned in the sense that “the planned actions of one actor are met by the planned actions of another actor”.<sup>117</sup> Marowitz also asserts that the actor’s natural spontaneity can be hindered on stage, if too many actions are pre-planned.<sup>118</sup> For example, the repeated nature of rehearsals and performances can interfere and hinder both the actor’s Flow state as well as their own natural spontaneity.<sup>119</sup> On the other hand, it could be argued that the planned and repeatable action in the play actually helps the actor to achieve a Flow state. Csikszentmihalyi explains that Flow is “typically described as involving a sense of control – or more precisely, as lacking the sense of worry about losing control that is typical in many situations of normal life”.<sup>120</sup> While a play is not a normal life situation, Silberschatz states that because Stanislavsky had control over his productions, the actors did not need to fear losing control and therefore they could feel secure.<sup>121</sup> It must be noted, however, that the sense of control needed to achieve a Flow state is not one of security. For example, Csikszentmihalyi asserts that what is essential is “the *possibility*, rather than *actuality* of control”:<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Gillett, ‘Experiencing or Pretending?’, p. 4.

<sup>116</sup> Silberschatz, p. 15.

<sup>117</sup> Silberschatz, p. 20.

<sup>118</sup> Charles Marowitz, ‘Getting Stanislavsky Wrong’, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 30 (2014), p. 210.

<sup>119</sup> Silberschatz, pp. 20–21.

<sup>120</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, p. 59.

<sup>121</sup> Silberschatz, p. 20.

<sup>122</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, p. 60. Original emphasis.



What people enjoy is not the sense of being in control, but the sense of *exercising* control in difficult situations. It is not possible to experience a feeling of control unless one is willing to give up the safety of protective routines. Only when a doubtful outcome is at stake, and one is able to influence that outcome, can a person really know whether [they are] in control.<sup>123</sup>

Moreover, Csikszentmihalyi found that artists and athletes are more likely to experience Flow, especially in their profession.<sup>124</sup> In addition, he notes the idea that music and Flow are intricately linked because music can sustain a person's intrinsic motivation, one of the main aspects of a Flow experience.<sup>125</sup> He further positions music (creating, listening and playing) as a flow activity, while noting that “[the greatest] creative rewards are open to those who learn to make music”,<sup>126</sup> but that too much emphasis is placed on how one performs rather than what is experienced while performing.<sup>127</sup> Since Csikszentmihalyi's work, researchers in psychology have found that all nine elements as identified by Csikszentmihalyi are present and relevant to the Flow experience of musicians in performance.<sup>128</sup> Although psychological research is beyond the scope of this thesis, it should be noted that due to the complexity of both the Flow and music phenomena, the analysis of the Flow state in a musical context is developing rapidly.<sup>129</sup> This has led scholars to focus on various aspects of the Flow

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<sup>123</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, p. 61. Original emphasis.

<sup>124</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, p. 4.

<sup>125</sup> For further information see: Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, pp. 108–13.

<sup>126</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, p. 111.

<sup>127</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, p. 112.

<sup>128</sup> Polanco and Bonfiglio, pp. 207–8; Alice Chirico and others, ‘When Music “flows”. State and Trait in Musical Performance, Composition and Listening: A Systematic Review’, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6 (2015), 1–14 <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00906>>.

<sup>129</sup> Adam M. Croom, ‘Music Practice and Participation for Psychological Well-Being: A Review of How Music Influences Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment’, *Musicae Scientiae*, 19.1 (2015), 44–64 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1029864914561709>>.

experience relating to music, including emotions,<sup>130</sup> motivation,<sup>131</sup> performance anxiety management,<sup>132</sup> and creativity.<sup>133</sup> In addition, recent research by Chirico and colleagues found that the complex relationship between music and Flow should be considered as an emergent embodied system.<sup>134</sup> Similarly, another innovative study by Nijs and colleagues also connects Flow and music to embodiment, by testing how Flow could be achieved by musicians participating in an interactive task combined with the embodiment of a musical experience.<sup>135</sup> The connection between embodiment and Flow relates back to Stanislavsky's teachings on the interconnected nature of Experiencing and embodiment. He believed both aspects to be essential within his psychophysical approach to acting and actor training, as Experiencing reflects the Inner life of the character while embodiment refers to the Outer physicalisation of the character. In other words, he sought to create the "life of the human spirit of a role"<sup>136</sup> as well as its full physical and vocal embodiment.<sup>137</sup> Another aim of the study by Nijs and colleagues was to spark creative exploration, integrating awareness and action

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<sup>130</sup> Alexandra Lamont, 'Emotion, Engagement and Meaning in Strong Experiences of Music Performance', *Psychology of Music*, 40.5 (2012), 574–94

<<https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735612448510>>; Manuela Maria Marin and Joydeep Bhattacharya, 'Getting into the Musical Zone: Trait Emotional Intelligence and Amount of Practice Predict Flow in Pianists', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4 (2013) <<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00853>>; Croom.

<sup>131</sup> Costas I. Karageorghis, Symeon P. Vlachopoulos, and Peter C. Terry, 'Latent Variable Modelling of the Relationship Between Flow and Exercise-Induced Feelings: An Intuitive Appraisal Perspective', *European Physical Education Review*, 6.3 (2000), 230–48 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X000063002>>; Nikolaos Digelidis and others, 'Effects of Asynchronous Music on Students' Lesson Satisfaction and Motivation at the Situational Level', *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 33.3 (2014), 326–41 <<https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2013-0120>>.

<sup>132</sup> Joann Marie Kirchner, 'Incorporating Flow into Practice and Performance', *Work*, 40.3 (2011), 289–96 <<https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-2011-1232>>.

<sup>133</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997); Mark Sheridan and Charles Byrne, 'Ebb and Flow of Assessment in Music', *British Journal of Music Education*, 19.2 (2002), 135–43 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051702000220>>; Charles Byrne, Raymond MacDonald, and Lana Carlton, 'Flow and Creativity in the Music Classroom', in *ESCOM 10th Anniversary Conference* (Liège, 2002); Raymond MacDonald, Charles Byrne, and Lana Carlton, 'Creativity and Flow in Musical Composition: An Empirical Investigation', *Psychology of Music*, 34.3 (2006), 292–306 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735606064838>>.

<sup>134</sup> Chirico and others, p. 1.

<sup>135</sup> Luc Nijs and others, 'Interacting with the Music Paint Machine: Relating the Constructs of Flow Experience and Presence', *Interacting with Computers*, 24.4 (2012), 237–50 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intcom.2012.05.002>>.

<sup>136</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, pp. 35–36. Original emphasis.

<sup>137</sup> Gillett, 'Experiencing through the Voice', p. 158.

together with the task of creating music, and they found that there is a strong relationship between Flow and being in the present moment.<sup>138</sup> This relates back to Stanislavsky, who also describes inspired acting as being completely consumed in the moment.<sup>139</sup> From the perspective of actor-training, Polanco and Bonfiglio propose that by examining various aspects of Stanislavsky's 'system' that may encourage Flow "we can determine the mechanisms through which the system predisposes the actor to have an optimal experience".<sup>140</sup> They urge the need for future research into the connections between the elements of Stanislavsky's technique, such as "muscular release, concentration and attention, communication and most significantly, action."<sup>141</sup>

## 2.4 Actions

Throughout the twentieth century, many theatre practitioners have focused on action as an essential foundation of their practice and actor-training methodologies. Examples include the metaphysical concepts of Antonin Artaud, where the feelings and meanings are transmitted through action rather than words,<sup>142</sup> and in Grotowski's later work, which focuses on mapping impulses or physical actions.<sup>143</sup> Stella Adler too emphasises the importance of actions, because "everything we do in theatre is action. That's what acting means. So there is nothing more important we can learn".<sup>144</sup>

Additionally, actions have become the most used and practiced aspect of Stanislavsky's 'system' by both students and professional actors.<sup>145</sup> Its significance is evident in *An Actor's Work*, as 'Action' is placed as the first fundamental acting technique and preparation tool for the actor, emphasising

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<sup>138</sup> Nijs and others, p. 237.

<sup>139</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, location 118.

<sup>140</sup> Polanco and Bonfiglio, p. 213.

<sup>141</sup> Polanco and Bonfiglio, p. 2013.

<sup>142</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* (London: Oneworld Classics, 2010).

<sup>143</sup> Thomas Richards and Jerzy Grotowski, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>144</sup> Stella Adler, *The Art of Acting*, ed. by Howard Kissel (Michigan: Applause, 2000), p. 53.

<sup>145</sup> Marowitz, pp. 210–11.

that acting is first and foremost about doing, rather than being or remembering. For Stanislavsky:

Acting is action. The basis of theatre is doing, dynamism. The word 'drama' itself in Ancient Greek means 'An action being performed'. In Latin the corresponding word is *actio*, and the root of this same word has passed on into our vocabulary, "action", "actor", "act". So the drama is an action we can see being performed, and, when he comes on, the actor becomes an agent in that action.<sup>146</sup>

Stanislavsky considered actions as the direct result of the interconnected Inner and Outer of the dramatic character, as "acting is action – mental and physical".<sup>147</sup> Actions are the fundamental "want" of the character, which forms the character's primary objective within each scene.<sup>148</sup> Action does not necessarily need to be outwardly active; it is possible to be completely motionless while being fully active inwardly. It is important, however, to clarify the distinction between action and activity: actions are the result of the character's motives, while activities are an action that requires no particular willingness, such as dressing or eating.

Furthermore, Stanislavsky's two most significant legacies, the Method of Physical Action and Active Analysis, are centred on the concept of action. As with much of Stanislavsky's work, however, there are many discrepancies between the Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis. Although an in-depth comparison between the two techniques/terminologies is beyond the scope of this research, it is important to consider some of these confusions within the context of this study, particularly their relevance and implication on Action.

Benedetti states that the Method of Physical Actions is the term most commonly used to describe Stanislavsky's rehearsal methods and techniques; however, it is sometimes more accurately referred to in Russian as the Method of Analysis

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<sup>146</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, p. 40. Original emphasis.

<sup>147</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, p. 40.

<sup>148</sup> Marowitz, pp. 210–11.

through Physical Action.<sup>149</sup> He describes it as a practical methodology for actors so that they can explore the play and events in a physical, action driven manner, using specific exercises and improvisations, as “physical actions are the foundation on which the entire emotional, mental and philosophical superstructure of the ultimate performance is built”.<sup>150</sup> Benedetti combines the two into one describing the Method of Physical Actions as the play’s active analysis in the rehearsal room.<sup>151</sup> Maria Knebel also considers the two to be one and the same, only from her perspective the Method of Physical Actions was incorrectly named and should have been called the Method of Active Analysis. Knebel defines Active Analysis as Stanislavsky’s method of “analysis through action”,<sup>152</sup> and she considers it to be the culmination and complete summary of Stanislavsky’s legacy.<sup>153</sup>

In contrast to Knebel and Benedetti, Merlin believes that there are significant differences between the two techniques. From her perspective, the Method of Physical Actions classifies performances as actions and counteractions, whereas Active Analysis goes a step further and includes “all the available avenues of investigation – mental, physical, emotional and experiential – harnessed together holistically”.<sup>154</sup> She explains that there is a logical partnership between the two: the Method of Physical Actions is used to outline each scene using action, then the outlined actions are repeated while gradually introducing the words. Active Analysis, on the other hand, expands this approach to include “the structure of a scene, the ‘anatomy’ of a play, the very medium of drama itself, meaning the logic of the sequence was less important than the experiential discoveries made through active [i.e. physical] research”.<sup>155</sup> She further describes Active Analysis as an improvisational method, with the benefit that actors can

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<sup>149</sup> Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, p. xv.

<sup>150</sup> Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, p. xv.

<sup>151</sup> Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, p. xv.

<sup>152</sup> Merlin, *Stanislavsky*, p. 33.

<sup>153</sup> James Thomas, *A Director’s Guide to Stanislavsky’s Active Analysis: Including the Formative Essay on Active Analysis by Maria Knebel*, Kindle Edition (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), location 181.

<sup>154</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 3681.

<sup>155</sup> Merlin, *Stanislavsky*, p. 34.

learn from physicalising the scenes with greater creative freedom. Interestingly, Benedetti's description of the Method of Physical Actions is similar to Merlin's outline of Active Analysis:

It is active analysis on the rehearsal-room floor, as opposed to the reflective, formal analysis that takes place in the study [...] Physical action is the foundation on which the entire emotional, mental and philosophical superstructure of the ultimate performance is built.<sup>156</sup>

Overall, varying opinions from a selection of reputable Stanislavsky scholars indicates the degree of confusion in the literature about these late-Stanislavskian actor-training techniques. Knebel states that much of this confusion originates from the fact that Stanislavsky uses the term 'physical action' to describe two different stages of an actor's creative process, and the difference between the two is not always clear. He uses 'physical action' in relation to the actor's initial preparation, illustrating "the actions physically carried out, actually executed during the work of analysis".<sup>157</sup> 'Physical action', in this sense, refers to the stage of rehearsal when the actor physically places themselves in the position of the character and the circumstances dictated by the author.<sup>158</sup> Once the actor has created the role and grasped it, or the role is close to completion, 'physical actions' begin to serve a greater purpose, as they transform into "a 'lure' for feelings, a kind of creative accumulator of feelings".<sup>159</sup> Stanislavsky's dual use and meaning of 'physical action' emphasises his perspective of the psychophysical interconnectedness between "the life of the human body,"<sup>160</sup> and "the life of the human spirit."<sup>161</sup>

Like Stanislavsky, Alfreds views actions as being psychophysically connected and dependent on each other. Playing actions engages the actor's body in several

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<sup>156</sup> Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, locations 170-81.

<sup>157</sup> Maria Knebel, 'Active Analysis of the Play and the Role', in *A Director's Guide to Stanislavsky's Active Analysis: Including the Formative Essay on Active Analysis by Maria Knebel*, trans. by James Thomas, Kindle Edition (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), location 2410.

<sup>158</sup> Knebel, locations 2410-19.

<sup>159</sup> Knebel, location 2427.

<sup>160</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, p. 410.

<sup>161</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, p. 20.

different ways: physiologically, cognitively and emotionally. Alfreds expands further on this and explains that “by playing actions, actors automatically bring the whole physical world of the play alive: not only their own bodies, but the space around them, the objects they handle, the clothes they wear, the other actors on stage.”<sup>162</sup> Alfreds considers the actor to be the centre of the creative process and theatrical event and, therefore, the “action” (what the actor does) is at the core of his acting methodology:

The profound nature of theatre, its essence, is action – not language, not image, nor the interpretation of great texts, not political engagement, but action. Action is how theatre expresses itself. The purpose of theatre is the revelation of action and revelation through action. The life of theatre is created by characters in action, that is to say, acting out their lives through meaningful and revelatory deeds and behaviour.<sup>163</sup>

Alfreds believes that the actor’s main task is playing actions, because technically, “actions are the only thing an actor can actually play.”<sup>164</sup> In short, actions allow the character to obtain their objectives. These objectives are always dependent on other characters. Therefore, to attain an objective the character must effect change in other characters, which implies that actors must effect change in the other actors. The only way the actor can effect change is by playing actions.

## 2.5 Actioning

Actioning, sometimes referred to as “Psychophysical Actioning”,<sup>165</sup> is a rehearsal technique for the actor most often associated with directors Max Stafford-Clark and Alfreds. Its initial creation and development is credited to Stafford-Clark and

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<sup>162</sup> Alfreds, p. 66.

<sup>163</sup> Alfreds, p. 64.

<sup>164</sup> Alfreds, p. 51.

<sup>165</sup> Nick Moseley, ‘The Psycho and the Physical in Psycho-Physical Actioning’, *Stanislavski Studies*, 1.2 (2013), 150–89 (p. 150) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/20567790.2013.11428589>>; Nick Moseley, *Actioning and How to Do It*, Kindle Edition (London: Nick Hern Books, 2016), location 21.

Bill Gaskill, co-founders of Joint Stock Theatre Company, who developed it in the 1970s.<sup>166</sup>

The literature suggests that there is a relationship between Actioning and Stanislavsky's theories. For example, Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams believe its origins lie in Stanislavsky's 'system', as he "pioneered a series of exercises and rules which would allow actors to access their emotions more freely and maintain the essential but elusive creative state".<sup>167</sup> Similarly, Merlin also describes Actioning as a "Stanislavsky-based practice",<sup>168</sup> which originated in the Method of Physical Actions, and was evolved by Stafford-Clark from a process introduced by Stella Adler.<sup>169</sup> Also, both Stafford-Clark and Alfreds reference Stanislavsky's influence on their practice and Actioning. Stafford-Clark states that although he has never studied Stanislavsky's work himself, he is convinced that Actioning is a "Stanislavsky-based working method".<sup>170</sup> He also uses the terms Objective and Super-objective<sup>171</sup> in relation to Actioning, both of which are part of the 'system' (as translated by Hapgood), demonstrating how influential Stanislavsky and his terminology has become even with those who are not specifically familiar with his work. Alfreds too outlines his approach to acting and dramatic character preparation as grounded in the broader context of Stanislavsky's "System of Physical Actions",<sup>172</sup> evident in Alfreds' thorough usage of Tasks and Actions.

In contrast, Moseley presents the argument that Actioning is not a technique derived from Stanislavsky's 'system' but that its origins lie in the political theatre

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<sup>166</sup> Moseley, 'Psycho-Physical Actioning', pp. 150–51.

<sup>167</sup> Marina Caldarone and Maggie Lloyd-Williams, *Actions: The Actors' Thesaurus* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2004), pp. xiv–xv.

<sup>168</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 2069.

<sup>169</sup> Merlin, *Acting*, p. 182.

<sup>170</sup> Max Stafford-Clark, *Letters to George: The Account of a Rehearsal* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997), p. 66.

<sup>171</sup> Task and Supertask in Benedetti's translations.

<sup>172</sup> It could be debated that Alfreds uses the 'hybrid' term "System of Physical Actions" to encapsulate all of Stanislavsky's work – the 'system', the Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis – while avoiding any kind of debate over terminology. Alternatively, he could have selected this term as a means to emphasise the influence of Stanislavsky's teachings on 'Physical Actions' on his own actor-training methods. Alfreds, p. 37.



of 1970s Britain.<sup>173</sup> He states that Actioning was developed out of a need to move away from a “Method-based Freudian approach to text”,<sup>174</sup> which focused predominantly on the character’s motivation (the why). Instead, Actioning allows the actor to focus on the intention and effect of the character’s physical and verbal actions (the what). Although he does not believe Actioning is a Stanislavskian technique, he does credit its similarities to the Method of Physical Actions. He explains that both are founded on the principle that “a physical action which is motivated from the character’s objective and carried out truthfully”<sup>175</sup> has much more impact on the actor’s creative imagination than “an intention which exists only in the actor’s head”.<sup>176</sup> This refers to Stanislavsky’s concept of the reciprocal and interconnected relationship between mind and body: just as a thought, feeling and intention can influence the body, so can physical action generate thought, feeling and intention.

Moreover, Moseley, and Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams, also believe that it is not possible to use Actioning effectively without having an understanding of Stanislavsky’s ‘system’, and using a range of Stanislavskian-derived exercises as a means to establish the character’s background and Given Circumstances.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, Alfreds also establishes a connection between Actioning and Stanislavsky’s ‘system’; however, he offers a contradictory perspective on the order in which the actor should approach Actioning and any Stanislavskian preparatory techniques. Unlike Moseley, and Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams, he uses Actioning as an improvisational technique and encourages the actor to begin this process before they have completed any background research on the role or play. For instance, he suggests considering only the character’s Given Circumstances once the actions, tasks and bits have been established.<sup>178</sup> He is, however, referring to the actor, not the singer-actor, in a discussion of this technique in relation to a play rehearsal. Interestingly, however, he also states

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<sup>173</sup> Moseley, ‘Psycho-Physical Actioning’, p. 151.

<sup>174</sup> Moseley, ‘Psycho-Physical Actioning’, p. 151.

<sup>175</sup> Moseley, ‘Psycho-Physical Actioning’, p. 150.

<sup>176</sup> Moseley, ‘Psycho-Physical Actioning’, p. 150.

<sup>177</sup> Moseley, *Actioning*, location 87; Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams, p. xv.

<sup>178</sup> Alfreds, p. 183.

that “character, mood, atmosphere and style will quite naturally be created if actors play their actions and objectives within the context of their Given Circumstances”,<sup>179</sup> implying that the Given Circumstances should be set before the actions.

Although Actioning is a widely used technique, it is not as prominent in the current literature when compared to Stanislavsky’s work; however it is discussed as a rehearsal process/technique in extensive detail by Alfreds, Stafford-Clark, Moseley,<sup>180</sup> Merlin, and Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams.<sup>181</sup> Outside of these leading sources it is also mentioned in various acting guidebooks, theses, dissertations and journal articles<sup>182</sup> which establish its validity as a rehearsal technique. For example, Petronilla Whitfield suggests Actioning as a possible rehearsal technique for persons with SpLPD (Dyslexia) who wish to perform Shakespeare’s text.<sup>183</sup> The participants in her study use Stanislavsky’s physical actions and Active Analysis — with some suggestion of Actioning — to express their perceived core meaning of each line, with the purpose of advancing their

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<sup>179</sup> Alfreds, p. 65.

<sup>180</sup> Moseley’s book *Actioning and How to Do It* was only published in April 2016, after I had already completed my Four Applied Case Studies, with the exception of the re-recording of my Final DMA Recital.

<sup>181</sup> Alfreds; Stafford-Clark; Moseley, *Actioning*; Moseley, ‘Psycho-Physical Actioning’; Merlin, *Toolkit*; Merlin, *Acting*; Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams; *FirstyWork, Actions: The Actors’ Thesaurus*, version 1.2, Mobile App (BLC NuMedia and Nick Hern Books, 2014) <<https://itunes.apple.com/nz/app/actions-the-actors-thesaurus/id903874266?mt=8>> [accessed 1 May 2014].

<sup>182</sup> Petronilla Whitfield, *Towards Accessing Shakespeare’s Text for Those with SpLD (Dyslexia): An Investigation into the Rationale for Building Visual Constructs* (unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2015); Trevor Rawlins, “‘Disciplined Improvisation’ in the Rehearsal and Performance of Shakespeare: The Alternative Approach of Mike Alfreds’, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 30.4 (2012), 431–47 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/shb.2012.0082>>; Ron Cameron, *Acting Skills for Life*, 3rd edn (Toronto: Dundurn, 1999); Maria Inglis, ‘Slow Time: A New Play by Roy Williams’ (London: National Theatre Education Workpack, 2005); Maeve McKeown, ‘Max Stafford-Clark: Education Resource Pack’ (London: Out of Joint, 2008); Kate Napier, ‘Integration and Performance: The Usefulness of Books in Musical Theatre Training’, *Studies in Musical Theatre*, 2.3 (2008), 283–93 <[https://doi.org/10.1386/smt.2.3.283\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1386/smt.2.3.283_7)>; Joe Deer and Rocco Dal Vera, *Acting in Musical Theatre: A Comprehensive Course* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Tony Gash, *How Can ‘Actioning’ Be Utilised in Rehearsal to Analyse and Realise a Text for Performance?* (unpublished Masters essay, University of East Anglia, 2003); Zachary Dunbar, ‘Stanislavski’s System in Musical Theatre Actor Training: Anomalies of Acting Song’, *Stanislavski Studies*, 4.1 (2016), 63–74 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/20567790.2016.1155366>>; Paul Harvard, *Acting Through Song: Techniques and Exercises for Musical-Theatre Actors*, Scribd Edition (London: Nick Hern Books, 2014).

<sup>183</sup> Whitfield, p. 153.

reading competency of Shakespeare's texts. Also addressing the works of Shakespeare, Trevor Rawlins discusses Actioning as a disciplined improvisation technique in rehearsal and performance.<sup>184</sup> He also addresses the similarities between Actioning and Stanislavsky's Active Analysis. Bussell likewise states that she used active action verbs for her character preparations in *Gianni Schicchi*, however no specific examples are given.<sup>185</sup> In relation to rehearsal, Tony Gash discusses the use of Actioning, but he addresses this technique specifically for the actor's text analysis.<sup>186</sup> Actioning is also addressed in Musical Theatre pedagogy. Joe Deer and Rocco Dal Vera suggest this technique for the singer-actor as a means of 'actioning the lyric-text' but have renamed it Tactical Actions.<sup>187</sup> Similarly, Paul Harvard also advocates the use of Actioning for the musical theatre performer, but refers to it as either Actioning or Observing Actions.<sup>188</sup> Furthermore, Zachary Dunbar explains that one of the primary ways that a psychophysical acting approach combines with establishing the character's emotional journey in musical theatre song is through Actioning the text, as if it were a spoken monologue.<sup>189</sup> Although he is specifically addressing the musical theatre actor, or singing-actor (giving primacy to acting over singing), this relates directly to Stanislavsky, who when working with opera singers, instructed them to approach the lyrics of art-songs and ballads as if they were monologues.<sup>190</sup>

### **2.5.1 Actioning as a rehearsal technique**

In simple terms, Actioning is a rehearsal technique which interprets the action implied for any given moment of the dramatic text. It is a rehearsal process in which the actor divides all their lines into phrases (or thoughts), and then places an active, transitive verb on each phrase which expresses the underlying motive of each line. Once the actor has assembled all the verbs, they must say and play

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<sup>184</sup> Rawlins, p. 436.

<sup>185</sup> Bussell, p. 21.

<sup>186</sup> Gash, pp. 3, 12–16.

<sup>187</sup> Deer and Dal Vera, p. 181.

<sup>188</sup> Harvard, p. 153.

<sup>189</sup> Dunbar, p. 66.

<sup>190</sup> Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, location 433-573.

each phrase (or thought) in the manner indicated by each verb. This process allows the actor to rehearse and practice their character's Inner motivations physically. Alfreds explains that the verbs are "mainly active, transitive verbs",<sup>191</sup> and for Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams they are a "doing word", which are always in the present tense.<sup>192</sup> Stafford-Clark defines this process as "an action which has to be expressed by a transitive verb and gives the character's intention or tactic for that particular thought".<sup>193</sup> Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams add that the verbs are transitive by nature, as the purpose of each action is to be played towards another actor on stage. Examples might include: "*I COMFORT you*", "*I TEASE you*", "*I REJECT you*". Merlin refers to Actioning as playing 'psychological actions' because each selected verb represents the psychological reasoning behind the character's Supertask.<sup>194</sup> For instance, if the Supertask is "*I SEDUCE you*", the actor can select a broad range of 'psychological actions' such as, "*I ENTICE you*", "*I LURE you*", "*I DELIGHT you*" and so forth. Also, Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams define that Actioning provides "the stimulation for the actor to play each line of the text and develop alternative ways of bringing the character to life".<sup>195</sup> Following Merlin's suggestion, this is because the actor's external, Outer actions are "the physical manifestation of [their] desires and aspirations".<sup>196</sup>

Director Miles Anderson proposes a modification to the Actioning process by adding an extra layer in the form of an adverb.<sup>197</sup> Rather than just placing a transitive verb on each phrase/thought, he suggests that the actor can colour each phrase (or thought) more distinctly by adding an adverb to the action. For instance, "*I THREATEN quietly*", "*I CHARM assertively*", "*I EDUCATE playfully*" or "*I CHARM playfully*", "*I EDUCATE quietly*", "*I THREATEN assertively*". Not only does this provide more depth to the action, but it also allows the actor to be

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<sup>191</sup> Alfreds, p. 72.

<sup>192</sup> Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams, p. xvii.

<sup>193</sup> Quoted in: Katalin Trencsényi, *Dramaturgy in the Making: A User's Guide for Theatre Practitioners* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). Original source: Stafford-Clark, p. 66.

<sup>194</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, locations 2534-61.

<sup>195</sup> Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams, p. xiii.

<sup>196</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 2539.

<sup>197</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, locations 2058-71.

more distinctive and specific with their character's intentions. Another modification to the Actioning process is suggested by Deer and Dal Vera, who in the context of musical theatre preparation, advise that, depending on the musical number, the action can be played reflexively, rather than onto another actor. For example: "*I LULL me*", "*I PUNCTURE me*", "*I HYPNOTISE me*".<sup>198</sup>

Similarly, Harvard also addresses this in regard to the musical theatre performer, stating that if the singer-actor is addressing themselves they must "alter the format to: *I [verb] myself*".<sup>199</sup> Harvard also connects Actioning with an adaptation of Stanislavsky's first Fundamental Question *Who?*. He proposes that the first thing the singer-actor must do is establish who they are addressing: themselves, an absent character, a higher power, a natural phenomenon, an imaginary or personified character, or the audience.<sup>200</sup> Once the singer-actor has established who they are addressing, the actions can be adjusted accordingly.

Another essential point is made by Rawlins and Moseley, who draw a parallel between Actioning and Stanislavsky's Active Analysis.<sup>201</sup> For example, Active Analysis requires the actors to discuss the scene and improvise using their own words; they then discuss the improvisation and repeat this process until it closely resembles the play-text, at which point the actors are ready to work with the text and memorise the actual dialogue.<sup>202</sup> In comparison, Actioning requires the actors to voice their actions as they play them: they say what they are doing in a descriptive form, for example: "*I REJECT you*".<sup>203</sup> As Moseley explains, in Active Analysis "actors initially *improvise* the dialogue of the play, exploring the relationships and the journey of each scene to the point where the actual text can be 'drip-fed' into the imaginary world thereby created".<sup>204</sup> Actioning, on the other hand, is not an improvisational technique. Instead, it is an analytical process whereby the actor begins with the text, carefully selecting each

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<sup>198</sup> Deer and Dal Vera, p. 182.

<sup>199</sup> Harvard, p. 212. Original emphasis.

<sup>200</sup> Harvard, p. 210.

<sup>201</sup> Rawlins; Moseley, *Actioning*, location 29.

<sup>202</sup> Carnicke, p. 212.

<sup>203</sup> Alfreds, p. 171.

<sup>204</sup> Moseley, *Actioning*, location 29. Original emphasis.

transitive verb, and works through the entire play in this manner – thought by thought and action by action. The actor chooses the most basic action that the text asks for, initiating a preparation process which provides both discipline and freedom. The discipline is located in the security of the *what* (in this case “reject”), and the freedom in *how* he/she rejects him/her. Rawlins expands on Actioning as a rehearsal technique, by stating that:

This is an approach derived from psychological realism, one that ascribes psychological motivation to the characters, but it is approached in a way that is detached from a naturalistic or realistic mode of performance. The actor is required to make a decision on the most basic level about the action of the scene, and physically to commit to playing that action; but whilst doing so, the actor describes what they are doing instead of saying the dialogue as written or improvising in a naturalistic or realistic way.<sup>205</sup>

Through Actioning, the actor is made aware of the interconnected nature of the mind and body and can use it to their advantage in a non-realistic, non-naturalistic manner as a means of preparing their dramatic character. Essentially, Actioning and Active Analysis have the same purpose, which is to assist the actor in finding a way to ‘own’ the text so that it is connected to their own thoughts and physicality. Moseley explains that Actioning systematically provides the actor with a precise technique that allows them to explore and identify how each phrase informs a thought, intention or moment: “for an actor to be truly ‘present’ in performance there must be a synergy of thought, body and text so that all three move forward together”.<sup>206</sup> Similarly, Harvard notes that Actioning invites the actor, or singer-actor, to take their “instinctive choices” and expand or refine them in order to “help [them] find nuance and detail”.<sup>207</sup> Although Actioning is an analytical and precise technique, its aim is to give the actor creative freedom through physicalising and using the body, rather than creating repeatable results. Alfreds asserts that actions (or objectives) played “implicitly

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<sup>205</sup> Rawlins, p. 437.

<sup>206</sup> Moseley, ‘Psycho-Physical Actioning’, p. 150.

<sup>207</sup> Harvard, p. 107.

deny the possibility of a repeatable result.”<sup>208</sup> If the actor plays the action genuinely, it is not possible to create that exact moment again, as the principle of this exercise is process oriented rather than results oriented. Actioning ensures that the actor is continuously in a state of process, seeing possibilities, but not looking for results.<sup>209</sup>

Alfreds views Actioning as a rehearsal method which allows the actor to work on a script in a disciplined yet open-ended manner; a method which allows the actor’s imagination to be as creative as it can be while still working in conjunction with the specificity of the text.<sup>210</sup> Essentially, for Alfreds, Actioning is a rehearsal process which enables the actor to work with the script in “an active and organic way”.<sup>211</sup> He believes that Actioning allows the actor to work on the play in the “lightest terms possible”<sup>212</sup> while also concentrating on “the essential concept of *being in action*”.<sup>213</sup> Alfreds considers that the actor’s body allows the actor to work a play holistically and he believes that the body holds the individual’s experiences and memories, as the body encapsulates their complete “emotional and sensory life”.<sup>214</sup> Additionally, Actioning is a physical process, which is centred on the actor’s physical body, it therefore raises the question of how the actor plays actions. Alfreds states that there are many ways of playing one action and he believes it is essential for the actor to have the freedom to express the actions in a way that feels most natural to their experiences and imagination within that given moment.<sup>215</sup> Actioning is not used to specifically define exactly how each phrase should be played, but is used instead to teach the actor how to seek the character’s objectives through action. In addition, each action may be played in a multitude of ways; the aim is always to use the

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<sup>208</sup> Alfreds, p. 37.

<sup>209</sup> Alfreds, p. 169.

<sup>210</sup> Alfreds, p. 163.

<sup>211</sup> Alfreds, p. 163.

<sup>212</sup> Alfreds, p. 168.

<sup>213</sup> Alfreds, p. 168. Original emphasis.

<sup>214</sup> Alfreds, pp. 164–65.

<sup>215</sup> Alfreds, p. 165.

character's line to pursue an objective, and, as a result, the how should happen instinctively, moment to moment.<sup>216</sup>

What makes Actioning unique as a rehearsal and preparatory technique is that its starting point is directly with the text itself. Actioning the text allows the actor to apply an analytical process which encapsulates the actor's will as well as each moment of the play. Essentially, the series of moments are a psychophysical embodiment of the text and the actor, presented through physical action.

## **2.6 Dramatic character preparation for the singer-actor**

Dramatic character preparation for the singer-actor is a well-established subject within the relevant opera and musical theatre literature, particularly in the form of guidebooks and training manuals. Almost all of the literature on acting for singer-actors in both opera and musical theatre is additive, teaching acting as a separate activity to singing rather than integrating the two. Furthermore, the focus is primarily on acting in performance, rather than on the preparation leading towards performance. Dunbar suggests that the majority of the current acting approaches for actors in musical theatre are primarily based on Stanislavsky's 'system',<sup>217</sup> and I have found that this is also the case in the literature aimed at actor training for opera singers, although in both genres it is not always credited to Stanislavsky.

This section of the literature review discusses a selection of these training sources across both genres. It begins by addressing how this literature focuses on dramatic character preparation for the singer-actor as well as the influence of the 'system' evident in these sources, establishing the validity of Stanislavsky's teachings and acting techniques for the twenty-first-century singer-actor.

Balk's approach to training the singer-actor is formative, as he was the first to suggest a combination of opera and theatre training methods, particularly the

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<sup>216</sup> Alfreds, p. 83.

<sup>217</sup> Dunbar, p. 63.



teachings of Stanislavsky. His preparatory techniques are primarily external, emphasising the singer-actor's conscious control over their body and expression, which then work inward to create the internal emotions.<sup>218</sup> Balk took this Outer-Inner approach as a stated rejection of Strasberg's Method, as he believed that a Method actor worked from the internal to the external, which could become problematic for the singer-actor.<sup>219</sup> Major and Laing, on the other hand, suggest an Inner-Outer approach in which singer-actor seeks the character's Inner motivations and analyse how aspects of the musical score reflect these within each Action (which happen moment to moment).<sup>220</sup> Deer and Dal Vera combine both approaches and offer the singer-actor various Outer-Inner and Inner-Outer exercises, working towards creating an "internally rich and externally expressive"<sup>221</sup> performance.

Another recurring Stanislavskian-inspired concept is the search for believable and truthful characterisations and performance. Oswald's approaches to dramatic character preparation are primarily based on the premise that "good acting singing is believable acting singing".<sup>222</sup> He advocates the use of several Stanislavskian techniques and incorporates them into his own experience-based materials, such as the *Ten Maxims of Believable Singing Acting*, which is a comprehensive list of characterisation rules for singer-actors to create believable characters. Additionally, Balk and Hicks also seek to teach the singer-actor how to create active dramatic and emotionally truthful characters, aiming ultimately at a more truthful performance. Similarly, Bergman and Moore also offer the singer-actor workshop-style exercises, focusing on creating "authentic, truthful, personal performance[s] that [are] based in the theatrical traditions of Stanislavski".<sup>223</sup> The concept of 'believable acting' refers directly to Stanislavsky's work. As Benedetti explains, Stanislavsky always maintained that "the most

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<sup>218</sup> Balk, p. 26.

<sup>219</sup> Balk, p. 26.

<sup>220</sup> Major and Laing, p. 14.

<sup>221</sup> Deer and Dal Vera, p. 11.

<sup>222</sup> Oswald, p. 3.

<sup>223</sup> Tracey Moore and Allison Bergman, *Acting the Song: Performance Skills for the Musical Theatre*, 2nd edn, Scribd Edition (New York: Alworth, 2016), p. 11.

acute sense of artistic truth occurs when an actor believes with all his heart in the reality of the character he had created".<sup>224</sup>

In both opera and musical theatre, the singer-actor is required to sing as well as act, which in combination, requires "a complex set of analytical and physical preparations".<sup>225</sup> Dunbar states that it is therefore not surprising that Stanislavsky's psychophysical acting 'system' is a current influence within singer-actor training.<sup>226</sup> For example, Deer and Dal Vera's approach to dramatic character preparation for the various styles within the musical theatre repertoire is largely based on Stanislavskian-style text-analysis, using techniques such as the Magic If, Fundamental Questions, Given Circumstances, Imagination, Tasks, Supertasks, and establishing the character's Inner monologue. Like Stanislavsky, they suggest analysing song as if it were dramatic text, observing that Emotion, Observation and Imagination are intertwined within the process, urging the singer-actor to "find the character through emotional and psychological means that eventually result in physical and vocal choices that are stageworthy".<sup>227</sup> Clark and Clark also address the multidisciplinary challenges for the singer-actor and offer a synthesis of practical workshops, lessons and exercises which integrate voice, drama and movement, also influenced by Stanislavsky's teachings. Major and Laing's dramatic character preparation for the singer-actor is "brief and practical",<sup>228</sup> half of which focuses specifically on Stanislavsky's Fundamental Questions. However, they use only five out of six, which they have adapted slightly: "Where am I coming from?, Where am I going?, What do I want?, What might block me?, [and] How do I overcome that block?".<sup>229</sup> Hicks, on the other hand, presents the singer-actor with an extended theoretical approach to character preparation based on a scene-study methodology devised by Fran Dorn, which he adapted for use in opera scenes and arias.<sup>230</sup> It is,

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<sup>224</sup> Benedetti, *The Art of the Actor*, p. 146.

<sup>225</sup> Dunbar, p. 64.

<sup>226</sup> Dunbar, p. 64.

<sup>227</sup> Deer and Dal Vera, p. 11.

<sup>228</sup> Major and Laing, p. 66.

<sup>229</sup> Major and Laing, p. 66.

<sup>230</sup> Hicks, p. 335.

however, heavily underpinned by Stanislavskian techniques such as Tasks and Actions. Harvard bases his approach to dramatic character preparation on a combination of Stanislavsky, Meisner and Laban techniques.<sup>231</sup> He explains the basics of Stanislavsky's acting 'system' for the purpose of song acting and also recommends the use of several Stanislavskian-based preparatory techniques, including the Fundamental Questions, Actions, Tempo-rhythm.

Collectively, it is evident within these sources that Stanislavsky's acting 'system' is the leading influence on their theories of dramatic character development, preparation and analysis. The most predominant theme which emerges from this leading literature is the need for singer-actors to present "believable" or "truthful" characters on stage.<sup>232</sup> The primary focus for the singer-actor is to create believability and to achieve this; there are a series of commonly suggested basic steps for the singer-actor's character analyses, most of which are based on Stanislavsky's acting theories. These steps include the Fundamental Questions,<sup>233</sup> the Magic If, Given Circumstances and Task, Supertask and (in the case of Clark and Clark), even Emotion Memory. Limitations have emerged as a result of reliance on the Hapgood translations. In these sources, Stanislavsky's 'system' is often confused with the American Method; moreover, the Fundamental Question *How?* is approached from a theoretical perspective, with no practical suggestions of how to apply it.

## 2.7 Character analysis

Dramatic character preparation and character analysis are closely tied. The distinction between the two is that dramatic character preparation refers to how the singer-actor prepares their character or role, while character analysis is the tool through which the singer-actor prepares for a character or role. Like dramatic character preparation, character analysis is also a well-covered subject

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<sup>231</sup> Harvard.

<sup>232</sup> Oswald; Clark and Clark; Major and Laing; Hicks; Deer and Dal Vera; Harvard; Moore and Bergman.

<sup>233</sup> Depending on the source, this can vary between five to seven basic questions.

within the relevant opera and musical theatre singer-actor training sources. Interestingly, however, character analysis appears to fall into two distinct categories, which I have chosen to call literary character analysis and physical character analysis.

The majority of the relevant literature addresses literary character analysis, which can be defined as a strategy to intellectually analyse the actions, feelings, thoughts, look and speech of a dramatic character, as well as the character's motivations, socio-economic conditions and background.<sup>234</sup> In contrast, physical character analysis is the physical application of the character's behaviour and motivations, usually addressed as acting technique, characterisation, physicalisation, gesture, body language and facial expressions.<sup>235</sup> The division between these two types of character analysis once again indicates Stanislavsky's influence, as literary character analysis refers to the character's Inner, while physical character analysis refers to the character's Outer. To further support this assertion, viewing this divide through a psychophysical lens could connect literary character analysis to Experiencing and physical character analysis to embodiment.

### **2.7.1 Literary character analysis**

The primary purpose of a literary character analysis is to analyse the text and its relationship to the music, to understand the intentions of the composer and librettist towards the character.<sup>236</sup> This process will lead the singer-actor towards an informed decision and a successful and believable character interpretation. There are three vital steps in applying a literary character analysis. First, translation and analysis of the text; second, consideration of the relationship between music and text; and third, analysis of the background and context of the work.

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<sup>234</sup> Ostwald; Clark and Clark; Smith; Harrison; Baldy; Major and Laing.

<sup>235</sup> Stanislavski and Rumyantsev; Alfreds; Clark and Clark; Ostwald; Hicks; Major and Laing.

<sup>236</sup> Ostwald, pp. 4, 6.

The consensus within the literature is that the first step towards a successful character analysis for the singer-actor is to begin with the text.<sup>237</sup> This perspective is supported by the reasoning that the text is the foundation on which the music was composed. For example, Helfgot and Beeman believe that “the seed, the origin of the opera is the text, which inspires the composers to give a particular shape to the work”.<sup>238</sup> Similarly, Smith notes that “vocal music begins as text, so that is where we should begin when learning.”<sup>239</sup> In addition, Moore and Bergman state that the singer-actor should familiarise themselves with the entire libretto before rehearsals commence as a means to investigate all the elements of the dramatic work and their own role.<sup>240</sup> In the case of opera, which is performed in several languages, opera practitioners also urge the singer-actor to translate the text if they are not a native or fluent speaker.<sup>241</sup> Major and Laing, and Hicks point out that it is important for the singer-actor to translate all the roles in the opera, as it is essential to know the entire context and not just their own character’s lines.<sup>242</sup> As Major and Laing state, “without a precise understanding of the dialogue – the interplay, the give-and-take, all the things that ‘real’ characters do with each other in a play – no interaction, and therefore no genuine drama [is] possible”.<sup>243</sup> Therefore it is essential for the singer-actor to understand each word that is sung (or spoken) within the opera, otherwise it would affect not only their own performance but the entire production. Consequently, a lack of understanding would also compromise any sense of believability. Smith and Ostwald suggest that in addition to a word-for-word translation, the singer-actor should also write out a phrase by phrase meaning, even if the opera is in a language in which the singer-actor is fluent, as this will

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<sup>237</sup> Ostwald, p. 129; Clark and Clark, p. 25; Major and Laing, pp. 79–82; Hicks, pp. 18, 355; Smith, p. 140; Harrison, p. 69; Baldy, p. 91; Harvard, pp. 74–76; Deer and Dal Vera, pp. 42, 231; Dunbar, p. 65; Moore and Bergman, p. 176.

<sup>238</sup> Daniel Helfgot and William O. Beeman, *The Third Line: The Opera Performer as Interpreter* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1993), p. 43.

<sup>239</sup> Smith, p. 140.

<sup>240</sup> Moore and Bergman, p. 472.

<sup>241</sup> Ostwald, p. 129; Clark and Clark, p. 25; Major and Laing, pp. 79–82; Hicks, pp. 18, 355; Smith, p. 140; Harrison, p. 69; Baldy, p. 91.

<sup>242</sup> Hicks, p. 18; Major and Laing, pp. 79–82.

<sup>243</sup> Major and Laing, p. 81.

give the singer-actor further insight into their character's motivations.<sup>244</sup> It should be noted that there is a similarity between Ostwald's phrase-by-phrase approach and Actioning. However, the first is literary based, while the latter is analytically active. Moreover, Baldy explains that translating the score will also solve any issue with language inflection, as a failure to understand the text precisely will give the singer-actor problems with the nuances of the text and language (and as a result) also with the musical phrasing.<sup>245</sup> Therefore, it is the singer-actor's responsibility to understand every word spoken as they would in everyday life, as "complete involvement with the text is absolutely necessary".<sup>246</sup> This involvement requires two things; first, a complete understanding of the text; and second, a conscious attachment to the words while the singer-actor is singing them.<sup>247</sup>

Robinson, however, presents a contrary perspective, claiming that the basis for analysing and understanding opera and its characters should be the music, not the text.<sup>248</sup> He argues that it is not possible for the singer-actor to consider only the text because he believes opera's primary language is music.<sup>249</sup> One of the reasons supporting his belief in the music's primacy, is that contrary to theatre, opera is often performed in a language foreign to its audience, while theatre is almost exclusively performed in the language also spoken by the audience.<sup>250</sup> Robinson affirms that the convention of performing opera in a foreign language exists because the music is considered to have priority over the text.<sup>251</sup> However, Grout and Williams remark that opera is full of unnatural conventions, such as singing instead of speaking, and in most circumstances they are performed in their original language.<sup>252</sup> From another perspective, Fisher states that opera

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<sup>244</sup> Smith, p. 140; Ostwald, p. 129.

<sup>245</sup> Baldy, p. 95.

<sup>246</sup> Baldy, p. 95.

<sup>247</sup> Baldy, p. 95.

<sup>248</sup> Paul Robinson, 'Reading Libretti and Misreading Opera', in *Opera, Sex and Other Vital Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 30–51 (p. 30).

<sup>249</sup> Robinson, pp. 30–31.

<sup>250</sup> Robinson, p. 33.

<sup>251</sup> Robinson, pp. 30–51.

<sup>252</sup> Donald Jay Grout and Hermine Weigel Williams, *Short History of Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 2. There are exceptions to this rule as some dramatic vocal works were composed in more than one language. Another reason to support singing opera in its

“achieves an expressive and emotive intensity that neither words nor music can achieve alone”.<sup>253</sup> In other words, the combination of music and text can attain far greater expression together than separately, and therefore their relationship must be carefully considered.

The singer-actor must consequently consider the relationship between the text and music, as well as their combined impact on the dramatic character. It may be argued that the music reflects the composer’s thoughts and impression of the character, as they have “interpreted the character’s feelings in music”.<sup>254</sup> The singer-actor must interpret these feelings and question what the composer is communicating about the character within the music.<sup>255</sup> Stanislavsky too considered opera as the “organic union”<sup>256</sup> between words and believed that the music expressed the character’s motivations and feelings.<sup>257</sup> Therefore, he urged the singer-actor to connect to the words themselves, make them relevant for the character and then “bind them to the music”.<sup>258</sup> To further support Stanislavsky’s opinion, Foster also notes that “singing is an emotionally expressive event involving the world, its meaning and feeling and its musical environment”.<sup>259</sup>

Ostwald suggests that the singer-actor must address the musical score as a means of analysing the character’s subtext.<sup>260</sup> Similarly, Deer and Dal Vera also state that the “subtext is often explicitly delivered through music”.<sup>261</sup> In other words, the music expresses the character’s Inner thoughts and feelings which are reflected in the “key, time signature, tempo, pitches, intervals, dynamics, tessitura, and style of your vocal line, of the melody, harmony, rhythm,

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original language is because the music was composed and set to that specific language and a translation can cause issues with the syntax and vowel placements for the singers.

<sup>253</sup> Burton D. Fisher, *A History of Opera: Milestones and Metamorphoses* (Miami: Opera Journeys, 2007), p. 14.

<sup>254</sup> Ostwald, pp. 3–4.

<sup>255</sup> Clark and Clark, pp. 25, 89.

<sup>256</sup> Stanislavski and Romyantsev, location 680.

<sup>257</sup> Stanislavski and Romyantsev, location 676.

<sup>258</sup> Stanislavski and Romyantsev, location 679.

<sup>259</sup> Walter Charles Foster, *Ideal Singing: Expressive and Technical Aspects of the Vocal Art, Together with a System for Developing Expressive Spontaneity and Performance Capability* (Arkansas: Recital, 1976), p. 6.

<sup>260</sup> Ostwald, p. 220.

<sup>261</sup> Deer and Dal Vera, p. 52.

dynamics, and instrumentation of its accompaniment, and [...] introductions, interludes, or postludes”.<sup>262</sup> Clark and Clark add that the singer-actor must observe any sudden changes in any of these aspects of the music, as it inherently reflects a dramatic choice the composer has made.<sup>263</sup> Therefore, it is essential for the singer to research each scene and determine the composer’s dramatic intentions, and “sing, interpret, move and interact to give meaning to the work, to make it real”.<sup>264</sup> As Michael Ewans notes: “the interpretation of an opera’s text and music is a subjective discourse [...] you [the singer-actor] must inform your own opinions on every point – down to the small details of blocking, posture, gesture and facial expression”.<sup>265</sup> Ostwald further expands on this by affirming that to create a genuine and believable character on stage, the analysis of the subtext and “ultimately [the] character’s entire internal dialogue [must] reflect the feelings and transitions the music suggests”.<sup>266</sup> As Maria Callas states, “the most important prerequisite of an actor (opera singers *are* actors) is to identify with the character, as created by the composer and librettist....”<sup>267</sup> In other words, it is the singer-actor’s responsibility to match the character’s textual motivations to the music. If this analysis does not match the performance, character believability is compromised.<sup>268</sup>

Numerous sources state that it is essential for the singer-actor to use background research, as this can provide them with essential information about the character, the composer/librettist and their influences.<sup>269</sup> Smith recommends that singer-actors should do “all the research an actor would do in preparing a role: [s]tudy the source material for the opera – read background information, historical context, commentaries, and studies about the opera and their character so that they ‘get under the skin’ of their character”.<sup>270</sup> Similarly, Deer

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<sup>262</sup> Ostwald, p. 220.

<sup>263</sup> Clark & Clark, p. 82.

<sup>264</sup> Clark & Clark, p. 87.

<sup>265</sup> Michael Ewans, *Performing Opera: A Practical Guide for Singers and Directors*, Kindle Edition (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), location 291.

<sup>266</sup> Ostwald, p. 220.

<sup>267</sup> Stelios Galatopoulos, *Maria Callas: Sacred Monster* (USA: Fourth Estate, 1998), p. 431.

<sup>268</sup> Ostwald, p. 19.

<sup>269</sup> Smith; Clark and Clark; Ostwald; Major and Laing.

<sup>270</sup> Smith, p. 179.



and Dal Vera also assert that “the original source material offers [the singer-actor] detailed information on the character, relationships and original intent”.<sup>271</sup> Clark and Clark observe that there is valuable information in “novels, plays and historical materials [as they] often describe characters and setting in a level of detail that is impossible in an opera”.<sup>272</sup> Nicholas Muni adds that, before arriving at rehearsals, the singer-actor should “know the historical background information, if any. Giving thought to the character background (personal history and circumstances)”<sup>273</sup> will give the singer-actor further knowledge about the context of the opera, and lead them to question “what was going on in the composer’s life at the time? Why did he or she write the opera? Are there any political circumstances that might be pertinent?”<sup>274</sup> Oswald further argues the importance of background research before music rehearsals and states that the singer-actor “should also be familiar with the entire piece and [their] character’s place in it”.<sup>275</sup> He suggests that the singer-actor should also investigate the character’s social class, period of the opera, fashion of that time (and the relevant time the opera is set in), familiarise themselves with history and literature of the period, social customs, music by the same composer, how the opera was received and consider how it would have been understood.<sup>276</sup> Deer and Dal Vera have a similar perspective and suggest that to analyse the character, the singer-actor must analyse the world of the musical, and investigate historical, geographical and social contexts, as well as the original source material.<sup>277</sup> When all these aspects have been evaluated, the singer-actor can fashion their interpretation.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Deer and Dal Vera, p. 159.

<sup>272</sup> Clark and Clark, p. 130.

<sup>273</sup> Nicholas Muni quoted in Clark and Clark, p. 101.

<sup>274</sup> Nicholas Muni quoted in Clark and Clark, p. 101.

<sup>275</sup> Oswald, p. 177.

<sup>276</sup> Oswald, p. 191.

<sup>277</sup> Deer and Dal Vera, pp. 158–59.

<sup>278</sup> Oswald, p. 190.

### 2.7.2 Physical character analysis

Physical character analysis is the physicalisation of a dramatic character through the use of the body, gesture and facial expressions.

The literature aimed at the opera singer-actor focuses predominantly on using various improvisation techniques as a means of physicalising the character. For example, Clark and Clark, and Ostwald advocate the importance of improvisational exercises towards physically creating the character. Clark and Clark take a predominantly physiological perspective, arguing that “a powerful performance begins with an awareness of the body”,<sup>279</sup> as a means of creating a physically connected character. Ostwald argues further that improvisation is the “single most potent technique [the singer-actor] can use to improve [their] believability on stage”.<sup>280</sup> He further points out that by simply using Stanislavsky’s techniques, improvisation can be as simple as applying Given Circumstances and the Magic If for the singer-actor to connect physically and mentally to the character.<sup>281</sup>

Stanislavsky’s influence on the character physicalisation in the literature aimed at the musical theatre singer-actor is also prominent. For example, Harvard takes a psychophysical approach and suggests using Active Analysis, explaining how “active, improvisational methods might provide a more holistic, less cerebral result.”<sup>282</sup> He provides a breakdown of how the Active Analysis process can be adapted for musical theatre. Similarly, Deer and Dal Vera also follow a Stanislavskian-based approach, advocating various ‘system’ techniques including the Magic If, Given Circumstances, Tasks, Bits and Obstacles. Deer and Dal Vera take a psychophysical approach similar to that of Harvard. For instance, they acknowledge the commonly assumed difficulty of young singer-actors in addressing a character’s physicalisation, and ensure that the secret to acting characters is to make them physical. They explain that “anything that lives in the heart or in the head also lives in the body. If you have a thought or feeling, your

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<sup>279</sup> Clark and Clark, p. 2.

<sup>280</sup> Ostwald, p. 42.

<sup>281</sup> Ostwald, p. 42.

<sup>282</sup> Harvard, p. 164.

body will respond. Your breath will shift; certain muscles will tighten or relax; your posture and balance will adjust”.<sup>283</sup>

In their respective guide books, Clark and Clark, Ostwald, Harvard, Deer and Dal Vera provide several improvisation exercises as a way for the singer-actor to physicalise the character. Limitations to this study design are that most of these exercises and physical activities are designed to be used within groups. Although this would be very beneficial within a classroom or workshop setting, their use would be limited for the singer-actor’s individual dramatic preparation process. There are, however, certain advantages to an improvisational approach. For example, as part of any improvisation method, there is a consensus within the literature that strongly advocates the use of imagination, as this allows the singer to put themselves in the character’s place *as if* they were the character.<sup>284</sup> Similarly, from a vocal pedagogical perspective, Harrison urges the singer-actor to use imagination, to see a range of images in the mind, thereby creating a naturally reactive performance.<sup>285</sup>

Other aspects of character physicalisation highlighted in the literature are facial expressions and body awareness. Clark and Clark and Ostwald argue that facial expression is a necessary communication tool for the singer-actor. Clark and Clark state that the use of an expressive face will give the singer-actor more clarity and enhance their communication with the audience. Similarly, Ostwald urges that the singer-actor’s character emotions must be transparent on their faces, as the face should be as expressive as the voice and body.<sup>286</sup>

Regarding the body, Clark and Clark assert that it is crucial for singer-actors to be aware of their bodies before they sing and connect emotively, as body awareness allows “focus on balance, flexibility, grace, and breathing that is regular in the face of intense emotion”.<sup>287</sup> They suggest using Yoga, Pilates, the

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<sup>283</sup> Deer and Dal Vera, p. 35.

<sup>284</sup> Ostwald, pp. 28–32; Clark and Clark, pp. 28, 72; Harvard, pp. 37–41; Deer and Dal Vera, pp. 8, 136.

<sup>285</sup> Harrison, p. 205.

<sup>286</sup> Ostwald, pp. 12, 16, 18.

<sup>287</sup> Clark and Clark, p. 3.

Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais and Tai Chi as a means of building body awareness and to lead towards a connected full-body performance.<sup>288</sup> Similarly, Harvard notes that the body (and voice) is the singer-actor's instrument, and that they need to be free from tensions to be able to respond and react spontaneously.<sup>289</sup> Body awareness is a high priority for the singer-actor, as it allows movement on stage, a physical engagement with the voice and character, as well as a full-body connection necessary for breathing and phonation. Furthermore, Harvard acknowledges the psychophysical connection between the singer-actor's body and the voice, explaining that the body will absorb any physical preparation, and even "whilst you are in the act of singing, you will observe that the physiology of your body contains a physical memory of your discoveries [...] a psycho- physical connection will remain."<sup>290</sup>

In conclusion, numerous sources have argued that the singer-actor must be a psychophysically *connected* performer.<sup>291</sup> To achieve connectivity within a performance, the singer must connect and establish a relationship with the character based on their literary character analysis findings, meaning that a connected performance requires an integration of voice, body and character. The concept of integration is possibly influenced by Stanislavsky's "holistic belief that mind, body and spirit represent a psychophysical continuum,"<sup>292</sup> as one cannot function without the others. As established earlier in this chapter, Stanislavsky firmly believed that the mind and body are interconnected and dependent on each other. Similarly, the literary and physical character analyses for the singer-actor should be approached and addressed as interdependent, and they should, therefore, be integrated into one psychophysical approach, establishing a character connection and aiming towards a connected performance.

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<sup>288</sup> Clark and Clark, p. 3.

<sup>289</sup> Harvard, p. 71.

<sup>290</sup> Harvard, p. 182.

<sup>291</sup> Harvard; Deer and Dal Vera; Moore and Bergman; Dunbar; Clark and Clark; Smith; Ostwald; Baldy; Harrison. It should be noted that these sources do not necessarily use the term psychophysical but that is what is implied.

<sup>292</sup> *Actor Training*, ed. by Alison Hodge, 2nd edn, Kindle Edition (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 7.

## 2.8 Integrating voice with the dramatic character

Integrating the voice with the dramatic character is possibly the most controversial aspect of the character analysis process. It is evident from a vocal pedagogical perspective that character analysis and acting are often regarded as a secondary necessity for the training of singer-actors.

As mentioned in Chapter One, there is a predisposition among vocal teachers and singer-actors to believe that singing technique is more important than acting technique. For example, Miller views the connection between acting and singing to be based on vocal function and level of ability: “When we understand the function of the mechanism, we can train ourselves to associate emotional and creative experiences with sensation that results from specific kinds of physical co-ordination”.<sup>293</sup> So, when the singer-actor has full control over their voice, such as dynamics, range, skill and pitch, they can learn to recognise which physical voice requirements are necessary in order to express emotions. This would allow the singer-actor to express these emotions, but only once they have mastered their vocal technique. Miller’s argument prioritises vocal technique over communication and expression, as vocal technique is the necessary basis for expression. Once the singer-actor’s vocal technique is sufficient and the sound has reached the required level of beauty, the singer-actor has to try and “reattach” the emotional connection while preserving the physical coordination of the vocal mechanism.

In contrast to Miller, Smith argues that although many singer-actors might initially be overly focused on vocal technique, and while audiences “can be impressed by good sounds”,<sup>294</sup> it is far more important for a singer to “combine impressive technique with emotional truth”.<sup>295</sup> He claims that this not only

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<sup>293</sup> Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1986), pp. 198–99.

<sup>294</sup> Smith, p. 25.

<sup>295</sup> Smith, p. 25.

improves the quality of the singer-actor's performance but also improves the audience's experience of the performance.<sup>296</sup>

Burgess and Skilbeck, however, specifically categorise two types of training for the singer-actor. The first includes physical elements such as relaxation, fitness, control, concentration, imagination, awareness and spontaneity, while the second focuses on vocal elements such as voice production, rhythm, diction, textual analysis and characterisation.<sup>297</sup> Following a psychophysical approach, they further state that it is the singer-actor's "task to combine these areas into a single co-ordinated act of sung theatre [and] to transcend the separate performance disciplines involved in singing and acting at the same time to unite the many levels of meaning present in music and drama into a synthesis".<sup>298</sup> To achieve this, Burgess and Skilbeck begin by addressing vocal practice before setting guidelines for acting techniques. Deer and Dal Vera, however, begin with characterisation and textual analysis before incorporating vocal techniques. As Dunbar suggests, there is a consensus within musical theatre pedagogy that the singer-actor must integrate their vocal and character learning processes, but that they must have secure vocal technique before they begin their character development process.<sup>299</sup> Harvard explains that once the singer-actor has mastered their vocal technique, they will be able to act spontaneously and the voice will integrate with the acting.<sup>300</sup>

Furthermore, Smith's perspective is that the singer-actor "function[s] more as a vessel for the drama [rather] than [being] a participant in it".<sup>301</sup> This suggests that the singer-actor takes an emotional distance from the music and their character, which ensures that the vocal mechanism can work at optimum form.

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<sup>296</sup> Smith, p. 145.

<sup>297</sup> Thomas De Mallet Burgess and Nicholas Skilbeck, *The Singing and Acting Handbook: Games and Exercises for the Performer* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 15–16.

<sup>298</sup> Burgess and Skilbeck, p. 16.

<sup>299</sup> Dunbar, p. 68.

<sup>300</sup> Harvard, pp. 207–9.

<sup>301</sup> Smith, p. 145.

However, it could be argued that in the case of contemporary opera,<sup>302</sup> this presentational style would be suitable, as many modern operas challenge standard operatic conventions. An issue may arise if the singer-actor does not have extensive training in this style of acting, as it could come across as mechanical. Smith further contradicts himself by arguing that the singer-actor should simply communicate while singing, but communication does mean involvement to some degree. There is a consensus within the relevant literature that complete immersion into the drama and life of a character is detrimental to the singer-actor.<sup>303</sup> As argued by Stanislavsky and Ostwald, however, a performance and the relevant characterisation should be believable, and therefore the singer-actor should create an empathic connection with their character.

The relevant literature has established that the voice is the singer-actor's most expressive means.<sup>304</sup> Therefore, in performance, the voice should be integrated with the dramatic character. While the voice is a living mechanism and instrument, which can and will be affected by any physical action, it is also an expressive tool that can be used to evoke the dramatic character's feelings and motivations through the simple act of singing.<sup>305</sup>

Additionally, it is evident in the literature that vocal pedagogy consistently encourages the development of expressive and communicative singers, and exercises in this literature are focused on the singer-actor's voice. Vocal pedagogy is becoming increasingly holistic in approach, encouraging singer-actors to perform with their mind, body and soul.<sup>306</sup> This perspective is possibly influenced by Stanislavsky's holistic approach to acting, based on natural processes which use conscious work to arrive at an intuitive and spontaneous performance. Smith states that "vulnerability, spontaneity, constant motion and

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<sup>302</sup> Some examples include: *The Tempest* by Thomas Adès; *Nixon in China*, *The Death of Klinghoffer* and *Dr. Atomic* by John Adams; *Little Women* and *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* by Mark Adamo; *Einstein on the Beach* by Philip Glass; *Ghosts of Versailles* by John Corgliano.

<sup>303</sup> Stanislavski and Rumyantsev; Ostwald; Clark and Clark; Smith.

<sup>304</sup> Baldy; Harrison; Smith.

<sup>305</sup> Ostwald, p. 11.

<sup>306</sup> Smith, p. 18; Harrison, p. 28; Baldy, p. 4.

creativity are essential to good vocal technique”,<sup>307</sup> as these elements will enable the singer “to communicate straight from the heart – with freedom, honesty and power.”<sup>308</sup> Several other vocal pedagogues also urge a personal connection in performance; Harrison asserts that “singing depends on its truthfulness...It is truer and more effective if it strikes the listener... in some way personal”.<sup>309</sup> His suggestion for personal focus aims to make the performance more engaging and convincing. Similarly, Baldy argues for the need for personal connection to the text and the music as a means to humanise the character and character’s situation.<sup>310</sup> Smith adds that singing is a balance between beauty and freedom,<sup>311</sup> meaning that for the singer-actor to express and communicate easily, their vocal mechanism must be free and connected.<sup>312</sup> A closer view of Smith’s statement also demonstrates that characterisation cannot be a compromise between vocal technique and acting technique. This view is reiterated by Hicks, who argues that it is unnecessary “to neglect the techniques and artistry of singing in order to create a truthful and meaningful interpretation of an operatic role”.<sup>313</sup>

The various opinions within the relevant literature on whether singer-actors should give primacy to their singing technique or their acting technique shows the influence and mirrors the dualistic nature of Stanislavsky’s psychophysical technique. While the majority of the literature states that the singer-actor can work on characterisation effectively only once they have learned their music technically and are secure in their vocal technique, it could be argued that it is possible for the singer-actor to work on both vocal technique and aspects of their dramatic character (particularly textual analysis) simultaneously in the preparation process. As Merlin states, “if you’re working psychophysically, [...]:

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<sup>307</sup> Smith, p. 26.

<sup>308</sup> Smith, p. 26.

<sup>309</sup> Harrison, p. 206.

<sup>310</sup> Baldy, p. 4.

<sup>311</sup> Smith, p. 29.

<sup>312</sup> Connected singing can refer to a physical vocal support connection and also to a personal connection while singing. In this case it implies both.

<sup>313</sup> Hicks, p. 474.



you can hop from one stimulus to another with equal affectivity”.<sup>314</sup> Therefore, it is important for the singer-actor to achieve a balance by integrating the voice with the dramatic character; they should sing each note and word with purpose. They must fill their roles, their stage presence and their musical performance with rich content by performing with their whole self.<sup>315</sup>

## 2.9 Self-sufficiency, preparation and practicing skills

Practice and preparation are two aspects crucial to the singer-actor’s learning process. From a vocal pedagogy perspective, it is common knowledge that singer-actors are expected to practice daily and there is a strong consensus that vocal practicing skills are a basic training aspect for both amateur and professional singer-actors.<sup>316</sup> Interestingly, however, Claudia Friedlander points out that in relation to vocal practice “many singers lack well-defined practice strategies”,<sup>317</sup> and she suggests that this is not a discipline issue but rather because singer-actors are often not confident in *how* to practice.<sup>318</sup> In contrast, instrumentalists are far more efficient at structured practice, as they use repetitive practicing techniques “in order to internalise and solidify the music”.<sup>319</sup> To assist the singer-actor in improving their practicing skills, she suggests using the concept of Deep Practice based on the work by Daniel Coyle. Deep Practice, also known as Deliberate Practice or Purposeful Practice, is a technique that is divided into three stages: chunk it up, repeat it and learn to feel it.<sup>320</sup> This practicing technique advises breaking things down into small and manageable sections, giving complete focus to each section in turn, and then

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<sup>314</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 2788.

<sup>315</sup> Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, locations 2283, 2498.

<sup>316</sup> Jones; Smith; Harrison; Baldy; Miller, *On the Art of Singing*.

<sup>317</sup> Claudia Friedlander, ‘Musing on Mechanics — Structured Practice — Instrumental Means to Vocal Success’, *Classical Singer Magazine*, October 2014, para. 2 <<http://www.classicalsinger.com/magazine/article.php?id=2764>> [accessed 2 December 2014].

<sup>318</sup> Friedlander, para. 2.

<sup>319</sup> Friedlander, para. 5.

<sup>320</sup> For more information see: Daniel Coyle, *The Talent Code: Greatness Isn’t Born. It’s Grown*, Kindle Edition (New York: Random House eBooks, 2010), pp. 79–94.

integrating them.<sup>321</sup> Similarly, Miller advocates a structured practicing technique, suggesting the use of his theory Creative Practice as a means of applying the information learned in the teaching studio and following “an overall plan that outlines goals, with explicit instruction”.<sup>322</sup> In his words:

Creative practicing does not mean just doing one’s own thing; it means creatively using the information during a lesson. Creative practicing can take place only if it is based on specifics with an understanding of what is to be accomplished. Each solution opens up the possibility of additional progress. Every practice session should build on the creative excitement of solutions previously offered in the studio.<sup>323</sup>

He further reasons that “if there is no plan, no organisation to the practicing, there will be little positive result”.<sup>324</sup> As “even musical expression and textual communication need to be systematically practiced”.<sup>325</sup>

It is evident that strong practicing skills are essential to becoming a self-sufficient singer. Jones argues that self-sufficient vocal practicing skills require the singer to self-supervise, which builds an increase in vocal confidence as “[the] singer can use the practice experience to build confidence and achieve the goal of moving forward”.<sup>326</sup>

From a dramaturgical perspective, for Alfreds, preparation is a tool the actor uses to “arm [themselves with (a) knowledge of the material (‘this is what I know *so far*’) and (b) possible ways of structuring the rehearsals (‘this is how we *might* approach the work’)].<sup>327</sup> It is important to note that Alfreds is discussing the preparation of a full cast in rehearsal. The steps outlined, however, are also valid for the singer-actor. It is crucial for the singer-actor to have a strong working knowledge of the material as well as knowing how they *might* approach their

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<sup>321</sup> Friedlander, para. 6; Coyle, pp. 79–94.

<sup>322</sup> Miller, *On the Art of Singing*, p. 182.

<sup>323</sup> Miller, *On the Art of Singing*, p. 182.

<sup>324</sup> Miller, *On the Art of Singing*, p. 185.

<sup>325</sup> Miller, *On the Art of Singing*, p. 184.

<sup>326</sup> Jones, para. 7.

<sup>327</sup> Alfreds, p. 112. Original emphasis.

individual character, rather than the whole work. Alfreds argues that before the actors start to work with the text, a significant amount of preparation work is needed from both the director and the company. Similarly, the singer-actor is also required to do a significant amount of preparation, including the additional work of learning the musical score. As Stanislavsky observed, “real, artistic forms that are meant to convey the inner life of a role, are difficult to find and are created slowly”.<sup>328</sup> I take this to mean that any stage of the creative learning and development process takes time and cannot be hurried; “every exercise, even the most insignificant, connected with the Inner and the Outer line of action, needs to be monitored and sanctioned by the feeling of truth.”<sup>329</sup>

Similarly, self-sufficiency in practicing dramatic skills through a psychophysical character development process will also help the singer build confidence in their ability to characterise. Stanislavsky emphasised that “the creative capacity of an actor and a singer is a science. You have to study, develop it, as you do other forms of science.”<sup>330</sup> Therefore, preparation and practice are an essential process leading towards rehearsal and ultimately to performance. The singer must prepare and practice both musically and dramatically before arriving at the first rehearsal, as the “rehearsal is the final stage of the process whereby you develop a complete vocal, musical, physical, and psychological portrait of your character, so you can be believable in your role”.<sup>331</sup> Character analysis and character creation are a continual process. If they are included in the singer’s preparation and practice within the practice studio, this will effectively provide singers with self-sufficient characterisation skills. Following Hicks’ argument that “acting preparation occurs simultaneously with musical preparation”,<sup>332</sup> psychophysical character development should be an integrated element of the singer-actor’s preparation process.

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<sup>328</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, p. 33.

<sup>329</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, p. 194. My emphasis.

<sup>330</sup> Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, location 880.

<sup>331</sup> Ostwald, p. 190.

<sup>332</sup> Hicks, p. 479.

## 2.10 Summary

Three dominant themes emerged throughout the literature review, providing the rationale for my study. The first established the significant influence of Stanislavsky's 'system', although not always credited, on singer-actor training, confirming his techniques as valid for the twenty-first century singer-actor. The second highlighted the division between literary character analysis and physical character analysis as the majority of the literature addresses literary character analysis for the singer-actor, while physical character analysis is addressed only in terms of acting technique, gesture and expressions. Although the literature acknowledges the need for singer-actors to be integrative performers, there is little suggestion of how the singer-actor can integrate both types of analyses, and practice physicalising their dramatic character outside of group improvisation exercises. Furthermore, almost all of the literature on acting for the singer-actor is additive, and addresses acting as a separate activity to singing rather than integrating them. The third theme is the necessity of dramatic self-sufficiency for the singer-actor. Practice, preparation, and private rehearsal are three crucial aspects of the singer-actor's learning process, and while it is established that the singer-actor should be self-sufficient in terms of their dramatic and vocal preparation, there is little or no general instruction on how to incorporate dramatic preparation of a character within the practice studio.

The literature review also establishes that no previous study has tested how the singer-actor might adapt and use Actioning within their own dramatic preparation process. Although Dunbar, Harvard, and Deer and Dal Vera suggest the use of Actioning as a means of preparation for the singer-actor, there are no accounts of the effect, practicality or applicability of this process.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to research and investigate how I, as singer-actor, could integrate dramatic character development and preparation within my own initial role-learning process, aiming at increased dramatic self-sufficiency. To do this, I will conduct a practice-led experiment through four applied case studies, using myself as subject, on the efficacy, adaptability, and

validity of Actioning within a Stanislavskian-based dramatic character preparation process for operatic roles.

## Chapter Three: Research Method

The purpose of this research is to examine the process of preparing for operatic roles by combining elements of Stanislavsky's 'system' with Alfreds' Actioning. This chapter presents the practice-led research method, providing insight into the application and testing of Actioning within a Stanislavskian-based dramatic character preparation process. In addition, this chapter explains and situates the experiment, presented through the four applied case studies, documenting the singer-actor/researcher's own dramatic preparation process for the roles of Carmen, Carlotta in two productions, and Micaëla, with particular focus on the preparation of her aria *Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante* for recital.

### 3.1 Practice-led research

Practice-led research is the study of the nature of practice leading to new knowledge which has operational significance for that practice. The focus of this type of research is to advance knowledge about practice and/or within practice. Carole Gray defines the two characteristics of practice-led research as:

Firstly, research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners.<sup>1</sup>

Practice-led research falls within the performative research paradigm. Haseman, for example, presents a strong argument to acknowledge performative research as an autonomous third research paradigm, distinct from quantitative and

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<sup>1</sup> Carole Gray, 'Inquiry through Practice: Developing Appropriate Research Strategies', in *No Guru, No Method?* (Helsinki: University of Art and Design, 1996), pp. 1–28 (p. 3); Carole Gray, 'From the Ground up: Encountering Theory in the Process of Practice-Led Doctoral Research', in *AHRC Postgraduate Conference In Theory?* (Leicester: De Montfort University & Loughborough Universities, 2007), pp. 1–18 (para. 2).

qualitative research with its own approaches to designing, conducting and reporting.<sup>2</sup>

There is some confusion within the literature over the difference between the terms practice-led, practice-based, practice as, practice in and practice through research methodologies, as the terminology is often used interchangeably. John Freeman notes that there is a growing consensus in distinguishing between practice-led and practice-based research:

We would probably agree that when practical performance, in its most inclusive sense, forms the core of the contribution to knowledge then that research can most logically be described as practice-based.

Conversely, when the research undertaken is likely to lead primarily to new and/or advanced understandings about practice, we can say that this is practice-led. Beyond this point very little useful consensus exists.<sup>3</sup>

Like Freeman, Linda Candy also makes a distinction between practice-led and practice-based research. In her opinion, practice-based research focuses primarily on the creation and/or making of an artefact, whereas the main focus of practice-led research is new understandings about practice.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that practice-led research may or may not include a creative artefact, as the research focuses more specifically on the understanding of the development of a specific practice in a given field or organisation. Candy further explains that “practice-led research does not depend on the creation of an artefact by practitioner researchers, but is, nevertheless, founded in their practice”.<sup>5</sup>

Practice-led research is a relatively new research paradigm that uses innovative ways to collect data. Brad Haseman explains that “*practice-led research* has

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<sup>2</sup> Haseman, ‘Manifesto’, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> John Freeman, *Blood, Sweat & Theory: Research through Practice in Performance*, Kindle Edition (Oxfordshire: Libri, 2009), pp. 62–63.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Candy, *Practice Based Research: A Guide*, Creativity and Cognition Studios (Sydney: University of Technology, 2006), p. 1; Linda Candy, ‘Research and Creative Practice’, in *Interacting: Art, Research and the Creative Practitioner*, ed. by Linda Candy and E.A. Edmonds (Faringdon: Libri, 2011), pp. 33–59 (p. 35).

<sup>5</sup> Candy, ‘Research and Creative Practice’, p. 36.

become a prominent term for effectively describing the research approach that enables practitioners to initiate and pursue their research through practice.”<sup>6</sup> This, as Hazel Smith and Roger Dean explain, is because in practice-led research there are two interlinked aspects to consider. First, the creative work by itself is a form of research which generates original research outcomes; and second, the creative practice, and the knowledge generated by the creative practitioners while creating artistic works, can lead to “specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research”.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, practice-led research focuses on the insights, concepts and theories which may emerge through reflection and documentation of the creative practice. Therefore, practice-led research strategies can include a creative journal (reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action), as a place for the practitioner to reflect before, during and after their practice. Haseman claims that this type of research strategy reinterprets what constitutes an original contribution to knowledge in general doctoral research:

Rather than contribute to the intellectual or conceptual architecture of a discipline, these research enterprises are concerned with the *improvement* of practice, and new epistemologies of practice distilled from the insider’s understandings of action in context.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to the more traditional research approaches such as quantitative and qualitative research, Haseman identifies two major differences whereby practice-led research is developed: its starting point and its research output.

### **3.1.1 Starting point**

As mentioned in Chapter One, many practice-led researchers do not start a research project with clearly formulated research questions. Instead, they are

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<sup>6</sup> Brad Haseman, ‘Rupture and Recognition: Identifying the Performative Research Paradigm’, in *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, ed. by Barbara Bolt and Estelle Barrett, Kindle Edition (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), locations 3285-4512, p. Location 3289.

<sup>7</sup> Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Haseman, ‘Manifesto’, p. 100.



driven by what might best be described as a passion. This passion may lead them to begin practicing and see what develops. Therefore practice-led researchers tend to avoid the limitations of setting problems and rigid methodological requirements at the beginning of a research project. It should be noted that this approach to research and knowledge creation dovetails with one of the characteristics of the devising process: you know where you are coming from (a strong passion), but you do not know where it will lead you (new knowledge and understanding).

The starting point for this research encompassed three desires. The first was to examine the process of preparing for operatic roles actively in the practice studio; the second was to contribute to the dramatic preparation process and skills of the singer-actor by testing the efficacy of Actioning for the singer-actor. The third desire was to encourage the development of dramatic self-sufficiency for the singer-actor. Initially, the research was initiated without predetermining the framework or outcomes, but rather allowing the process of practice to establish what emerged.

### **3.1.2 Research output**

In practice-led research, the research outputs and claims to knowing must be made through symbolic language and methods of practice.<sup>9</sup> Haseman asserts that practice-led researchers “have little interest in trying to translate their findings and understandings into numbers (quantitative) and words (qualitative) as preferred by traditional paradigms”.<sup>10</sup> Instead, they consider a much broader range of communicative and artistic expressions as a means to present and document their research. These means include, but are not limited to, dance, music, singing, video, multimedia, design, graphic arts and so forth.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the symbolic but still tangible research outputs as established by Haseman, a substantial part of the performative and practice-led research output can be the

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<sup>9</sup> Haseman, ‘Manifesto’, p. 101.

<sup>10</sup> Haseman, ‘Manifesto’, p. 101.

<sup>11</sup> Haseman, ‘Manifesto’, p. 101.

transformative value of the creative practice, as in this experiment. This transformative value takes the form of embodied knowledge, increased skill, awareness, and understanding of myself and my own dramatic character preparation process. The measurable output of my research is presented in the form of five recitals, a DVD of the final DMA recital, and this thesis.

### **3.2 Research strategy**

By combining practice-led research strategies such as applied case studies, a creative journal and critical written analysis, this study illustrates a vigorous exchange between action and reflection, creating knowledge that weaves together understanding, doing and being. In this section, I detail and elaborate on each of the main research strategies employed.

#### **3.2.1 Case study research**

Colin Robson defines case study research as “a well-established research strategy where the focus is on a case (which is interpreted very widely to include the study of an individual person, a group, a setting, an organisation, etc) in its own right, and taking its context into account.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Jean Hartley defines it as “[consisting] of a detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, of phenomena, within their context”.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Robert Yin defines case study research into two parts:

1. “A case study is an empirical inquiry that
  - Investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-life context, especially when
  - The boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident...

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<sup>12</sup> Colin Robson, *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Wiley, 2002), p. 178. Quoted in: David Aldridge, *Case Study Designs in Music Therapy* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2005), p. 196.

<sup>13</sup> Jean Hartley, ‘Case Study Research’, in *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*, ed. by Catherine Cassell and Gillian Symon (SAGE, 2004), pp. 323–33 (p. 323).

## 2. The case study inquiry

- Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- Relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- Benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.”<sup>14</sup>

In other words, case study research assists in understanding a specific case or phenomenon with the understanding that it is “likely to involve important contextual positions pertinent to your case”,<sup>15</sup> and the phenomenon is not isolated from the context but is deliberately part of the design.<sup>16</sup>

Given these definitions, it is important to note that a case study is not a research method, but a research strategy.<sup>17</sup> Sharleen Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy do not consider a case study as a methodology, but rather as a “decision about what is to be studied”.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, Robert E. Stake suggests that a “case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied [...] by whatever methods, we chose to study the case”.<sup>19</sup> He explains further that case study research can be approached “analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures, or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods.”<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, it is important that a case study is not defined by its methodological perspective but instead by its theoretical perspective and interest in individual

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<sup>14</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th edn, Kindle Edition (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014), locations 955, 973.

<sup>15</sup> Yin, location 961.

<sup>16</sup> Hartley, p. 323.

<sup>17</sup> Hartley, p. 323.

<sup>18</sup> Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, *The Practice of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn, Kindle Edition (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2011), location 3794.

<sup>19</sup> Robert E. Stake, ‘Qualitative Case Studies’, in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3rd edn (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2005), pp. 443–46 (p. 443).

<sup>20</sup> Stake, p. 443.

cases.<sup>21</sup> As explained by Hartley, “this places emphasis on understanding processes alongside their contexts”.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, case study research allows for in-depth and in-context research in which “theory development can occur through the systematic piecing together of detailed evidence to generate (or replicate) theories of broader interest”.<sup>23</sup> Or as Yin explains, the research must “make inferences about what actually transpired...based on convergent evidence...as well as some unspecifiable element of common sense.”<sup>24</sup>

Robson argues that a case study research strategy is most useful if the purpose of the research is to gain an understanding of the research perspective and the process being endorsed. In addition, Yin states that a “case study allows investigators to focus on a ‘case’ and retain a holistic and real-life perspective”.<sup>25</sup> He further explains that a case study is particularly useful when:

- a. The primary research questions are “why” or “how” questions’
- b. The researcher has little or no control over behavioural events;  
and
- c. The focus of the study is a contemporary (rather than completely historical) phenomenon.<sup>26</sup>

Within the context of this research the applied case study framework allows a dual lens perspective. First, the case or ‘contemporary phenomenon’ could be considered to be the character within their ‘real life’ context (their place in the opera). Second, the case could also be defined as the singer-actor’s application of the role preparation process and their place as participant within the research. Because the singer-actor is both subject and researcher, the practice-led research method yields first-hand knowledge and experience, keeping a ‘holistic and real-life perspective’. This double lens perception of the case study process provides this researcher with the opportunity to examine the interwoven

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<sup>21</sup> Hartley, p. 324.

<sup>22</sup> Hartley, p. 324.

<sup>23</sup> Hartley, p. 324.

<sup>24</sup> Yin, location 2264.

<sup>25</sup> Yin, location 691.

<sup>26</sup> Yin, location 695.

perspective on the phenomenon (the study of the character and study of the singer-actor's experiment) and the context (the character's place in the opera and the singer-actor's place as participant).

### **3.2.2 The applied case studies**

Role preparation is an active process. To stretch understanding and embody knowledge beyond a theoretical perspective, I conducted my own experiment on the efficacy of Actioning on my usual Stanislavskian-based dramatic preparation process for operatic roles. The study was undertaken in the form of four applied case studies which integrate dramatic character preparation within the early stages of my music/role-learning process.

The following table represents an overview of each applied Case Study, detailing the activity, the context and its timeframe.

**Table 1: The applied case studies**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Role preparation for Carmen in <i>Carmen</i> by Bizet performed as a semi-staged University of Waikato Graduate Opera production, self-directed, conducted by Adam Maha.	March 2012 – August 2012
Role preparation for Carlotta Giudicelli in <i>Phantom</i> by Lloyd Webber with the New Plymouth Operatic Society, directed by Warren Bates.	March 2014 – July 2014
Role preparation for Carlotta Giudicelli in <i>Phantom</i> by Lloyd Webber with the Amici Trust and Amici Productions, directed by Grant Meese.	October 2015 – March 2016
Role and Aria preparation for Micaëla in <i>Carmen</i> by Bizet (only the aria was performed in my final DMA recital).	February 2015– October 2015

The semi-staged/concert production of *Carmen* with orchestra was a valuable opportunity in self-directed, self-sufficient character creation, as there was no director involved with this production. As I had played this role before I was introduced to Alfreds' Actioning, this case study presents my initial dramatic preparation process based solely on elements of Stanislavsky's 'system'.

The two productions of *Phantom* provided an opportunity to explore and experiment with several variations on Alfreds' Actioning within my usual Stanislavskian-based dramatic character preparation process, and test this process twice on the same role within different professional production settings.

The role preparation of Micaëla from *Carmen* "as if" I was playing the role proved to be a valuable testing platform. Although I did not perform the role in production, this applied case study provided fertile ground to experiment with Actioning, and offered a comparative perspective between preparing a full

operatic role for production and recital preparation. Additionally, this provided another practical way to further to increase understanding and knowledge of Actioning by applying it in the context of recital performance.

### **3.2.3 Creative Journal**

Throughout my research, I kept an informal but detailed creative journal of my involvements, reflections and responses relating to my preparation, rehearsal and performance process. This journal became an invaluable guide in the writing of this thesis. The journal also formed an essential element in devising my experiment and testing of Actioning within my dramatic character preparation process, as it allowed me to address the various obstacles that occurred throughout this process.<sup>27</sup>

## **3.3 Reporting and data collection**

The data is collected through four applied case studies in which I, the singer-actor/researcher, conduct an experiment testing the efficacy of Actioning within my Stanislavskian-based dramatic character preparation process for operatic roles. Haseman states that “practice-led research outcomes are essentially reported in two forms – the creative work and the exegetical, linguistic accompaniment to that work”.<sup>28</sup> This is because of the necessary translation from one creative medium to another. For example, in this study it is necessary to translate the data, analysis and findings from the practical application of my dramatic character preparation process, into a written document in the form of this thesis. An integral part of this research is the interplay between myself as researcher, myself as practitioner, and my creative work within that process. Therefore the data is collected through the physical and active dramatic

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<sup>27</sup> For an example of my creative journal, see Appendix 4: Creative Journal Extract.

<sup>28</sup> Brad Haseman and Daniel Mafe, ‘Acquiring Know-How: Research Training for Practice-Led Researchers’, in *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts*, ed. by Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 211–28 (p. 216).

character preparation process, enabling me to make various discoveries about this process as both a singer-actor/practitioner and a singer-actor/researcher.

### 3.4 The singer-actor/researcher

A potential shortcoming of practice-led research is the possibility of developing a subjective bias. As I am both a practitioner (singer-actor) and a researcher, I do have a limited perspective. However, according to David Aldridge, in case study research “the researcher is not defined as being ‘objective’ and might function as a practitioner with tacit knowledge about the researched context and material”.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Haseman argues that practice-led research “enables practitioners to initiate and then pursue their research through practice”,<sup>30</sup> and that practice-led research “asserts the primacy of practice and insists that because creative practice is both ongoing and persistent, practitioner researchers do not merely “think” their way through or out of a problem, but rather they “practice” to a resolution.”<sup>31</sup>

Using a practice-led approach, testing and experimenting for my own role preparation, I am able to draw from first-hand experience as both a singer-actor and researcher. In doing so, I hope to provide an illustration of complete submersion within the research. Additionally, having personal and direct involvement in the study, from two varying perspectives, gives me the opportunity to monitor my own development throughout the process. This is because creative knowledge is foremost an embodied knowledge. It is located in and through the body of the performer.<sup>32</sup> Bert van Dijk argues that “in order to accumulate and share creative knowledge and meaning it is important that the creative artist (and researcher) assumes the role of an audience, or outsider, and

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<sup>29</sup> Aldridge, p. 195.

<sup>30</sup> Haseman, ‘Rupture and Recognition’, location 3291.

<sup>31</sup> Haseman, ‘Rupture and Recognition’, location 3298.

<sup>32</sup> Bert van Dijk, *Towards a New Pacific Theatre: Practice-led Enquiry into a Model of Theatre Making That Relates to the Geography, Cultures and Spiritual Values of Aotearoa/New Zealand* (unpublished Doctoral thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2010), p. 16.



reflects on his or her actions".<sup>33</sup> David Fenton also establishes that there is reflection-on-action, which "is done before or after an event of practice"<sup>34</sup> but also reflection-in-action that "can happen inside the event".<sup>35</sup> This act of reflection provides me, as both singer-actor/researcher and participant, with the necessary time and space to consider my about my practice, as well as presenting an opportunity to direct my practice in new and adjusted ways.

Furthermore, van Dijk argues that through the practitioner's own experience it is important to acknowledge both the intuitive and cognitive decision-making process within their own practice. It is possible to have an intuitive desire to make a decision or lead the creative journey in a particular way without necessarily knowing the reason why. He observes, "it is a valid strategy to follow this intuition and the process of reflection – in or on action – presents an evaluating or guiding mechanism to establish the benefits of intuitive actions".<sup>36</sup>

### 3.5 The research design

In order to undertake this research, which involved testing the efficacy of Actioning for the singer-actor, I devised my analysis as a progression of four steps, influenced by Stanislavsky's 'system', with each step categorising a different stage of my dramatic character preparation process:

1. Character/Role;
2. Analysis;
3. Development;
4. Reflection.

**Step one: 'Character/Role':** This initial step was devised to familiarise myself with the character, dramatic work and its plot/storyline, while also being aware

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<sup>33</sup> van Dijk, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup> David Fenton, *"Unstable Acts", a Practitioner's Case Study of the Poetics of Postdramatic Theatre and Intermediacy*. (unpublished Doctoral thesis, Queensland University of Technology, 2007), p. 54.

<sup>35</sup> Fenton, p. 54.

<sup>36</sup> van Dijk, p. 16.

of my own first initial assumptions about the character's place in the story. If applicable, I translated the score. A valuable resource for the translation of operatic libretti are the series of books written by Nico Castel published by Leyerle Publications, which usually provide an idiomatic translation, a word-for-word translation and an International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcription for the entire opera. Once I had familiarised myself with the dramatic plot and completed the translation I could begin my music learning process.

**Step two: 'Analysis'** focuses on the literary analysis of the relevant background information relating to the character/role, the work, librettist/author and composer. To begin the personalisation process between myself and the dramatic character, I rely primarily on Stanislavsky's Fundamental Questions. I began by addressing the first three: *Who?*, *Where?* and *When?*. *Who?* requires the singer-actor to simply ask and answer: "Who is my character?". The answer to this will most likely stem from an accumulation of facts derived from the score, and any other relevant background information such as the original source of the story. Fundamental Question *Where?* "operates on a number of Circles of Attention – from the immediate surroundings to the larger geographical placement".<sup>37</sup> As Merlin notes, "in most scripts, the arc of a character's journey – be it a geographical movement from one place to another or a psychological one – is the main thrust of the overall dramatic Action".<sup>38</sup> *When?* is also established from the specific facts within the text. For example, *When?* does the dramatic action take place? What is the era, year, month, season and time of day?

**Step three: 'Development'** begins with defining the character's Supertask, as this determines what drives the character throughout the entire plot. Merlin observes that the Supertask "is arguably the portal through which the [actor] can enter the writer's psyche".<sup>39</sup> Commonly the journey of the lead protagonist within the plot will clarify the primary Supertask. But every other character in the play will have their own Supertask in relation to the lead protagonist's Supertask.

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<sup>37</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 1906.

<sup>38</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 1922.

<sup>39</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 4101.

Next, I address Fundamental Questions four and five: *Why?* and *For what purpose?* *Why?* is the first of the Fundamental Questions that does not refer to factual information in the score and text. Instead, this question develops and intensifies the singer-actor's journey into their Imagination, interpreting and personalising the information about the character learned during an exploration of the previous Fundamental Questions. The question '*Why?*' directly relates to the dramatic structure of the opera or the scene. The singer-actor may ask: "Why is this scene in the opera? Why was it written/composed? If this scene was not in the opera/musical, would the overall narrative still make sense?" This Fundamental Question presents the singer-actor with a wide variety of interpretive choices, and these choices will affect their characterisation. In addition, the answers to '*Why?*' combine the factual information learned from the score and libretto together with the singer-actor's personal interpretation of the text. The result of this combination creates the character's subtext.<sup>40</sup>

The fifth Fundamental Question '*For what purpose?*' is different from the fourth one. As Merlin explains, in English '*Why?*' and '*For what purpose?*' have very similar meanings.<sup>41</sup> In Russian, however, '*pochemu*' (почему) (*Why?*) refers to the past, and '*zachem*' (зачем) (*For what purpose?*) looks to the future.<sup>42</sup> For instance, '*Why?*' (*pochemu*) has Micaëla come into the mountains? Because Don José is there with the smugglers; '*For what purpose?*' (*zachem*) has Micaëla come into the mountains? To find Don José and bring him home. Stanislavsky divided this question into three stages: *For what purpose?* "obliges us to clarify what we are aiming for [...] defines the future [...] and impels us to positive action".<sup>43</sup> Firstly, the singer-actor must clarify on what or whom they are concentrating their attention. Secondly, they should create a possible future for their character. Thirdly, they must direct their character to work with purpose towards that possible future. As Merlin notes, '*For what purpose?*' can "give all manner of

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<sup>40</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 1957.

<sup>41</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 1952.

<sup>42</sup> Merlin uses the translation "*For what reason?*". I have changed this to "*For what purpose?*" as it avoids the synonym with *Why?*

<sup>43</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, p. 81.

textures and reverberations to an interpretation of a part beyond the written word".<sup>44</sup>

The next step is to answer the final Fundamental Question: 'How?'. Merlin notes that her mentor, Albert Filzov, believed that if the actor has done all the necessary detective work in the previous five questions, there is no need to know all the answers to 'How?', and that most of this will become clear as soon as the actor starts to physically move their character. His reasoning for this is because within each performance the answers to 'How?' will change minutely, depending on the intricate nuances and reactions to the actors on the stage. Therefore the 'How?' is never fixed, and instead the Fundamental Question could be rephrased as : "How will I behave in this [performance] in response to this actor in front of this audience given these actions?".<sup>45</sup>

Following Filzov and Merlin's perspectives, 'How?' is dependent on beginning 'to physically move the character'. This led me to question how this would be applicable if the singer-actor does not know how to *begin* the character physicalisation process, since without that knowledge the Fundamental Question 'How?' has no value. Equally, however, without the question 'How?', dramatic character preparation is purposeless, seeing that without physically moving the character and without the physical embodiment, the character does not exist. Referring back to Stanislavsky, characters exist only "as I create them out of my own resources, physical and mental".<sup>46</sup> From this viewpoint, the physical and mental creations of the character are equally important, as they can only exist and be created through both applications.

This problem sparked an experiment within this research and therefore, as a means to bridge this gap, my study aims to answer the Fundamental Question 'How?' through the use of Actioning, by testing its efficacy as a suitable

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<sup>44</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 2042.

<sup>45</sup> Merlin, *Toolkit*, location 2042.

<sup>46</sup> Benedetti, *Stanislavski and the Actor*, p. 5.

preparatory technique for the singer-actor and exploring it within my initial dramatic character preparation process.

As explained in the literature review, Actioning is a rehearsal technique that requires the actor/singer-actor to divide all of the character's text into separate phrases or thoughts, and then select a transitive verb which expresses the underlying active intention of the line (what the character is doing). Once each verb has been selected, the singer-actor goes through the text, line by line, stating-and-playing the action "as if the words defining the actions were the text itself".<sup>47</sup>

It is crucial that the verbs selected are transitive verbs, verbs which the character can *do* upon another character, "such as 'prod', 'ridicule', or 'encourage', rather than in-transitive verbs such as 'muse', 'cry' or 'hesitate',"<sup>48</sup> as they pull the attention back onto one's self, rather than the other person or persons on stage.

Alfreds identifies three categories of verbs which cannot work as actions. The first is verbs which suggest achievement or obtaining a result (for example: seduce, convince, frighten) as these "express an already completed action, the successful result of other actions (such as urge, coax, tempt...)"<sup>49</sup> It is impossible to play these types of verbs, as they indicate the character's objectives rather than their physical actions. The second are verbs which indicate emotions or relationships (for example: love, joy, revenge), as these are emotional states of being: "To become active they have to be specified as I declare my love, reveal my hatred, share my dislike, offer my regret, express my admiration, accuse you of my suspicions, air my doubts (in fact, what the character is doing with the emotion)."<sup>50</sup> The third category are verbs which indicate a secret intention (for example lie, deceive, confuse) as these also function as character objectives, rather than what the character is physically doing. Instead, the actor should play the action employed to effect the lie: "play the action you want the other

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<sup>47</sup> Alfreds, p. 165.

<sup>48</sup> Moseley, *Actioning*, location 32.

<sup>49</sup> Alfreds, p. 72.

<sup>50</sup> Alfreds, p. 72.

character to 'see' and accept. Instead of 'I *pretend*' I was home last night, the action might be something like: I *inform* you I was home last night, I *assure* you I was home last night".<sup>51</sup>

Alfreds adds that it is perfectly acceptable to use prepositions with verbs as a means of making them active, such as "'sympathise with', 'confide in', 'run something by', 'defer to', 'retreat from', 'size up', 'laugh at' and so forth."<sup>52</sup> He further explains that if a verb is not transitive towards another character "it must always be played transitively for *the benefit of* and *to* the other actor-characters in the scene".<sup>53</sup>

The effect of the Actioning process ultimately means that each phrase is spoken (or sung, in the case of the singer-actor) and played with the intention of a particular transitive verb, aiming to affect another character in the way that is implied by the meaning of each selected verb.

Actioning was originally designed to be used as a rehearsal and/or performance technique for the actor. My research, however, focuses on adapting Actioning to work as a preparatory technique for dramatic character preparation in the privacy of the practice studio. Therefore, to undertake this research, I identified two specific differences between Actioning for the actor compared to the singer-actor.

The first is that the singer-actor sings, and although the act of singing does not affect the application of Actioning, it does add another layer to the overall process. Actioning always begins with the text, with the singer-actor/actor's full involvement and engagement with the words. The singer-actor, however, also must establish the same level of involvement with the music. My research follows the perspective that dramatic character preparation can occur simultaneously with musical preparation. Actioning can provide the singer-actor not only with the skill to practice and prepare their dramatic character, but also

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<sup>51</sup> Alfreds, p. 72.

<sup>52</sup> Alfreds, p. 73.

<sup>53</sup> Alfreds, p. 73. Original emphasis.

give them a systematic method of practicing musical expression through textual communication and provide them with the skills to relate the character's actions/motivations directly to the composer's score.

The second difference to consider is that Actioning was designed to be used primarily within a rehearsal setting, or in other words, by a group of actors, rather than by an individual. This links directly to what is probably the most fundamental characteristic of Actioning, which is that each action is supposed to be played upon another character/actor. This led me to question how Actioning could be adapted or used when the singer-actor is alone on the stage, or in the context of a recital performance. Would it have the same effect? Would it affect the overall process and the outcome? Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams offer a solution for the actor who is preparing a soliloquy or speech by suggesting that they use their imagination and place each phrase upon another person in the character's life. In this way, each line (and thought) is said and played with a specific action directly upon another character, even if they are not on the stage.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Deer and Dal Vera also suggest for the singer-actor to imagine other characters when they are alone on the stage, and place their actions upon them. They also add that in instances where the singer-actor is addressing themselves, the object of the action can be changed from 'you' to 'me'.<sup>55</sup> Actioning can provide the singer-actor with the technique to analyse the subject of each line (in aria, song, ensemble, recitative) whether they are on stage with others or alone, in production or recital, so that each phrase (and thought) is said and played with specific and direct impetus.

The following table indicates a simple, step-by-step breakdown of how I adapted the Actioning process for myself as a singer-actor.

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<sup>54</sup> Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams, pp. xxi–xxiii.

<sup>55</sup> Deer and Dal Vera, p. 182.

**Table 2: Actioning for the singer-actor**

<p><b>Actioning for the singer-actor</b></p> <p>For each stage, select a small number of phrases to work with at a time, gradually adding more lines until the scene is completed.</p> <p><b>Step one:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Play-and-say action with text-in-hand, repeat as necessary;</li><li>Play-and-say action without text-in-hand, repeat as necessary;</li><li>Play-and-say action with text-in-hand, repeat as necessary.</li></ol> <p><b>Step two:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Play action and speak text with text-in-hand, repeat as necessary;</li><li>Play action and speak text without text-in-hand, repeat as necessary;</li><li>Play action and speak text with text-in-hand repeat as necessary.</li></ol> <p><b>Step three:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>Play action and sing text with text-in-hand, repeat as necessary;</li><li>Play action and sing text without text-in-hand, repeat as necessary;</li><li>Play action and sing text with text-in-hand, repeat as necessary.</li></ol>
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**Step Four: 'Reflection':** My research begins with the premise that it is essential to develop keen reflective thinking capabilities, so it becomes possible to apply newly learned knowledge to complex situations. The singer-actor, for example, could use reflective thinking as a self-assessment tool, considering how their newly-learned character knowledge might relate to the plot, the composer, the librettist, their vocal technique, and so forth.

Reflective thought can also provide the singer-actor with a means by which they can challenge assumptions and enhance their own sense of mindful self-awareness. This concept of mindfulness is the process by which we, as people, observe our own experiences carefully enough to be able to spot any misconception that may have become fixated.<sup>56</sup> Mindfulness may be cultivated within reflective thought by slowing down mental activity and being consciously aware of sensations, rather than just accepting and acting on the first

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<sup>56</sup> Ellen Langer, 'Mindfulness and Mindlessness', *Itineraries, Second Journey* (North Carolina, Summer 2008), para. 5 <[http://www.secondjourney.org/itin/Archives/LangerE\\_08Sum.htm](http://www.secondjourney.org/itin/Archives/LangerE_08Sum.htm)> [accessed 21 August 2015]; Lucas Bill, Claxton Guy, and Spencer Ellen, *Expansive Education* (Victoria: ACER Press and Open University Press, 2013), p. 38.



interpretation that comes to mind.<sup>57</sup> Ellen Langer observes that “a mindful approach to any activity has three characteristics: the continuous creation of new categories; openness to new information; and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective”.<sup>58</sup> While she is speaking a pedagogical perspective, her concept of mindfulness is equally valid for the singer-actor within the context of this research, as it is equally important for the singer-actor to remain open to possibilities. Interestingly, Langer’s concept of mindfulness is not unlike Csikszentmihalyi’s Flow state, as both emphasise effortless focus and absorption of creative qualities. As explained previously, Csikszentmihalyi’s research has firmly established that creativity is increased when we are in a state of Flow, and that to experience Flow is both beneficial and enjoyable to the learner. He goes a step further and claims that the achievement of this type of experience involves “painful, risky, difficult activities that stretch[s] the person’s capacity and involved an element of novelty and discovery”.<sup>59</sup> Not only must the singer-actor be open to possibilities (in both practice and reflection), and aware of multiple perspectives, but they must also challenge themselves with a task that is sufficiently demanding and engaging and have the skills to complete it within an appropriate and sufficient time frame.

To undertake this step in my dramatic character preparation process, I employed the use of the reflective journal, as it provided me with the platform for self-assessment, which is a fundamental aspect of effective learning. One way in which I could enhance my self-assessment skills was by expressing my learning experience through another creative process. Throughout this project, I kept a detailed creative journal of my reflections, responses and thoughts relating to the various activities related to my dramatic character preparation process. This process was beneficial as it engaged me, the singer-actor/researcher, in reflection by expressing my experiences in words and reproducing what was learned practically by singing, acting, practicing through the creative medium of writing. The purpose of this type of self-reflection is to increase the singer-actor’s

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<sup>57</sup> Guy Claxton, *Wise Up* (Stafford: Network Educational, 2001), p. 145.

<sup>58</sup> Langer, para. 5; Bill, Claxton Guy, and Ellen, p. 38.

<sup>59</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, p. 110.

confidence, resilience, and motivation. It also further provided the opportunity for me to attribute my achievements to my own efforts, further enhancing my sense of self-sufficiency.<sup>60</sup> It is, therefore, important for the singer-actor to develop the habit of self-awareness and assess their own work's progress, comparing both their work and progress with their goals and identifying what could be improved for themselves. Building this habit will gradually increase the singer-actor's confidence, strengthen their reflective abilities, and enhance their dramatic self-sufficiency and character learning process.

This final stage of this process allowed me, the singer-actor/researcher, to reflect on the entire process and evaluate the results, the experience and the new knowledge gained throughout. In addition, this evaluation and reflection could be very useful for other singer-actors; when one's understanding of practice is enriched and deepened, this may in turn feed into a new process enriching and deepening one's understanding of practice, of dramatic character preparation.

### **3.6 Ethics and limitations**

As this research used no external human participation/subjects or animal subjects, no ethical approval was necessary.

When one begins any research endeavour, personal, social and cultural biases are brought to the fore. The research process will always be burdened with information that has been informed and affected by previous experiences. On this subject, Corbin and Strauss note that “[t]here are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and the observed.”<sup>61</sup> Conducting research, therefore, presents challenges by separating the researcher's perspective and experiences from that of the

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<sup>60</sup> Barry J. Zimmerman, 'Self-Efficacy and Educational Development', in *Self-Efficacy in Changing Societies*, ed. by Albert Bandura (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 202–31 (p. 219); Kevin F. McCarthy and others, *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2004), p. 24.

<sup>61</sup> *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 4th edn (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2011), p. 12.

research subject. In the case of this research project, the researcher is both observer and participant, which may be considered as a methodological limitation. However, as I assume a number of roles throughout the research (practitioner/singer-actor, researcher and observer), this will ensure a range of perspectives, including both perceptual and observational roles. Also, as a direct participant, I am able to experience first-hand the impact and meaning of preparing the dramatic character in the practice studio.

## Chapter Four: The Applied Case Studies

This chapter comprises the four applied case studies in which I conducted an experiment, with myself as subject, on the efficacy of Actioning within my own Stanislavskian-influenced dramatic characterisation process for operatic roles. The four case studies present my role preparation of Carmen in Bizet's *Carmen* (2012); Carlotta Giudicelli in Lloyd Webber's *Phantom* in two productions (2014, 2016); and my role preparation of Micaëla also from Bizet's *Carmen* "as if" I was preparing the role for production and my preparation of her aria "*Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante*" for my Final DMA Recital in 2015. Unfortunately, the recording of my final recital was mistakenly deleted by the University of Waikato, therefore I re-performed and re-recorded this recital in November 2016.

My practice-led experiment is presented through a series of applied case studies. Each Case Study follows the four-phase format as stipulated in Chapter Three: Character/Role; Analysis; Development; and Reflection.<sup>1</sup>

The applied case studies took place over a thirty-month period beginning March 2012 and ending March 2016. In chronological order:

Carmen (2012) – *Carmen* – March 2012-August 2012

Carlotta (2014) – *Phantom* – March 2014-July 2014

Carlotta (2016) – *Phantom* – September 2015-March 2016

Micaëla (2015/2016) – *Carmen* – February 2015-October 2015/August 2016-November 2016

This study focuses specifically on my initial preparation process for these roles as conducted in the practice studio.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Three, 3.5 The Research Design.

## 4.1 Applied Case Study One: Carmen (2012)

This Case Study presents a written transcript detailing my dramatic preparation process for the title role in Bizet's *Carmen*, for The University of Waikato Graduate Opera Production in 2012. This applied Case Study details my earlier dramatic character preparation process, influenced solely by Stanislavsky's teachings, as I played this role before I was introduced to Actioning. This Case Study provides a base example of how I prepare the dramatic character simultaneously with my music learning process, in my own practice studio. Furthermore, this production became a self-directed semi-staged performance, as our director had resigned partway through our rehearsal period (which is addressed in more detail later in this chapter), providing a definite testing ground for self-sufficient character creation.

### 4.1.1 Character/Role

Following my casting, in March 2012, I immediately purchased my own score and read the entire libretto in translation by Burton D. Fisher as a means to familiarise myself with the opera.<sup>2</sup> Next, I listened to several recordings of the complete opera, and watched various productions of the opera. Listening and watching other productions of the work is not advised by all practitioners, as some claim it could influence characterisation decisions. I believe, however, that it increases further knowledge about the character and the story. The aim is not to copy other singer-actors but to expand your knowledge and understanding of the various ways to interpret a role. I also read and studied the additional translations of the libretto by Castel,<sup>3</sup> and Mary Dibbern.<sup>4</sup>

My music learning began by dividing my score into manageable learning sections and addressing only one section at a time, reading all Carmen's words out loud

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<sup>2</sup> I initially purchased the Schirmer edition of *Carmen; Georges Bizet's Carmen: Complete Libretto with Music Highlight Examples*, ed. & trans. by Burton D. Fisher (Miami: Opera Journeys, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Nico Castel, *French Opera Libretti: Vol. 1. - Werther; Carmen; Samson et Dalila; Lakmé; Pelléas et Mélisande; Chérubin; Don Carlos; Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (New York: Leyerle, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Mary Dibbern, *Carmen: A Performance Guide* (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2000).

until it felt natural and easy to speak them. Next, I worked on speaking the words to the rhythm. Once I was confident with the text and the rhythm I began learning the melodies, first by lip-trilling and humming, then on singular vowels followed by vowel tracking,<sup>5</sup> and finally, with the text.

#### 4.1.2 Analysis

This section of the analysis process begins with a literary analysis of the relevant background information relating to the character/role, the librettist, author and composer. This is followed by my application of the first three Fundamental Questions: *Who?*, *Where?* and *When?*, presented as excerpts from my creative journal.

#### Background

Bizet's *Carmen* (1975) is one of the most popular and frequently performed operas and has naturally been widely studied.<sup>6</sup> Musicologists have studied textual issues related to the opera's complicated performance and publication history.<sup>7</sup> Several scholars have studied the plot, libretto, and characters in feminist, literary or psychoanalytical terms, mostly to the exclusion of the music.<sup>8</sup> When Bizet's characters are discussed, they are mostly examined in relation to

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<sup>5</sup> Vowel tracking is the technique of singing from vowel-to-vowel. The benefit is that it allows the singer to balance the resonance vowel-to-vowel while also maintaining clear linguistic definition. Miller, *Training Soprano Voices*, pp. 79–86.

<sup>6</sup> See for example: Hervé Lacombe, *George Bizet Naissance d'une identité créatrice* (Paris: Fayard, 2000). Mina Curtiss, *Bizet and His World* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1959); Winton Dean, *Bizet* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> Winton Dean, 'The True "Carmen"?', *The Musical Times*, 106.1473 (1965), 846–55 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/952172>> [accessed 4 March 2012]; Lesley A. Wright, 'A New Source for Carmen', *19th-Century Music*, 2.1 (1978), 61–71 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/746191>> [accessed 2 March 2012]; Paul Landormy and Fred Rothwell, 'An Unpublished Page of Bizet's "Carmen"', *The Musical Times*, 67.1003 (1926), 803–4 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/912667>>. For a comprehensive guide on the publication history of Carmen, see Dibbern. See also Robert Didion's preface to *Carmen* in Georges Bizet, *Carmen, Partition Chant et Piano*, ed. by Robert Didion, 2nd edn (Mainz: Schott, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Clément, *Opera, Or, The Undoing of Women*, trans. by Betsy Wing (London: Tauris, 1997); Nelly Furman, 'The Languages of Love in Carmen', in *Reading Opera*, ed. by Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 168–83; Evelyne Gould, *The Fate of Carmen* (London: John Hopkins University, 1996).

exoticism and Spanish influences, even though Bizet never visited Spain, or mentioned it in any of his surviving letters.<sup>9</sup>

The most comprehensive English-language study of the music and characters in *Carmen* in the past few decades is by Susan McClary in 1992, as part of the Cambridge Opera Handbook series.<sup>10</sup> McClary situates *Carmen* as “one of a large number of fantasies involving race, class, and gender that circulated in nineteenth-century French culture”.<sup>11</sup> For McClary, *Carmen* is a paradigmatic work regarding its depiction of the exoticised racial and sexual Other.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, she views Bizet’s characters as a battle between the sexes, in which from the very beginning, the woman is marked as the enemy. McClary’s discussion of the music and characters is focused towards supporting her view that Bizet’s musical languages are based on “the ideological implications of Orientalism and its closely related misogyny.”<sup>13</sup> Following McClary’s example of music analysis in *Carmen*, Andrew Y. Pau wrote his doctoral thesis on the diverse use of Bizet’s musical codes, deriving potential insights into musical and dramatic meaning along the way.<sup>14</sup> Another recent doctoral study on *Carmen* is Edith Zack’s dissertation which, similarly to McClary’s work, discusses the musical portrayal of the Other and the nineteenth-century operatic femme fatale.<sup>15</sup>

The first season of *Carmen* was performed at the Opéra-Comique in 1875 and ran for thirty-five performances. In the first year alone *Carmen* ran for over one

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<sup>9</sup> José F. Colmeiro, ‘Exorcising Exoticism: “Carmen” and the Construction of Oriental Spain’, *Comparative Literature*, 54.2 (2002), 127–44 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4122479>> [accessed 3 March 2012]; Julien Tiersot and Theodore Baker, ‘Bizet and Spanish Music’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 13.4 (1927), 566–81 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/738292>> [accessed 3 February 2012]; James Parakilas, ‘The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter Part I’, *The Opera Quarterly*, 10.2 (1993), 33–56 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oq/10.2.33>>. On the contrary Donald Jay Grout argues that “the mild Spanish local colour” is “[p]robably the least important feature” of the music in *Carmen*. Grout and Williams.

<sup>10</sup> Susan McClary, *Georges Bizet: Carmen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> McClary, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> McClary, p. 56.

<sup>13</sup> McClary, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Y. Pau, *An Analytical Study of Bizet’s Carmen: Melody, Text Setting, Harmony and Form* (unpublished Doctoral thesis, City University of New York, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Edith Zack, *Carmen and Turandot: Femme Fatale to Femme Creatrice in Opera* (unpublished Doctoral thesis, Bar-Ilan University, 2000).

hundred performances, which is more than any of Bizet's previous operas.<sup>16</sup> For an opera to be performed at the Opéra-Comique, the work had to be comical, include spoken dialogue, a small chorus and chamber orchestra, and present a story which was light-hearted, as this was a family theatre. While Bizet's *Carmen* conforms to several of these conventions, such as featuring spoken dialogue, the story is certainly not light-hearted; in fact, it was the first time the leading role was murdered on the Opéra-Comique stage. In addition, the heroine Carmen was considered too risqué for their audiences, and Bizet's music was criticised as being too sensual and offensive.<sup>17</sup> As a result, the premiere production received mixed reviews from critics.

Bizet died at age thirty-six, three months to the day after the premiere of *Carmen*, believing it had been a complete failure. As a result of his untimely death, however, Bizet's friend and colleague, Ernest Guiraud, composed the recitatives to replace the spoken dialogue for the first performances of *Carmen* in Vienna, 1875. Since then Guiraud's recitatives have become part of the standardised version of *Carmen* and are included in the majority of editions by notable publishers such as Schirmer, Choudens, and Peters. In 2000, however, the publisher Schott made a new critical edition of Bizet's autograph score of *Carmen*, edited by Robert Didion. This edition includes the original spoken dialogue between sung numbers and all posthumous additions have been removed.

### **Character background**

Carmen is an incredibly fascinating and exciting character for a singer-actor to play. At face value, she is the ultimate femme fatale, exotic, rebellious, free-spirited, intelligent, independent, and passionate and she uses her sexuality to her advantage. When I examined the character more closely, it became clear that her personality is not nearly as simple as might be initially assumed.

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<sup>16</sup> Bizet's first surviving opera *Le Docteur Miracle* ran for eleven performances; *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* and *La Jollie Fille de Perth* both ran for eighteen performances and *Djamileh* ran for ten performances.

<sup>17</sup> Fisher, *Georges Bizet's Carmen: Complete Libretto with Music Highlight Examples*, p. 16.



The story of Carmen was first written by novelist Prosper Mérimée in 1845 and published in the non-fiction journal *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Mérimée wrote and published his novella in the style of a documentary and without any indication that it was, in fact, a work of fiction. It is written as a story within a story, consequently having two narrations and two narrators. The first narrator is a French scholar, and the second is a Basque soldier. In the scholar's narrative, the story appears to be an academic study of Spanish gypsies, within which Don José's personal narrative is placed. In the story, the scholar meets Don José in prison, on the night before his execution (he is being hanged for the murder of Carmen) and Don José tells him his fatal and passionate story about the infamous gypsy, Carmen.

Bizet's *Carmen* departs in many ways from Mérimée's novella, as Bizet's librettists, Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, simplified and edited the plot and characters to accommodate to the conventions of the theatre. They softened the story and added two traditional Opéra-Comique stock characters: Micaëla and Escamillo. At one stage the theatre owner Adolph de Leuven made the request for Carmen not to die at the end of the opera, much to the disapproval of Bizet. To compromise, Bizet and his librettist assured de Leuven that her murder would take place almost unnoticeably in the middle of a vibrant final act. In reality, however, Carmen's murder is the pinnacle of the dramatic plot and certainly does not go unnoticed.

Additionally, as a result of the changes made to the story to accommodate an operatic framework, there are also several key differences in how Mérimée and Bizet each portray Carmen as a character. In Mérimée's novella Carmen is already married, works as a prostitute and practices gypsy magic and healing. These aspects are softened in Bizet's opera, where she is unmarried, works in a cigarette factory, is a smuggler and a fortune teller. There is also a key difference in the time frame, as Mérimée's novella spans several years whereas Bizet's opera implies that the story takes place over no more than a year. As the result of Mérimée's longer timeline, Carmen's and Don José's relationship presents a different dynamic when compared to Bizet's version. For example, in the novel,

Carmen is seemingly very loyal to José and saves his life on multiple occasions: “For a fortnight she did not leave me for a moment. She did not sleep; she nursed me with skill and devotion such as no woman ever showed for her beloved.”<sup>18</sup> In Bizet’s opera, this degree of loyalty is not demonstrated, although she does save his life by breaking up two fights between him and her other suitors, one of whom is the famous Toreador, Escamillo. Escamillo is based on Mérimée’s character Lucas, a picador with whom Carmen has a brief fling, which in the novel is José’s final provocation to kill her. A striking difference between the novella and the opera is that Mérimée’s José commits a premeditated murder, by killing Carmen in a gorge in the mountains and leaving her body carelessly in the dirt.<sup>19</sup> In the opera, Bizet gives Carmen a heroine’s death; the final scene outside the bullring, including her murder, was his invention, and José kills Carmen in an act of passion, not premeditated thought. It is the culmination of the opera, and she is in complete focus.

As previously mentioned, one of the most significant differences between the novel and opera is that Mérimée’s *Carmen* is presented as a story within a story. As result, his Carmen does not have her own voice; she is a projection of the two male narrators: first the French scholar and then Don José. The reader can only see her in the way the scholar describes and in the manner in which Don José tells his self-absolving confession. Contrary to Mérimée’s novel, Bizet’s opera is set in the present, and it is not a recollection. As result, Carmen has her own voice and expresses her own thoughts. It has been suggested that Mérimée based the character of the French scholar on himself.<sup>20</sup> In his novella, the cultured French scholar meets Carmen, and while he is very fascinated by her, he does not fall into Carmen’s web; José, on the other hand, cannot resist her

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<sup>18</sup> Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen and Other Stories*, trans. by Nicholas Jotcham, Kindle Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 47. (“Pendant quinze jours, elle ne me quitta pas d’un instant. Elle ne ferma pas l’œil; elle me soigna avec une adresse et des attentions que jamais femme n’a eues pour l’homme le plus aimé”). Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen French/English*, trans. by Lady Mary Loyd, Kindle Edition (Munich: Doppel Text, 1989), location 3533.

<sup>19</sup> Mérimée, *Carmen French/English*, locations 3668-3861.

<sup>20</sup> David R. Ellison, ‘The Place of Carmen’, in *Geo/Graphies: Mapping the Imagination in French and Francophone Literature and Film*, ed. by Freeman G. Henry, French Literature Series (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 73–86 (p. 77).

temptations. This suggests that Mérimée believed that those who were cultured and educated could not be tempted by a woman, not even by a beautiful gypsy such as Carmen.

Bizet's innovative view on characterisation and drama makes *Carmen* stand out in the operatic repertoire. Winton Dean notes that Bizet, "like Mozart, [had] the rare capacity to interpret his characters from within and without at the same time",<sup>21</sup> meaning that not only do the characters live within the context and world of the opera, but they also live within themselves. The audience can identify with the characters in *Carmen*, because nothing they say or do seems fabricated or unnatural. Bizet accomplished the perfect balance between music and drama. On this subject, his friend and critic Pierre Berton noted:

When a work seizes you, when it dominates you with such power, do not resist, do not dispute; it is that of a master. It has reached the supreme object of art, which is to make us escape from ourselves and rest away from our own existence, in making us live another life more intense and more beautiful.<sup>22</sup>

*Carmen* truly established Bizet as an operatic genius, with a strong gift for melody and dramatic characterisation. Unfortunately, at the time of his death, Bizet was unaware that he had composed what would become the most popular of all French operas.<sup>23</sup>

### **Fundamental Questions *Who?*, *Where?* and *When?***

Next, I applied the first three Fundamental Questions *Who?*, *Where?* and *When?* to initiate my character development of Carmen. This stage of the dramatic character preparation allows me as singer-actor to gather facts about my character and begin to identify myself with her by placing myself into my

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<sup>21</sup> Winton Dean, 'Bizet after 100 Years', *The Musical Times*, 116.1588 (1975), 525–27 (p. 527) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/958423>> [accessed 3 March 2012].

<sup>22</sup> Pierre Berton, 'Georges Bizet in the "Carmen" Period', *The Lotus Magazine*, 6.2 (1914), 80–96 (p. 84) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20543605>> [accessed 2 March 2012].

<sup>23</sup> The Metropolitan Opera has produced 971 performances of *Carmen* (first performance 5 January 1884 and the last 13 January 2011). It is their third most performed opera after Puccini's *La Bohème* and Verdi's *Aida*.

character's situation. This process begins very simply by changing pronouns. For example, once I study the first Fundamental Question, I no longer address the character as "Carmen", but instead I address myself as Carmen and the pronoun changes from "she/her" to "I". This basic change in perspective immediately lets me associate myself with her, blurring the division between "I, June" the singer-actor and "I, Carmen" the character.

The following table provides a sample of this process taken from the informal creative journal I kept throughout this production:

**Table 3: Fundamental Questions *Who?*, *Where?* and *When?***

**Who?:** *I am Carmen, I am an Andalusian Gypsy and a traveller. I work at the cigarette factory with the other gypsy women. I am part of a community of Gypsy smugglers. I am unmarried, and I like attention from men, particularly those with power or in powerful positions. I am a woman; I am a lover and a con-artist. I am in my early twenties; I wear little and/or provocative clothing. I am intelligent, strong, vivacious, rebellious, passionate and fatalistic. I live by my own rules and follow my desires. I am stubborn, temperamental and determined. I am used to getting my way, and I have high expectations from the men in my life. I am a sexual woman and often use my sexuality to my advantage. I am beautiful, alluring and attract many men and although I enjoy their attention, I value my independence more than anything else in life. I am highly emotional and dramatic: I have a quick temper, I shout, I cry, I laugh, I dance, and I sing. I am outspoken, superstitious, manipulative, self-destructive and controlling. I love life, and I love love, but I love my freedom and my independence. From a psychological perspective on Who? I am the main protagonist within this opera; I am the character around which all the action revolves. It could be argued that I am the femme fatale, leading Don José to his demise and destruction. I am the representation of the sexual Other. I am the theatrical emergence of a new type of woman in nineteenth-century opera. I defy tradition and convention, and I am punished for it by death.*

**Where?:** *My scenes in Act 1 take place in two places. First on a square in Seville, Spain, outside the cigarette factory. Second, I am in prison where I seduce Don José to let me escape. My scenes in Act 2 take place in the tavern of Lilas Pastia. When Don José returns, we retreat to my bedroom. Later we go back to the tavern's main room when Zuniga has come looking for me. My scenes in Act 3 take place in the Andalusian mountain range, in the smuggler's hideout. My scenes in Act 4 take place in a courtyard outside the bullring in Seville where Escamillo is performing as Matador. From a psychological perspective on*

*Where? my place in the opera is as the leading protagonist, and I am the cause of all the action within the opera. I am also at the centre of Don José's existence, however, initially, he is not at the centre of mine. His place in my life becomes increasingly dominant and centred as the opera progresses. The more possessive he becomes, the more I try to push him towards the periphery of my life.*

**When?:** *It is set around 1820, and Act 1 takes place in a square in Seville, during summer, in the late morning. Considering Stanislavsky's Circles of Attention, the big circle is the nineteenth century, the middle circle is summer, and the small circle is late morning. The remainder of this act takes place during the afternoon, in prison, where I seduce Don José to let me go and by the evening, he lets me escape. Act 2 projects us three months into the future, it is late autumn, during the evening and into the night. Act 3 takes place several months later, it is winter, and this act is set in the late evening and into the night. Act 4 takes place a month to three months later, and once again it is summer, it is set during the late morning and into midday, (although some productions have set this act in the evening). Throughout the whole of the opera, time affects the atmosphere, psychology and motive. Although the opera lasts under three hours and presents a storyline that unravels over the course of about a year, while the original story takes place over several years. Bizet's smaller timeframe adds a lot more drama and dysfunctional passion to the whirlwind relationship between José and Carmen. In addition, each act takes place during a different time of day and a different season presenting two correlating progressive cycles. Act 1 takes place during spring in the early morning through to midday; Act 2 plays in autumn in the late afternoon into the evening, Act 3 takes place in winter during the evening and into the night time and finally, Act 4 plays during summer in the late morning to midday. By the end of the opera, a full seasonal cycle has been completed as well as a full day-time cycle. For myself as Carmen, the year depicted in the opera completely destroys my life. I begin the opera as a young, vivacious, beautiful and independent woman. I love life, and I live passionately, but I slowly become resentful, introverted and angry because of José's continuous pressuring of his patriarchal ideals, his violence, and his possessiveness. I continuously try to push him away, but it only makes him even more possessive and eventually ends in my murder.*

### **4.1.3 Development**

The next stage of my dramatic character development process begins the psychophysical building of the character. The Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?* begin the singer-actor's journey into their *Imagination* as they identify and discover their character's Inner motivations. The final Fundamental

Question *How?* is the most physical and difficult step to address, as it bridges the gap between the literary analysis completed in the previous Fundamental Questions and the physical and active creation of the character.

As mentioned previously, this Case Study was completed before I was introduced to Actioning. Therefore *How?* is addressed through a psychophysical process influenced by Stanislavsky's teachings in which I analyse Carmen's motivations, her physicalisation, her physical energy, her physicality with Don José and her body language.

### **Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?***

Before addressing the next Fundamental Questions, I set my provisional Supertask as Carmen: "I, Carmen, want a passionate relationship within which I keep my independence".

The following table provides an example of this questing process for each act, which I applied to the entire role within my creative journal:

**Table 4: Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?***

**Act 1:** *Why do I provoke Don José when we first meet? I provoke him because he ignored me while I sang the Habanera. For what purpose do I provoke Don José? To get his attention and there is an immediate connection between us. I consider love to be a game, it amuses me, and I am generally only interested in men who do not desire me. I want what I cannot have – as demonstrated in the lyrics "Si tu ne m'aime pas, je t'aime" (If you don't love me, I love you). However, I also give a strong warning in this aria 'Si je t'aime, prend garde à toi!<sup>24</sup> (But if I love you, watch out!). Why do I give this warning? To make it very clear that I have certain standards and will only love someone on my terms. For what purpose do I give this warning? I give this warning to ensure that José knows I am different, daring and not like any other woman he has ever known.*

**Act 2:** *Why do I say he does not love me after he professes his devotion in his aria? I say he does not love me because I know he just loves the idea of me because if he truly loved me, he would leave the army. There is a significant cultural divide between him and me: he is a corporal, and I am a gypsy, as a result, we lead very different lives. I believe that the only*

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<sup>24</sup> Bizet, *Carmen*, p. 47.

way he can prove his love to me is by deserting his post in the army and conforming to my lifestyle. Why do I try multiple emotional approaches to convince him to do what I want? Because I am feeling a rollercoaster of emotions, one minute he loves me, the next minute he returns to the barracks. I get angry at him which does not work, I try being kind and sweet, it does not work either, so I get angry again. There is a significant amount of passion and tension between myself and José, and we both have dominant personalities. I am sexually manipulative, and he is possessive and violent. Our contradicting views, ideals and mutually explosive temperaments show that while there might be a passionate attraction between us, we are certainly not compatible.

**Act 3:** Why does my demeanour change in my third Aria Air des Cartes? In this aria, Mercédès and Frasquita are reading cards to tell their fortunes. Mercédès finds that she will find love and Frasquita sees that she will meet an old man who will leave her his fortune. When I read my own cards, however, contrary to the other two women, all I see is death. My suspicions of my doomed relationship with José are confirmed, and my demeanour begins to change because I am afraid. For what purpose does my demeanour change during this aria? It changes because I see that I will die first, and then José. I see that we are the cause of each other's death. The juxtaposition between the happiness of Mercédès and Frasquita and my own miserable discovery marks a very dramatic shift in my character and demeanour. I do not want either myself or José to die, but I believe the cards and I cannot see how to escape this fate, other than by leaving him.

**Act 4:** José pleads me to leave with him so that we can start a new life together, he can save me, and he can be saved through me. Why do I refuse this offer? I refuse because he believes he is in love with me, but in reality, he wants to possess me. He believes I need saving; I do not need saving, and certainly not by him. For what purpose do I refuse his offer? I refuse it because I do not want to be with him, I still believe we are destined to die because of each other, I do not want to give in to him. I would rather die than give in to his demands. Why do I tell him I no longer love him? I tell him this because it is the truth, although I once loved him, his possessive and violent behaviour has driven me away. For what purpose do I tell him this? I tell him because I believe that if I take my love away, which is what he craves, he will let me be. I do not understand why he would want to be with someone who does not love him. I tell him that I would rather die free than yield to his demands. Why do I refuse to go with him? I refuse because he is physically holding me back, blocking my path, doing anything he can to keep me physically near him. For what purpose do I want to leave? I want to leave because I can see no agreeable outcome to this situation, he is not listening to my words, and he will not let go of me. Once he physically blocks me from leaving, I become defiant and aggressive. Why do I tell him I love Escamillo when I do not actually love him? I tell him as a taunt and to hurt him but also to try and

*make him realise that our relationship is over and that I have moved on. Why do I tell him to either let me go or kill me? I tell him this so that he will see that it is a lost cause, no matter which decision he makes, I will not return to him. For what purpose do I tell him this? It is my final taunt; I want to ensure he knows how well I know him and what he is capable of. Why do I keep saying no to José? I say no because he repeatedly threatens me, the more I refuse him, the tighter he holds on. Why do I give him his ring back? I give his ring back to him because I want to make it clear that I do not want to be with him, and that I do not belong to him. For what purpose do I give his ring back? I give it back because I want to be free. When he stabs me, although I partly expected it, I am still surprised.*

### **Fundamental Question *How?***

I approached my dramatic character preparation for this role by first establishing Carmen's Tasks and her Inner motivations in each scene, based on the information I had gathered in the previous five Fundamental Questions. I wrote each of these into my score so that while I rehearsed the part, I was continuously reminded of the motivation and action driving Carmen's wants and needs.

I addressed the text, first speaking it and then I followed by singing, using the Magic If, specifically letting myself feel the intention and purpose of each line as if I was Carmen. I questioned where the natural stresses fell in the text when spoken, compared to the sung melodies. This gave me various insights into how Bizet coloured the inflection of each line. I also observed every harmonic shift, or colour change, as each of these indicates a change of feeling, character, or dramatic intent. Then I imagined various scenarios for each scene. For example, I questioned how the other characters would react towards Carmen: would Don José be loving, or would he be manipulative and show obsessive stalking tendencies from the beginning of the opera? Would he be emotional and heartbroken each time I (as Carmen) reject him, or would he become violent and want to manipulate me into being his possession? Would I notice his jealous and violent tendencies, would this concern me, or would I expect this from men? Is this behaviour I am used to from my lovers?

Next, I assessed how Carmen would express herself physically, by investigating her natural energetic movement. In simple terms, energy may be defined as an



active source which fuels the singer-actor and/or their character's purpose on stage: "when you walk your energy must flow all the way from your spine down your legs."<sup>25</sup> Energy may also be defined as a person's natural movement: how they move through life from a physical, intellectual and emotional perspective. In addition, Stanislavsky believed that the spirit of the actor fuses together the body and mind, the physical and intellectual, the Inner and Outer, during the creative process. Therefore, I found that it was crucial not to separate the physical preparation of Carmen from her intellectual and emotional context, as all three aspects of her natural energy are interdependent and should be integrated.

Carmen's primary energetic and physical movement is active and reactive; she is dynamic, sure and purposeful. She uses an extrovert expression, pushing forward with intensity to create results. She moves swiftly, substantially, she is intense, practical, resourceful, fiery and abrupt. Carmen's personality and physicality are textured, have substantial depth, and everything she says and does leaves a lasting impression. Her mind and body move with determination and purpose towards a specific end goal. As previously observed, she marks the theatrical emergence of a new kind of woman, as her dominance and push-forward energy, mentality and physicality were previously reserved only for men.

One of the primary problems in Carmen and José's relationship, for example, is his constant desire to soften her. While he enjoys her free-spirited, rebellious exotic qualities, ultimately he wants her to be more like his perception of Micaëla – soft, kind, obedient and submissive. Carmen consequently feels trapped and suppressed, which results in her expressing herself through reactive rage. This continuous suppression forces her into a position where she feels she is losing herself and as a result she is constantly trying to retain some form of control, which usually expresses itself in defiance.

It is often argued that Carmen is the downfall of Don José, however it could be as easily argued that he is the creator of his own demise. This idea was first put

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<sup>25</sup> Stanislavski and Romyantsev, locations 7503-04.

forward by the critic Jullien, who considered the opera *Carmen* to be “a vulgar Opéra-Comique with a dash of pathetic and a final murder that is most inexplicable”.<sup>26</sup> It is clear that Don José becomes increasingly possessive, which ultimately results in him murdering Carmen. Not only is this, as Julien calls it, “pathetic”, but it is also abusive, manipulative and shows incredible violence towards her purely because she does not act the way he wants her to. At the end of the opera he offers her either entrapment (in the form of being with him), or death, so that she will never be with anyone else. Carmen’s death might be considered as her ultimate act of passion, because although she dies, she has at least chosen it for herself.<sup>27</sup> Carmen and José’s relationship is the final power-play of the ownership of her “self”. He wants to own her completely, even against her will, while she is continuously fighting to retain her connection with her inner self and to be autonomous.

Carmen’s physicality is also expressed through her body language. Next, I identified how she would walk, stand, sit, gesture and the quality of her voice and language.

**Walking:** She walks with determination in her step, with a firm foot plant which is quick and brisk. Also, she walks with a swing in her hips, most likely because of her background in dance and because she enjoys the attention she receives from it. Carmen likes to have fun, dance, play, and she shows her enjoyment of life in every aspect of her being, including her walking.

**Sitting/Standing/Gesture:** Every movement Carmen makes is deliberate, whether it is sitting, standing up or gesturing. She also creates angles when she sits or stands, for example, she sits with her legs crossed or with one leg pulled up, she tilts her head to one side, she has her hands on her hips or her waist, and she bends her body at the waist. She “talks

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<sup>26</sup> Dean, *Bizet*, p. 120; McClary, p. 123.

<sup>27</sup> June Dams, ‘The Femme Fatale versus the Sentimental Heroine in Georges Bizet’s Operas: Characterisation and Performance’, in *Transgressive Womanhood: Investigating Vamps, Witches, Whores, Serial Killers and Monsters*, ed. by Manon Hedenborg-White and Bridget Sandhoff (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2014), pp. 153–64 (p. 156).

with her hands” so to speak, she uses her hands and arms to communicate. She is physically very expressive, and each movement and gesture is deliberate and purposeful.

**Voice/Language:** Carmen speaks and expresses herself explosively in volume at times. Her language and choice of words can be intense, reactive and abrupt.

It is important to consider how Carmen’s physicality changes throughout the opera. In the first two acts, she is buoyant, passionate, physical, active, and energetic. Although, as Susan McClary has noted, in the first two acts of the opera, it can be difficult to tell if Carmen is being herself or presenting a persona.<sup>28</sup> In her first three arias she seems to be playing a specific role. In *Habanera* she presents herself as a woman who sees love as a game, in her *Seguidilla* aria and duet with Don José, she appears to be playing the role of the seductress who can con her way out of jail, and in the *Chanson Bohémienne*, she presents a story of Gypsy life for the officers. Interestingly, none of these arias are specifically about her authentic self; they are presentational of the exotic rather than introspective. As the opera progresses, however, Carmen appears to become less ‘exotic’,<sup>29</sup> and her physicality begins to change. There is a definite change in her demeanour when she sings *Air des Cartes* in Act 3, and the authenticity of her true personality begins to emerge as her fears rise to the surface. This internal transformation is vital for any performer approaching the role, as this shift will affect her physically, mentally and emotionally.

As a singer-actor, there are many ways in which the final scene between Carmen and José in Act 4 may be interpreted physically. True to her nature, Carmen chooses to confront José one final time, even though her friends warn her against this decision. It has been argued that Carmen realises she must die for

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<sup>28</sup> McClary, p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> Ralph P. Locke, ‘A Broader View of Musical Exoticism’, *The Journal of Musicology*, 24.4 (2007), 477–521 (p. 511) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jm.2007.24.4.477>> [accessed 2 March 2012].

love, which she does willingly and possibly even joyfully.<sup>30</sup> While she might choose to die rather than become José's possession, the concept that she dies joyfully is one that could certainly be argued. She does not choose to die because death brings her joy, she chooses death because she wants to be free of him and there is seemingly no other way out. The only joy she might find in her choice of death is that she is not giving into his demands. In addition, Carmen is resilient and does not back down without a fight; it is in her nature to push the boundaries, so it could be questioned if she truly believes she will die. Throughout the opera, Carmen fights the conventions of society and the control of the male characters, and it could also be said that she is equally fighting against and challenging fate. In this scene, her physical body becomes still, upright, stately and with little movement in her limbs and body. Even her choice of words in the duet is significantly less emotionally charged. They are not directed at him or his behaviour. Instead they are about her and what she wants. Interestingly, when she states anything about herself, she says it in the third person, rather than the first person. It is almost as if she is protecting herself by distancing herself from the Carmen he keeps pleading with. In another sense, it could indicate that she is no longer that same person who was once in love with him. While she clearly states that she knows she will die, she could also be trying to call his bluff; he says he will kill her many times, but when he does stab her, it appears to surprise her. She did not think he had the courage to do so. Interestingly, from a musical perspective, this stabbing takes place in a relatively subdued part of the music. She has just said her last line where she gives him his ring back and he stabs her. Bizet's music specifically shows how "pathetic" her murder is by colouring it with the Toreador's fanfare in the background, where they are celebrating Escamillo's victory. Although it could be argued that this music is inadvertently also celebrating Carmen's demise, I would argue that it was Bizet's musical comment on the ridiculousness and pitiful nature of her death. If Bizet believed Carmen's death was justified, would he not have given it

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<sup>30</sup> Dan Friedman and Gabrielle Kurlander, 'Deconstruction and Development of the Opera Carmen(1)', *Modern Drama*, 43 (2000), 276 (p. 378).

its own music, or brought in the fatalistic returning theme at that point? Instead, he only brings the fatalistic theme back into the music just before José begins to sing again. Perhaps this musical colouring is Bizet's indication that José was Carmen's fatalistic downfall, that he was the reason she died, rather than a punishment for pushing against the boundaries of society, convention and male oppression.

#### **4.1.4 Reflection**

Our production of Bizet's *Carmen* was performed on 16 and 17 August 2012. My intention for my dramatic preparation of this role was to present a believable, truthful and human representation of Carmen. It is very easy to stereotype her as the 'exotic femme fatale' who is boisterous, aggressive and walks over any man in her way. While she is active, reactive, pushy and passionate, I wanted to find her inner reasons for her intense behaviour, so that her physical portrayal would be believable and authentic.

While I believe most of these intentions were realised, the sparse and non-realistic setting of a semi-staged concert performance made the authenticity of the situation harder to realise than it would have been in a full production with costume, set, props and an onstage chorus.

Contrary to a professional setting, the majority of rehearsals for this production were music rehearsals with the orchestra rather than piano rehearsals or staging rehearsals. Initially, we had a few rehearsals with a rehearsal pianist which our musical director/maestro conducted. As this was a student production with a student orchestra, we had significantly more rehearsals together than the standard one or two sitzprobe rehearsals. In addition to these rehearsals, I watched several of the individual orchestral rehearsals as well, mostly to familiarise myself with the overall orchestral sound, its acoustic size, and our maestro's conducting style.<sup>31</sup> The initial focus of the piano and orchestral

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<sup>31</sup> The reason I wanted to be familiar with the acoustic size of the orchestral sound was because our performance venue was a concert chamber, and the orchestra would be on the stage.

rehearsals was on the accuracy of the music on the collaboration between the voices and the orchestra. While I had memorised my role before our first music rehearsal, I used my score for the first orchestral rehearsals. Once we had run the full opera twice with the orchestra, however, I made the decision to do the remainder of the rehearsals from memory.

Two significant challenges emerged throughout the rehearsal process of this production. The first of these was that our director resigned from the production two months before opening night and was not replaced. At this stage, we had not begun any blocking rehearsals. The sudden and unexpected change resulted in a significant shift in my own dramatic preparation process. The opera became a self-directed production, which meant that as Carmen is in practically every scene I became the “responsible driving force” when it came to the acting and the dramatic presentation. I was even approached by performance lecturers to ensure that the other cast members “acted”, which implied that, in their view, it had become my responsibility to block and stage this production. This was not an easy situation, as I did not want to take the position of director for a production in which I was playing the title role. As a compromise, I approached this challenge by opening the communication lines with my colleagues. I decided to organise specific blocking rehearsals with the other singer-actors and I discussed the scenes, the action, what we wanted to communicate to the audience and how we could achieve that physically on stage.

The second significant challenge in this production became more noticeable closer to opening night, as the singer cast as Don José had not memorised his role and decided to sing the entire opera with his score on a music stand and/or in hand. When I realised this was not just a rehearsal condition but would become a production reality, it was essential for me to keep my own dramatic focus on stage, so as not to let his score and music stand become a distraction for myself during either the rehearsal period or the performances. In an attempt to contain this situation and as most of my prominent scenes were with Don

José, I spent a significant amount of time working with him on our scenes, discussing how to act them physically, considering dramatic perspectives and how we could make them work on the stage with limited physical space, as well as deciding where his music stand would be placed. To ensure that it would not become a distraction for me on stage, or be in the way, we adapted our blocking so that the music stand would not interfere with my movements or our communication. His lack of memorisation was a definite challenge as it meant he often had to look at the score rather than at me in crucial dramatic moments. This certainly required a shift in my approach so as not to let this become a hindrance. Instead, I used the frustration I felt as the singer-actor as the fuel for much of Carmen's frustrations behind the miscommunication between herself and Don José. For example, if Carmen is talking to José, or he is talking to her, but he will not look at her, this would infuriate Carmen even more.

Using Stanislavsky's Fundamental Questions as the primary basis for my dramatic character preparation proved to be a valuable and successful technique. Through these questions I gained a deeper literary awareness of the text, how it relates to Bizet's music and how this reflects and affects Carmen. In addition, they also showed me how I could begin the personalisation process between myself and Carmen by connecting my own imagination, body and emotions to hers. Furthermore, during my preparation process I found that the application of Stanislavsky's Fundamental Questions was a useful complement to Csikszentmihalyi's discussion on goal-directed activity. The Fundamental Questions helped me to determine the Given Circumstances of the opera, and began my Imagination process, connecting me (the singer-actor) to Carmen and the world of the opera. Throughout company rehearsals and performances, however, I found that there was also a merging of action and awareness, no sense of distractions, a distortion of time and no self-consciousness or worry of failure. It is possible that I was able to access more conditions that create a Flow state because company rehearsals and performances are a physical activity, with specific goals that require a high degree of concentration and focused attention. Outside of performances, I found that accessing a Flow state was particularly

noticeable in company rehearsals where we would run full acts or the whole opera. This may have been because it provided me with a clear focus on the progression of her story, and allowed me to bridge the gap between Carmen's reality and my reality, placing me in a state of Flow.

One of the limitations of my dramatic preparation of Carmen was that the majority of my analysis was literary, which is primarily a mental and thought-driven process. Performing and singing, on the other hand, is a physical process. I found that it was difficult, particularly in rehearsal, not to become overly analytical of my characterisation. In addition, due to the nature of this production, the rehearsals were primarily focused on music and the collaboration between voices and orchestra. Bridging the gap between the literary analysis and the physical presentation of that analysis was not always as simple as it could have been. It took considerable conscious effort to "let go" of the analysis and trust that what I was doing was working. This issue was probably also highlighted because this production did not have a director and therefore I could not rely on that feedback, which potentially added to my "double guessing" and hyper-analytical questioning of my physical characterisation of Carmen.

As noted by Stanislavsky, and various other theatre practitioners, all theatre (including opera) is action based, and it is only possible to act an action, not an emotion or feeling. There is always an inner drive and reason for every movement, decision, and gesture made. Although I found a way to "activate" Carmen, this process took an extended amount of time because my active preparation followed an unstructured and improvisational approach. I believe it would therefore be beneficial to incorporate a structured, active and physical preparation technique in future Case Studies.



## **4.2 Applied Case Study Two: Carlotta (2014)**

The second Case Study describes my preparation of Carlotta Giudicelli for the 2014 production of *Phantom* with the New Plymouth Operatic Society, directed by Warren Bates. Since my Case Study on Carmen, my dramatic character development process has developed, expanded and grown in some ways. Shortly before being cast in this role, I was introduced to Alfreds' book *Different Every Night* which explained the process of Actioning as a rehearsal technique. I decided to conduct an experiment on testing the efficacy of Actioning for the singer-actor within my Stanislavskian-inspired dramatic character preparation, seeking for a rehearsal and preparatory technique which would allow me to actively create and prepare a dramatic character.

### **4.2.1 Character/Role**

I was cast as Carlotta Giudicelli in March 2014, and my first rehearsal was scheduled for mid-May. I was the last lead to be cast in this production, and before my arrival at rehearsals, the cast (except the Phantom and Raoul) had been rehearsing part-time since February.

Prior to learning this role, I was already relatively familiar with the storyline and music of *Phantom*, as it is such a well-known and popular musical. Once I received my score, I read through it and the accompanying script, while I noted my initial reactions and feelings about Carlotta. Next, I watched several versions of the production, to get a more thorough understanding of the overall action and storyline.

My first dramatic impression was that, compared to the other characters, I instinctively felt most connected to Carlotta. From a musical perspective, I had the impression that Carlotta's music is challenging and demanding. For example, one of the first challenges I noted was that Carlotta is the first character to sing, as she opens the show directly after the overture. Also, the overture finishes in a different key to Carlotta's a cappella opening cadenza. As I do not have perfect pitch, I certainly noted I would need to rehearse this to ensure I was correct.

Another challenge I observed regarding this cadenza, was that by the second bar, it reaches D6. Not only is this note high in a soprano's range but as it is Carlotta's opening music, there will undoubtedly be nerves. Other challenges I noticed included the high tessitura of this role, the switching between English and Italian, the required shouting, maintaining the singing voice, as well as the physical and vocal stamina needed for this role.

My music learning process followed the same structure as I used to learn the role of Carmen. First I began by dividing my score into manageable learning sections, then I studied and spoke the text out-loud for both the music and the spoken dialogue until I was very familiar with the words. Next, I worked on speaking the words to the rhythm. When I was confident with the text and its meaning, I began learning the melodies, first by lip-trilling and humming, then on singular vowels followed by vowel tracking, and finally, with the text. While there are multiple ways to learn music, each singer-actor will find their own preferred system/method. For me personally, dividing it into these steps makes the process most efficient and has the most accurate results. At the early stages of learning this role, I found it difficult to focus on characterisation, as Carlotta's music is vocally demanding. Therefore I allowed myself to compartmentalise my preparation process and dedicate specific rehearsals to learn this music technically and focus solely on my musical accuracy, vocal technique and memorisation.

#### **4.2.2 Analysis**

Next, I addressed the necessary background research of the work, Carlotta's character background. Then I addressed the first stages of character development using the first three Fundamental Questions: *Who?*, *Where?* and *When?* as a means to establish Carlotta's Given Circumstances.

## Background

*Phantom* (1986) is based on the 1910 novel *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* by Gaston Leroux. The musical is set in Paris in 1881, and it tells the story of Erik, infamously known as the Phantom, a bitter and deformed composer who lives underneath the Paris Opéra. Although he is ashamed of his physical appearance, he falls in love with the ballet dancer Christine Daaé, who, through him, becomes the celebrated star of the Paris Opéra. While her fame rises, she is reintroduced to a childhood friend, Raoul Vicomte de Chagny, and they fall in love. The musical becomes a game of infatuation and unrequited love, causing the Phantom to grow mad with jealousy. As retaliation, he terrorises the opera company with manipulation, bribery, and murder.

The original novel was based on a series of existing myths about a murderous ghost who supposedly lived underneath the Paris Opéra. Leroux's novel was published as a series of instalments in *Le Gaulois*, a Franco-Belgian newspaper, between 1909 and 1910. The novel is written in a journalistic style, recounting the events that took place thirty years earlier. There are also strong elements of Gothic horror such as midnight visits to graveyards, secret pathways, mysterious letters, a variety of unexplained events, and inexplicable murders. Ultimately, however, all of these "mysterious" happenings are explained logically, leaving no lasting sense of the supernatural.

There are some notable differences between Leroux's novel and Lloyd Webber's musical. The most significant of these is that Leroux's novel focuses primarily on performances of just one opera, Gounod's *Faust*, whereas the musical features three fictional operas. Lloyd Webber had initially planned to include existing pieces from the operatic repertoire appropriate to the period.<sup>32</sup> The idea was abandoned in favour of re-creating works in the style of existing operas, which provided creative freedom and comedic moments in contrast to the more serious scenes.

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<sup>32</sup> John Snelson, *Andrew Lloyd Webber* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 106.

The first of these fictitious operas is *Hannibal* by Chalumeau, written in the style of French Romantic Grand Opera of the 1830s and 1840s and similar to the operas of Meyerbeer. *Hannibal* opens the musical with “a symbol of (aural and visual) extremes”<sup>33</sup> as Carlotta holds a severed head while singing immediately to the top of her range. This “opera” is a replication aimed at modern audiences’ prejudices against opera, presented through stereotype: unintelligible recitative, an overweight tenor, a screeching soprano, unrealistic staging and scenery and historical plot connotations, all within an Oriental setting.

The second fictional opera is *Il Muto* by Albrizzio, a parody of Mozart’s comedies. The characters are the Countess and Serafimo (a breeches role), which suggests certain character influences from Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro*, in particular, the Countess and Cherubino. Musically, this pastiche is based on Mozartian arpeggios and scales, and the staccato coloratura passages in Carlotta’s vocal line suggest Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* and *Don Giovanni* as specific operatic influences, specifically the Königin der Nacht and Donna Anna’s arias. As the managers state, “nothing like the old operas! Or the old scenery, the old singers, the old audience and every seat sold!”<sup>34</sup> *Il Muto* is evidently supposed to be a revival of an earlier production, in contrast to *Hannibal*, which is specified as a new production. As John Snelson states: “The idea of questioning the repertory, setting one style against another to provoke comparison and judgement, is a major theme underlying the shifting musical worlds of Lloyd Webber’s show”.<sup>35</sup> Considering Snelson’s words, it is possible to perceive this comparison between different operatic genres as a metaphorical representation of Carlotta versus Christine. The revival opera, *Il Muto*, represents Carlotta, as it ends in chaos, destruction, and murder, while *Hannibal*, the new, fresh, modern and successful opera, symbolises Christine.

The third fictional opera presented in the musical is *Don Juan Triumphant*, which is composed by the Phantom himself. The characters in this opera reflect on the

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<sup>33</sup> Snelson, p. 107.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Lloyd Webber, *The Phantom of the Opera*, Piano Reduction Rehearsal Score (London: Really Useful, 1986), p. 115.

<sup>35</sup> Snelson, p. 113.

central story between the Phantom, Christine, and Raoul, as both the musical itself and the opera within it are based on seduction, which is achieved through disguise and deceit. The story is based on the legend of Don Juan, and is set as a banquet scene obviously associated with the banquet scene at the end of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, shortly before Don Giovanni is dragged down to hell as retribution for his actions. Similarly, after this scene in the musical, Christine is dragged down to the Phantom's lair, which may be considered her version of hell. It is, however, the Phantom, like Don Giovanni, who pays the ultimate price for his actions. Musically, *Don Juan Triumphant* is the most extreme of the fictional operas; it is composed around distinctive atonal and whole-tone themes and the use of 5/4 and 7/8. The dissonant harmony in the choral description of the Phantom's intentions towards Christine presents the public with the height of his sexualisation of Christine: "Here the sire may serve the dam, here the master takes his meat! Here the sacrificial lamb utters one despairing bleat! Poor young maiden! For the thrill of your tongue of stolen sweets, you will have to pay the bill – tangled in the winding sheets!"<sup>36</sup> Not only does he expect her complete sexual submission as payment for his interest in her, but it is evident that he believes she stole the music from him. Like Don Giovanni trading places with his servant Leporello to seduce Donna Elvira's maid, the Phantom's Don Juan also trades places with his servant Passarino. However, the Phantom has murdered the singer Piangi and takes his place as Don Juan, fusing and melding the fictional opera into the musical's plot, and this scene transforms into the attempted seduction of Christine by the Phantom through the fictional characters of Aminta and Don Juan.

Outside of the added fictional operas, Lloyd Webber's musical adaptation retains much of Leroux's plot and detail. Another significant difference, however, is Lloyd Webber's avoidance of the novel's realistic explanations. In the musical, the Phantom's "tricks" are never explained. Therefore it is never quite certain if he does or does not have magical powers. In addition, the Phantom's history as Erik is only explained briefly in Act Two by Madame Girya, and his final fate in his

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<sup>36</sup> Lloyd Webber, *The Phantom of the Opera*, pp. 217–18.

lair also remains a mystery, for he simply vanishes. As John Snelson explains: “where Leroux’s original presents superstition and illusion in order to expose their falseness through reason, the musical elevates mystery, avoids explanation, and invites the suspension of disbelief”.<sup>37</sup>

### **Fundamental Questions *Who?*, *Where?* and *When?***

Next, I addressed the first stages of developing Carlotta as a dramatic character, by addressing the first three Fundamental Questions: *Who?*, *Where?* and *When?*. As with my preparation of Carmen, I began this process by placing myself into Carlotta’s situations, *as if* I were her by simply addressing myself as Carlotta.

The following table provides an excerpt of this process taken from the creative journal I kept during this production.

**Table 5: Fundamental Questions *Who?*, *Where?* and *When?***

**Who?:** *I am Carlotta Giudicelli, I am Italian and the Prima Donna at the Opera Populaire in Paris. I am unmarried, and I use my status in the company and my sexuality as power. I am a woman; I am a soprano, I am a diva, I am a singer. At the start of the musical, I am in the prime of my career, and the leading soprano for five seasons. I am temperamental, opinionated, easily provoked, and I am used to getting my way. I use my vocal talent as power and to manipulate others just as I use my status as a weapon and a bargaining tool. I fight against injustice, but only if it directly affects me. I like to be the centre of attention, and I like to be in the limelight. Piangi is my only true friend; he is convenient for me as it is beneficial professionally to be close to the leading tenor. I despise Christine, not for who she is, but for who she represents, the quick-to-rise star who gets to the top on the coat-tails of others. I convince myself it is Raoul who is trying to push her career forward. I become uncertain about my place in the company; I start to question the manager’s loyalty to my talent, I threaten, I manipulate, I guilt-trip. I am hurt, I am vulnerable, I am publically embarrassed. As the musical proceeds my status in the company dwindles, I unjustly become the “has-been”, and my only true friend is murdered by the Phantom.*

**Where?:** *All my scenes take place in the opera house, alternating between the theatre’s stage and the manager’s office. My physical placement originates and culminates on the stage. From a psychological perspective on *Where?*, where is my place in the musical? I am not the main protagonist within this musical; I am a supporting character. I am Christine’s*

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<sup>37</sup> Snelson, p. 81.

rival, and I am her contrasting character in every way (emotionally, temperamentally and vocally). In the first scene, I am at the centre of the focus, I am the prima donna, singing the leading role in the opera Hannibal. Throughout the musical, I become progressively less important. In Act 1 the focus is entirely on me, but once Christine is introduced, my importance fades. There is a momentary revival of my importance as Prima Donna, but even then it is overshadowed by the Phantom and Christine. My status is completely reduced in *Il Muto* where the Phantom interrupts my performance and makes my voice croak. In Act 2 my presence is limited and significantly less prominent, even my vocal range reduces and my costumes become physically smaller. My dwindling status is particularly emphasised once Piangi is murdered, as I too disappear from the story.

**When?:** It is the late nineteenth century, around 1880, in Paris. In Act 1, my first scene, it is evening; my second scene takes place a few weeks later, in the afternoon, and *Il Muto* is set that same evening. Act 2 projects us forward six months to the Masquerade ball. My following scene takes place the next day, or so (not specified), in the manager's office, around midday and that same evening is the *Don Juan* rehearsal. A few days later, *Don Juan* premieres in the evening, and a few hours later I discover that Piangi has been murdered.

### 4.2.3 Development

The following stage of my dramatic preparation process initiates the psychophysical building of the character through Imagination and action. The Imagination is intensified through the Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?* inspired by the information gathered previously, while *How?* is addressed through Actioning. As mentioned previously, this Case Study begins my experiment testing the efficacy of Actioning for the singer-actor, as a means of finding a way to actively prepare Carlotta as a dramatic character.

#### **Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?***

Before addressing the next Fundamental Questions, I set my provisional Supertask as: "I, Carlotta, am the leading soprano of the Paris Opéra and I need to retain my position".

Next, I addressed the Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?* starting the journey into my Imagination, interpretation and personalisation of the information I learned about Carlotta previously.

The following table provides a sample of this process, which I applied to the whole role, taken from my creative journal.

**Table 6: Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?***

*Why is Carlotta in Phantom? Carlotta is only a minor role in Leroux's novel, but she was given significantly more importance in Lloyd Webber's adaptation. She is the stereotypical "opera diva", she is the "evil" by which to compare Christine's "good". For what purpose is Carlotta in Phantom? Her purpose in the musical is to create opposition for Christine, not only in the sense of good versus evil but more specifically because it adds to the constant "who will sing" drama within the story line. Carlotta's presence adds to an uncertain future for Christine's opera career. Furthermore, there are also ensemble dynamics to consider: the addition of an extra female character, who is direct competition for Christine vocally, provides depth to the story. While the primary plot-line is centred around the love-triangle between the Phantom, Christine and Raoul, the extra plot lines between Carlotta and the managers adds comic relief, while also providing further significance to the interconnected relationships within the main trio.*

**Act 1:** *Why do I grow increasingly frustrated in 'Hannibal'? I am becoming frustrated because it is the final dress rehearsal which is continuously interrupted. Firstly, Piangi disrupts the rehearsal because he does not know his dialogue properly and he is stopped by Monsieur Reyer, the musical director. Secondly, the theatre owner and new theatre managers arrive mid-rehearsal and walk all through the stage, while we are rehearsing. Why does this frustrate me? I become very agitated as the constant disruptions are interrupting my focus. For what purpose am I becoming increasingly agitated? I consider this behaviour to be very unprofessional and I want to finish the rehearsal and prepare for the upcoming opening night.*

*In 'Il Muto', why do I reprimand Christine? I lash out at her because the Phantom has interrupted the production, I do not know how, but he has disrupted my performance. For what purpose do I reprimand her? I believe it is Christine's fault that these horrible, frightening things are happening in the opera house. I am angry, and I want to make her place in the company very clear to her. Unfortunately, the Phantom responds to this by making my voice sound like a toad. Why do I panic when my voice croaks? I panic because I do not know what is happening, I do not know how the Phantom is doing this to me. I am*



*completely horrified that this is happening in front of the audience, I am publically humiliated. I try to rectify the situation to no avail. For what purpose do I panic? I panic because if I lose my voice and cannot rely on my voice, then I have no future as a singer. I break down while the Phantom laughs triumphantly.*

**Act 2:** *Why do I confront the managers again in the second manager's office scene? I confront them because the Phantom has delivered the score of his opera, Don Juan, and my part is small. For what purpose do I confront them? I confront them because I am the leading soprano of this company but my role in this work is insignificant. I am becoming increasingly concerned about my future in the opera house. Why do I lash out at Christine again? I lash out at her because I am so frustrated that all these problems started when she was pushed into the limelight and I believe she is the cause of all this chaos. For what purpose do I lash out at her? I lash out at her because I am convinced that she is behind this casting in Don Juan, I believe she is trying to take my place in the company, and manipulating everyone around her. Why do I believe Christine is crazy? I believe she is crazy because she talks about hearing voices in her head, which is something I can only attribute to madness. For what purpose do I believe this? Because she is blaming a voice in her head for the things that are happening to her and around her. It is entirely ridiculous that the managers and Raoul think that having her sing would solve our problems, she is obviously incapable.*

### **Fundamental Question *How?* and Actioning**

At this stage of my dramatic preparation of Carlotta, I addressed Stanislavsky's Fundamental Question *How?* through the use of Alfreds' Actioning. The process of Actioning is a technique in which the actor selects a transitive verb for each line of the script. The aim is not to say the line in the script, but instead, say the action and play it. The purpose of this process is to develop a clear understanding of the motivations behind each line in the script.

As a character's motivations are the direct reasoning behind their physical action, I decided to try this process for myself and I will reflect on some of the challenges that this presented and the adaptations I needed to make. Firstly, I was applying Actioning to an operatic role, which is sung rather than spoken. As Actioning was initially created for the actor rather than the singer-actor, this added an extra layer to the process. Secondly, I needed to adapt this to a

practice studio setting, rather than a group rehearsal. So rather than play the action directly to another actor, I had to imagine their responses, and focus more specifically on how I could play each action.

Initially, I approached this technique slowly and split the three layers of the process over three days. On Day One I worked only on the transitive verbs of one scene (step one). On Day Two, I repeated step one and then repeated the process, saying the text and playing it with the action (step two). On Day Three, I went through the previous two steps again and then applied the process while singing. The reason I split it over several days was to give myself the time to try the technique thoroughly and in detail, without rushing through any stage. After my familiarisation with this rehearsal technique, Actioning soon became the foundation of my physical and active character preparation process.

### **My Actioning process**

The following description provides a detailed breakdown of my Actioning process as part of my dramatic preparation of Carlotta.

#### **Preliminary preparation steps:**

1. I created a comfortable working space within my practice studio so as to work privately without interruption;
2. I worked scene-by-scene. If the scene was longer, I split it into workable 'bits', which were usually a selection of phrases, gradually adding more lines until the scene was completed;
3. To make it easier, I divided this process into three steps:
  - I. Step one: Play-and-say the action only;
  - II. Step two: Play the action and say the text;
  - III. Step three: Play the action and sing the text.
4. I repeated each of these steps as many times as necessary (at least three each), to become comfortable and familiar with the technique.

I tried a selection of transitive verbs to familiarise myself with the process.

However, if the transitive verb I selected did not feel or sound suitable, I tried a few different options until it felt right.

### **Step one: Play-and-say the action only**

1. The first time going through the process I only focused on one small section or 'bit' at a time, concentrating on playing-and-saying the verb/action as naturally and truthfully as I could. I repeated this initial step at least three times just to become comfortable with the process. If a transitive verb felt incorrect, I selected another verb.
2. Then I put my score down and repeated playing the actions without the aid of my book, not specifically focusing on memory but rather on understanding the context of the scene.
3. Next, I referred to my score and played the action again but with the aid of my book, to see what I might have missed, forgotten or misunderstood.
4. Then I repeated this process several times, each time adding an extra 'bit' until the scene was completed. I did this with my score in hand (or not if I had the scene memorised). Having explored the process in smaller sections was very helpful, but this step was particularly beneficial to get a feeling of the whole.
5. I then repeated any section that I felt was imprecise, and if any transitive verb needed to be changed, I tried a few different options.

### **Step two: Play the action and say the text**

I repeated the above process, but while playing the action and *speaking* the text.

1. I focused on one 'bit' at a time, concentrating on saying the text and playing the action as naturally and truthfully as possible, with my score in hand.
2. Then I put my score down and repeated the process, again not focusing on memorisation, but on the understanding of the motivations behind the text.
3. Then I repeated it again but referred once again to my score to see what I might have missed.

4. I repeated this process several times, each time adding an extra 'bit' until the scene was completed. I did this with my score in hand initially, and later on without when I had memorised the scene.
5. I then repeated any 'bit' that needed to be reworked.

### **Step three: Play the action and sing the text**

I repeated the same process once again but this time playing the action and *singing* the text.

1. I focused on one 'bit' at a time, concentrating on singing the text and playing the action as truthfully as possible, with my score in hand.
2. I put down my score and repeated the process. Again I did not focus on memorisation, but rather on understanding the motivations behind the lyrics.
3. I then repeated it, once again referring to my score to see what I might have missed.
4. I repeated this process, each time adding an extra 'bit' until the scene was completed. Initially, I did this with my score in hand, and then without it when I memorised the scene.

I practiced each step individually until I could work through a whole scene/act at a time.

Rehearsing and applying Actioning was a significant shift in my character preparation. As mentioned previously, I initially divided this process over three days. On Day One I worked only on the transitive verbs of one scene. On Day Two, I repeated step one and then repeated the process, saying the text and playing the action. On Day Three, I went through the previous two steps again and then went through the process while playing the action and singing the music/text. The reason I split it over several days initially was to give myself time to try the process thoroughly and in detail, without rushing through any stage.

I repeated this whole process several times over. The first scenes I worked on were *Hannibal*, the first manager's office scene, *Prima Donna* and *Il Muto*, as

they include Carlotta's most substantial singing. I later worked on the second manager's office scene, the Don Juan Rehearsal and *Don Juan Triumphant*. In addition, I also split all of Carlotta's singing scenes from her spoken scenes.

My first observation of Actioning was that it felt rather clumsy and artificial. This initial discomfort was likely due to my lack of familiarity with the rehearsal technique at this early stage in my research process. Therefore I made the decision to repeat the first step as many times as needed to feel more secure with the process. Repeating the first step of the Actioning process provided me with more confidence in the process and less inhibition, which made way for a greater understanding of how I could translate and apply the Actioning process to an operatic text.

I further made the observation that Actioning is very much limited by the singer-actor/actor's knowledge of transitive verbs. From my perspective, I found that the more I worked on my vocabulary, the easier it became and the more variance and depth I could work into my characterisation of Carlotta. To help with building a transitive verb vocabulary, I would strongly recommend the app *Actions: The Actor's Thesaurus* by Marina Caldarone and Maggie Lloyd-Williams, available for iOS devices.<sup>38</sup> Alternatively, it is also possible to consult a standard thesaurus. The larger and more sophisticated the singer-actor/actor's vocabulary is, the more effective and beneficial this technique will be as part of their dramatic character preparation. On the other hand, if the vocabulary is limited then the results will be equally limited. For example, consider one of Carlotta's most iconic lines, "Your part is silent, little toad" (Act 1, *Il Muto*): The Phantom has interrupted the performance of *Il Muto*, and Christine breaks character and speaks, even though her role is mute. Hearing this, Carlotta says to Christine:

a. Your part is silent                      *I REPRIMAND*

Carlotta clearly believes that Christine wants to take her place in the opera company and blames her for all of the Phantom-related events. I selected /

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<sup>38</sup> FirstyWork.

*REPRIMAND* as the transitive verb because that is what Carlotta is specifically doing to Christine: she is reprimanding her for breaking character and speaking. With a poorer vocabulary, I might have selected a transitive verb such as *I ATTACK* or *I BLAME*, but neither of these selections would be suitable for this line. *I ATTACK* is a much stronger verb which I would consider incorrect within this context as it implies physical confrontation and aggression. *Il Muto* is a live performance within the musical and Carlotta would always try to uphold her status and keep her temper under control in front of an audience. *I BLAME* would be a transitive verb that is too weak for this context, and more importantly, it expresses the subtext of the line, rather than the text itself. Although Carlotta blames Christine for all the Phantom's interferences at the opera house, that is her underlying thought beneath the action, not the action itself.

b. Little Toad

*I INSULT*

Although the transitive verb's purpose is to reflect what the character is doing with the text, not what the character is thinking in the subtext, the subtext still provides an essential wealth of information for the singer-actor/actor. I selected *I INSULT* as the transitive verb for "Little Toad" because, in my interpretation, that is what Carlotta is doing with the text: she is insulting Christine. Even though Carlotta treats Christine with disdain and contempt, and certainly believes herself to be superior, I would not use *I SNUB*, or *I DENIGRATE* because both these action words focus on what Carlotta is thinking rather than what she is doing. Also, I would not select *I MOCK*, or *I RIDICULE* because both verb choices are too weak and imply jest. Similarly, Carlotta's objective is to regain control over this performance of *Il Muto*. Therefore, *I ABUSE* or *I AFFRONT* would be too strong as they would display too much aggression towards Christine and make her far less likely to resume her role in the performance.

It should be noted that there are always multiple options in choosing transitive verbs as part of the Actioning process. Essentially, the singer-actor/actor selects verbs which reflect and comprise their personal interpretation of the text and

the character. Therefore it is important for the singer-actor/actor to have completed the necessary background research on the work and character to be clear about both their Actioning verbs as well as their character's intentions that drive them. Naturally, a more abundant vocabulary will result in more detailed and nuanced Actioning choices.

In my own experience, the most difficult aspect of the second step in the Actioning process was not to become overly focused on memorisation. There can be a lot of pressure for the singer-actor to memorise their role quickly, but for the purpose of this exercise, it was important not to dwell on it. Personally, I found it difficult not to use my score for this step. It became easier with practice, however, and I found it beneficial to focus on meaning and motive rather than memorisation.

Once I became more familiar with the Actioning process, it became very beneficial in that I could focus on Carlotta as a character and what she specifically does in each scene without having to worry about becoming vocally fatigued, as I was just speaking the text. Overall, I believe it also helped me with Carlotta's inflection of speech as well as my memorisation of the role. Additionally, since Carlotta is Italian, it gave me the chance to play and experiment with her accent, not specifically focusing on "doing an accent" but focusing on what she is doing on stage, *with* an Italian accent.

Initially, I was very nervous about how step three of the Actioning process would affect my singing voice. This was the most difficult of the three steps, especially when I tried it without having the music and words memorised. Once I had the music and text memorised, it became significantly easier. It is important to note that this step is challenging unless the singer is comfortable with the role from a vocal perspective. They could also approach this step by marking; for example, in the case of Carlotta, I could have sung many of her lines down the octave. I included the third step in this process only once I was technically comfortable with the music to work physically at the same time. I found it very difficult to

focus on the singing, the lyrics, and the physical action while also holding and referring to the score.

While applying step three, I made careful observations on how Actioning affected my voice. This showed me how beneficial it was to split the overall process into easily manageable steps. In regard to singing, while playing the action, having given myself the opportunity to become used to the Actioning process in the previous two steps, it did not feel stressful on my voice, as long as I knew the music by memory. In addition, as the focus of Actioning is on the character's task, on the 'doing' rather than feeling, it avoided any of the vocal tension I was initially apprehensive about.

The following is an example of my transitive verb choices for Carlotta, taken from my application of Actioning on her full role in my creative journal. If I tested out more than one verb choice, it has been indicated, and my final choice is underlined. Once I selected my transitive verb, I continued it into a full sentence, showing the context of the scene. As Alfreds states: "I find it more helpful if the actors flesh out their active verbs with complete sentences. If they use the verb alone...without any context they will feel a little starved of nourishment".<sup>39</sup>

**Example 2: Transitive verbs for Carlotta. Lloyd Webber, *Phantom*, Act 1, Scene 7, "Il Muto", bars 22-68b**

Lyrics	Transitive verb options	Full sentence with motivational purpose
<b><i>Il Muto</i></b>		
<i>(As Countess)</i>		
Serafimo, your disguise is perfect.	1. <u>I APPROVE</u>	<u>I APPROVE</u> of your disguise.
Why? Who can this be?	1. <u>I QUESTION</u> 2. I PROBE	<u>I QUESTION</u> you because I want to know who is knocking at the door.

<sup>39</sup> Alfreds, p. 136.



(aside) The old fool is leaving!	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>I INSULT</i></li> <li>2. <i><u>I PATRONISE</u></i></li> <li>3. <i>I MOCK</i></li> </ol>	<i><u>I PATRONISE</u> my husband because he is a fool and I want him to leave.</i>
Serafimo away with this pretense!	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i><u>I INSIST that</u></i></li> </ol>	<i><u>I INSIST that</u> you take off your disguise.</i>
You cannot speak,	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i><u>I SILENCE</u></i></li> </ol>	<i><u>I SILENCE</u> you to remind you that you cannot speak.</i>
But kiss me in my husband's absence!	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i><u>I FLIRT with</u></i></li> <li>2. <i>I ATTRACT</i></li> <li>3. <i>I INSIST</i></li> </ol>	<i>I FLIRT with you so that you will kiss me.</i>
Poor fool, he makes me laugh! Haha, Haha! etc.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i><u>I DELIGHT</u></i></li> <li>2. <i>I CAPTIVATE</i></li> <li>3. <i>I ENCHANT</i></li> </ol>	<i><u>I DELIGHT the</u> confidantes and Serafimo with my humorous anecdote.</i>
Time I tried to get a better, better half!	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i><u>I RIDICULE</u></i></li> <li>2. <i>I MOCK</i></li> <li>3. <i>I INSULT</i></li> </ol>	<i><u>I RIDICULE</u> my marriage because I want a better relationship.</i>
Hahaha! Hahaha!	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>I ENAMOUR</i></li> <li>2. <i>I CAPTIVATE</i></li> <li>3. <i><u>I CHARM</u></i></li> </ol>	<i>I ENAMOUR you (Seraphimo) by singing for you.</i>
If he knew the truth he'd never ever go!	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i><u>I MOCK</u></i></li> <li>2. <i>I SHAME</i></li> </ol>	<i><u>I MOCK</u> my husband and our marriage.</i>
(As Carlotta) Your part is silent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>I ACCUSE</i></li> <li>2. <i><u>I REPRIMAND</u></i></li> <li>3. <i>I BLAME</i></li> </ol>	<i>I REPRIMAND you (Christine) because you have spoken when your role is mute and because this is your fault.</i>
Little toad!	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i><u>I INSULT</u></i></li> <li>2. <i>I DEGRADE</i></li> </ol>	<i>I INSULT I insult you because I resent you.</i>

Maestro, da capo per favore	1. <u>I INSTRUCT</u>	<i>I INSTRUCT</i> you (Maestro) to return to the da capo and begin this section of the scene again.
(As the COUNTESS)		
Serafimo, away with this pretense!	1. <u>I COMMAND</u> 2. <i>I INSTRUCT</i>	<i>I COMMAND</i> you (Christine) because I want you to listen to me.
You cannot speak, But kiss me in my ... *croak*	1. <u>I THREATEN</u>  1. <u>I CHOKE</u> 2. <i>I FREEZE</i>	<i>I THREATEN</i> you to dare speak again.  <i>I CHOKE</i> and my voice cracks like a frog.
Poor fool, he makes me laugh.. ha ...ha	1. <u>I UNNERVE</u> 2. <i>I PETRIFY</i> 3. <i>I FRIGHTEN</i>	<i>I UNNERVE</i> you and myself because I do not understand what has just happened but I try to re-establish the performance.
*Croak, croak, croak, croak, croak, croak*	1. <u>I CHOKE</u> 2. <i>I SHOCK</i> 3. <i>I HORRIFY</i>	<u>I CHOKE</u> again, and my voice keeps cracking and croaking like a frog.
Non posso pi —. I cannot. I cannot go on.	1. <u>I PANIC</u> 2. <i>I UPSET</i> 3. <i>I HORRIFY</i>	<i>I PANIC</i> you (the company) and myself because I cannot complete the performance.

Using the Actioning process provided me with various insights into Carlotta's physicalisation, her natural energy and body language. Therefore, it was essential to reassess my physical preparation of Carlotta from both a physical, intellectual and emotional context, as all three aspects of her character are interdependent and should be integrated.

Carlotta moves through life with exact, constant but swift determination. She is her own authority, and she does not like being told what to do. She is critical of herself, and of others, she demands perfection and expects the best from everyone in the company. When the best is not produced, she becomes increasingly frustrated and challenges the problem reactively. Carlotta cannot fake her feelings, whether they are positive or negative. In this musical, she is mostly in a negative state; she lets her anger build up and when provoked will go into a “protective” mode.

While Carlotta can be very precise in her actions, she also pushes forward with intensity, particularly when she is angry. When she is happy, on the other hand, she is exact, calm and collected. She likes things to be precise, consistent, perfect and correct. Her place in the musical is to contrast with Christine’s younger, naïve, youthful and soft energy. Her primary motive is to retain structure in her life and keep her career on track. When she is pushed to her limits, she becomes volatile and not afraid to speak (or scream) her mind. However, this only occurs when she has been pushed too far. For example, in her first dialogue in *Hannibal* she specifically says that these unexplained phenomena have been happening for three years, but evidently this is the first time she has lost her temper to this extent. Her rage, anguish and fearfulness have been building up for three years; she is not yelling from anger, but from fear and exhaustion.

Carlotta does not grant authority to anyone else in the musical. She would only accept someone’s authority if she perceived them as trustworthy. When the Phantom tries to assert authority over her, she becomes resistant to his attempts, and she does not welcome his ideas about her place in the company. Carlotta demands perfection, and to her, Christine is not perfection; she knows herself to be the better singer. Carlotta does not like to be put on the spot, especially not by the Phantom, but when she chooses to be in the limelight, she is very adept at influencing others. For example, in the first Manager’s Office Scene, the whole ensemble is talking about Christine performing the title role in *Il Muto*, and within a page of music, Carlotta manages to convince them that she should be singing that role instead. However, she never directly states that she

should be playing this role, but instead she points out the farcical nature of the situation.

Carlotta's communicative style is direct and precise. She values loyalty, respect, reliability and professionalism. Many of the qualities which she values most are challenged within the musical, which makes her irritable, stubborn, confrontational and explosive. Deep down she has a very soft-hearted disposition, which is evident when Piangi is murdered. She only reveals her innermost thoughts and feelings in extreme circumstances.

Carlotta's natural energy is also expressed through her body language. Following the Actioning process, I identified how she walks, stands, sits and gestures, as well as the quality of her voice and her use of language.

**Walking:** Carlotta walks in a very formal, upright manner, with a quick, determined and direct movement.

**Sitting/Standing/Gesture:** She sits very upright, formal, with straight posture, both feet on the ground, and hands folded. Her posture while sitting or standing is very poised, erect and structured in movement, with what could be said to be perfect posture. Carlotta talks with her hands and is very expressive with her upper body in general, particularly her arms and face.

**Voice/Language:** Carlotta speaks with a strong Italian accent, and her voice is clean and clear. Her choice of words is clear and direct, she says it how it is, and there is no grey zone in Carlotta's choice of language. She also repeats her words often, using many different inflections to indicate how much she is feeling. She uses volume to be heard.

From a positive perspective, Carlotta's energy creates an atmosphere of reliability, stability and clarity. Even considering her temperamental outbursts, the company does want her to stay on as Prima Donna. Although they also clearly adore Christine and her performances, for some reason they keep Carlotta in the company and actively work to give her back her Prima Donna

position. Perhaps it is because she provides them with a sense of stability within their productions.

It is important to consider how Carlotta's physicality develops throughout the musical. Initially, she is the leading soprano of the opera house, which is reflected in her vocal range and costume. As the musical progresses, her costume reduces in size and her vocal range also diminishes, so that she will no longer stand out as the Prima Donna. Once Piangi has been murdered, Carlotta disappears; when he dies, she metaphorically dies too. There is no culmination of her story, but instead, she disappears into his story. She is also the only leading role who has no specified finish, with no closure.

#### **4.2.4 Reflection**

I was cast as Carlotta in March 2014, set to begin rehearsals in mid-May. This role provided an ideal experimentation platform for testing the efficacy of Actioning within my Stanislavsky-influenced dramatic character preparation process. Some of these reasons include: having a limited time to learn and rehearse the score; playing an operatic character with vocally demanding music; working within a semi-professional setting;<sup>40</sup> and being in a fully staged production environment. In addition, this was the first musical theatre production I was involved with and therefore provided some interesting learning curves such as amplified singing, the combination of vocal genres/timbres and choreography.

The addition of Actioning was the most significant change to my dramatic character development process. I began the Actioning process while I was learning the role and before we commenced our first staging rehearsals. Initially, in my own practice, Actioning felt rather awkward, and it took a little while to feel confident in practicing this technique. Initially, I found that it was much easier to rehearse the physical aspect of a character when I separated it from my vocal rehearsal time. That way I did not feel like I "should be singing", or have

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<sup>40</sup> Although the New Plymouth Operatic Society is an amateur company, the production team and lead roles were all professionals.

“performer’s guilt” so to speak. As most of Carlotta’s scenes move very quickly dramatically, it was very helpful to go through the Actioning process without singing initially, as it gave me far more freedom to experiment with her actions, her motivations and how they, in turn, affected her feelings.

I continued using Actioning in my own practice time during our company rehearsal period, and I found that it benefitted our staging rehearsals. While the other actors were not specifically using Actioning, my preparation allowed me to try different things and assess how my colleagues and the director responded. In addition, I found that it instigated a response from the other singer-actors while rehearsing as well. Sometimes these responses meant that I needed to change my chosen action, which then, in turn, opened my eyes to another possibility.

Furthermore, our director was inspired by the work of Meisner, and therefore we rehearsed our scenes with much repetition. Initially, I had wondered if his approach might interfere with my own Stanislavskian and Actioning based approach, but I found that they were rather complementary, as both perspectives focus on *doing*. For example, Actioning focuses on forward momentum: playing the action onto your colleague is designed to cause reactions, and one of the main areas of Meisner’s work and repetition training exercises aims at placing your own focus solely on the other actor. In other words, rather than placing your attention on internal aspects, such as memories or emotions, the actors place their attention solely on each other, creating a space where each actor can and will affect the other.<sup>41</sup> In regard to his repetition training exercises, Meisner followed two basic principles. The first: “*Don’t do anything until something happens to make you do it*”,<sup>42</sup> and the second: “*What you do doesn’t depend upon you; it depends on the other fellow.*”<sup>43</sup> Meisner asserted that repetition leads to impulses, as “it is not intellectual. It is emotional and impulsive, and *gradually* when the actors I train improvise, what they say [...]

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<sup>41</sup> Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell, *Sanford Meisner on Acting* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), pp. 38–43.

<sup>42</sup> Meisner and Longwell, p. 34. Original emphasis.

<sup>43</sup> Meisner and Longwell, p. 34. Original emphasis.

comes not from the head but truthfully from the impulses.”<sup>44</sup> Although we did not use Meisner’s specific repetition exercises in rehearsals, we did use aspects of the repetition techniques for our scene rehearsals. We were directed to always have our focus on each other, what we were doing in the moment and that each gesture, movement or reaction must be an authentic and instinctive response fuelled by our emotional impulses created truthfully, not intellectually. Although Actioning begins as an analytical and intellectual process whereby the singer-actor selects specific transitive verbs that encapsulate each phrase or thought, it is in fact also a process that teaches the singer-actor to think physically and requires them to “[connect] thought and feeling to physical gesture and response”.<sup>45</sup> In addition, as Moseley notes, it is only possible to react impulsively and truthfully if the actor has set clear intentions.<sup>46</sup> I found that Actioning, in addition to Stanislavsky’s Fundamental Questions, provided me with a practical and straightforward process through which I could clearly establish my intentions, but still have the flexibility to be impulsive, reactive and present within each moment.

In this context, my own dramatic preparation, and particularly Actioning, gave me the freedom to be more physically expressive and adaptable. While these were not significant dramatic changes, they allowed me to be more nuanced, open to more possibilities and (fascinatingly) much more aware of my colleague’s physical actions. As previously mentioned, my colleagues were not specifically using Actioning in their preparation processes (to my knowledge), but even so, I became increasingly more aware of the dramatic choices they were making and what they were trying to achieve with these choices. In addition, as a side effect, it made the company rehearsal process far less about “what am I as Carlotta doing on the inside” than “what am I doing physically, why am I doing it, what are the others doing and how does this affect each other”. Rather than being purely focused on what I was doing, and how situations affected my character on stage, I became much more focused on what the others were doing,

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<sup>44</sup> Meisner and Longwell, pp. 36–37.

<sup>45</sup> Moseley, *Actioning*, location 2403.

<sup>46</sup> Moseley, *Actioning*, location 1072.

how my actions affected them, how the situation affected them and how it correlated to my character. All in all, it made me a significantly more observant singer-actor during the rehearsal period.

In addition, I found that Actioning evoked components of Flow. As I explained in Chapter Two, a Flow state in musicians and actors in performance has been well-established. However, during this Case Study I found that Actioning allowed me to access a Flow state within my preparation process. Csikszentmihalyi describes aspects of Flow to include high levels of concentration, focused attention and following clear goals of significant interest. Actioning provided me with a physical, active way to set Carlotta's goals (transitive verbs) for each phrase and thought. This allowed me to place myself within Carlotta's reality (Given Circumstances), making her goals my goals and therefore enhancing a Flow State. In addition to giving me clear and concise goals, Actioning also gave me the ability to check my progress towards those goals. As it is a physical exercise, it was easy to determine if I was using the correct transitive verb or not, or if there was an issue in how I was playing each transitive verb. I also noticed that while rehearsing Actioning, my sense of time became distorted, as time would rush by and I was able to focus without noticing distractions.

Overall the production was very well received by the general public and various critics, with several splendid reviews published in local and national media. This production had a twenty-show season, with five to six performances per week for four weeks.<sup>47</sup>

I found that my character preparation did not stop during rehearsals or throughout the performance season. Every performance required preparation, but also during every show, there was something new that I learned about Carlotta. As we had many performances throughout a month-long season, I was aware of the necessity of remaining reliable on stage yet not predictable in my characterisation of Carlotta. In other words, it was important to perform each show *as if* it was the first performance, focusing on my actions and reacting as

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<sup>47</sup> See Appendix 3: Review Excerpts.



authentically as possible to my colleagues. Although it might have been the tenth or twentieth performance for the cast, for the audience each show is the first time they have seen the production it is therefore a new experience.

When I played the role of Carmen, I had the luxury of time to thoroughly “unpack” the role analytically and then physically construct it step by step. Knowing that the extensive time frame I had to prepare the role of Carmen was a luxury rather than a commodity, I realised I would need to find a way to make the physical preparation a faster process. Including Actioning allowed me to speed up the physical preparation process by letting me immediately focus on Carlotta’s motivations and *how* to physically play them. It switched my thought pattern from the theoretical possibilities I discovered during my literary analysis to the reality of physicalisation. It took me from thinking to doing within my preparation process.

### **4.3 Applied Case Study Three: Carlotta (2016)**

The third Case Study presents my preparation of Carlotta for the 2016 production of *Phantom*, with the Amici Trust and Amici Productions, directed by Grant Meese and performed at the Civic Theatre in Auckland (NZ) in February-March 2016. This Case Study provided the opportunity to test my dramatic character preparation process and the efficacy of Actioning on the same role but within a different performance context. As this was the second time I prepared this role, much of the background information remained the same. Therefore, for the sake of clarity and to avoid repetition, those details will not be reiterated throughout this Case Study. Instead, I focus on the areas where I made different creative and characterisation decisions, particularly in how I approached and developed Actioning.

#### **4.3.1 Character/Role**

I auditioned for the role of Carlotta in the Auckland season of *Phantom* in September 2015. Rehearsals for this role began in early November and ran until mid-December, and commenced again at the start of January until we opened on February 11, 2015.

Although I had sung the role before, it was essential that I addressed the music as if it was a new role to ensure proper vocal technique, and give myself sufficient time to condition my voice to this music again. I followed the same music learning process as I did in Case Studies One and Two.

#### **4.3.2 Analysis**

For the initial analysis and development part of my preparation process, I reviewed and revised my previous notes on Carlotta from 2014. Next, I especially focused on my 2014 answers to the Fundamental Questions *Who?*, *Where?* and *When?* as a means to allow me to place myself back into Carlotta's situation.

### 4.3.3 Development

Next, I began the psychophysical development of Carlotta through Imagination and action. The Imagination is sparked through the Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?*, and *How?* is addressed through Actioning. Although I still agreed with my answers to these questions from 2014, I had a few additional insights during my preparation for this production. One of my specific aims within this production, for example, was to identify Carlotta's insecurities and vulnerabilities.

#### **Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?***

First, I set my provisional Supertask as: "I, Carlotta, am the leading soprano of the Paris Opéra and I need to retain my position".

The following table provides a sample of this process taken from my informal creative journal I kept throughout this production.

**Table 7: Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?***

*Why do I express so much hatred and anger towards Raoul? I am angry at him because I believe he is behind these mysterious happenings and that he sent me the letter saying "Your days at the Opera Populaire are numbered, Christine Daaé will be singing on your behalf tonight. Be prepared for a great misfortune, should you attempt to take her place". The letter was not signed, and his relationship with Christine has become public knowledge. For what purpose do I confront and accuse Raoul? I confront and accuse him because I am afraid I will lose my position in the opera house, I am convinced that he wants Christine to replace me as the Prima Donna. He represents everything I hate, someone who believes money can buy them everything, I have no respect for either himself or Christine. To me, Christine has bought her career through the interests of a wealthy patron; she has not worked for it.*

*Why am I so reactive throughout this musical? I am so reactive because I am afraid, I am uncertain, I feel unwanted, underappreciated and that the ousting of my position in the company is completely unwarranted and unjustified. For what purpose am I so reactive? I am reactive because I am afraid I will lose my position, I am reactive because I am nervous and anxious that I will be replaced at the height of my career. I am angry, frustrated and upset. I know Christine is talented, but I do not believe she deserves the acclaim she is receiving. While I taunt and say she cannot sing, I know she can sing, my problem is not*

*with the quality of her voice, my problem is that she is getting this career break because of the Phantom and Raoul's romantic interests in her. I do not believe she has worked for her career; she has just been receiving singing lessons. Previous to my exit during Hannibal she had never even auditioned or expressed any interest in singing for the opera company. In another way, I pity Christine, I know she is not suitable to this career, she is weak and vulnerable, which is confirmed during the Act 2 manager's scene when she says she cannot perform, to trap the Phantom.*

*Why do I storm out during the Hannibal rehearsal? I storm out because I am completely fed up with these mysterious accidents that keep happening, and I do not want to perform under these conditions. For what purpose do I storm out? I storm out because I believe the managers will come to beg me to perform, since Hannibal is a new production, and I am the only one who knows the role. I did not, however, foresee Christine knowing the role and singing the remainder of the season. This becomes the major underlying cause of my anger, in one way I blame myself for being so stubborn. If I had not stormed out, Christine would never have sung the production of Hannibal. While the audience knows it is the Phantom's doing, not Carlotta's, I as Carlotta am not aware of that, so I blame myself. This one event colours her attitude towards Christine for the remainder of the production.*

### **Fundamental Question *How?* and Actioning**

For the next stage of my dramatic preparation process, I address the Fundamental Question *How?* through the use of Actioning. During Case Study Two on Carlotta, I found that Actioning was a valuable preparation technique, particularly since it bridged the gap between my analytical and practical character preparation. It particularly helped me to clearly define each of Carlotta's motivational choices, leading me to a more expressive and authentic understanding of the role. Therefore, I found that there was specific value in using this process again and assessing if it could be developed further to assist the dramatic preparation of the singer-actor.

Before recommencing the Actioning process again, I read my notes from 2014, and began with my previously finalised action verbs. While the majority of my verbs still worked, there were a few instances where I changed my transitive verb. There was one significant development within my Actioning process in 2015/2016, which was the addition of adverbs to colour my transitive verb

choices. This is a modification on Actioning originally suggested by Anderson, as referred to by Merlin, and although it is only mentioned momentarily, it struck me as an addition that could contain a significant amount of value for dramatic preparation. Therefore, I made the decision to include it in my experiment.

### **My Actioning Process with adverbs**

I added three steps to the Actioning process outlined in my previous Case Study on Carlotta.<sup>48</sup> Steps Four to Six outline the process of Actioning with the addition of adverbs. In all cases, my strategy was to work one bit at a time, gradually adding each next bit until the scene was completed and repeating them as necessary.

#### **Step Four:**

1. Play-and-say action with adverb text-in-hand;
2. Play-and-say action with without text-in-hand;
3. Play-and-say action with an adverb with text-in-hand.

#### **Step Five:**

1. Play action with an adverb and speak text with text-in-hand;
2. Play action with an adverb and speak text without text-in-hand;
3. Play action with an adverb and speak text with text-in-hand.

#### **Step Six:**

1. Play action with an adverb and sing text with text-in-hand;
2. Play action with an adverb and sing without text-in-hand;
3. Play action with an adverb and sing text with text-in-hand.

As in 2014, I initially split this process over several days to ensure that I completed the process slowly and accurately. I used Actioning for my initial

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<sup>48</sup> See Chapter Four, 4.2.3 Development.

dramatic preparation in my practice studio; I repeated sections of this process throughout the rehearsals and the production season.

The addition of adverbs to influence the transitive verb added another level of character growth and possibilities. As I did not need to focus specifically on learning and memorising the role while preparing Carlotta for a second production season, it became an ideal opportunity to experiment, test and work on my characterisation from another perspective. Instead of working predominantly on memorisation and Carlotta's motivations (Actioning), I was able to focus more specifically on the colours and shades of her motivations (Actioning plus adverbs). I went through the Actioning with the adverb process several times, experimenting with different adverbs to assess their effect.

Usually, I interchanged two adverbs, as indicated in the table. Adding the adverb to the Actioning process gave me the opportunity to deconstruct Carlotta and her subtextual analysis in a physical and practical way. As I had played the role before, there may have been the temptation to play her the same way again. As there were many different physical, spatial and personal variances, however, such as the different direction, cast, much larger stage and so forth, this adaptation of Actioning was a very useful and practical way to reinvigorate my dramatic interpretation of Carlotta.

Actioning as a rehearsal technique encourages continuous growth and process within dramatic character development. While I used this technique primarily within my initial preparation, I also reused it once our director had blocked each scene, so that I could work out my actions within the actual blocking. Using it as a technique within my own preparation while we were already in the rehearsal period gave me the opportunity to see how it would affect my colleagues in rehearsals, particularly whether I could spark different reactions from them. For example, Carlotta is an outraged and temperamental character who has unpredictable mood swings; so testing different transitive verbs as the action I would play, allowed me to experiment with her reactive nature, and added an element of surprise. Actioning provides the singer-actor with the opportunity to open up to different subtextual possibilities, depending entirely on the objective

of the character. Carlotta screams and yells a lot throughout the process of this musical, but the reasons why she is screaming can be very different, even in the same line. For example, in 2014 for the line “O, sventurata!” (*Oh wretched!*), my transitive action for that was “*I ACCUSE* you” because I am accusing the theatre managers of not being on my side. In 2016, on the other hand, my transitive verb for the same line in the score was “*I BULLY* you” at M. André, one of the theatre managers. In 2014 I sang the line, and in 2016 I screamed it in his face. Although it is the same line of text, the subtextual colour was completely different. In 2016 I also used the added adverbs of “I bully you aggressively”, and “I bully you firmly”, both of which again achieved a different colour.

The following table provides a sample of this process taken from the creative journal I kept throughout this production.

**Example 3: Transitive verbs for Carlotta. Lloyd Webber, *Phantom*, Act 1, Scene 6, "The Manager's Office", bars 76-140**

<b>Lyrics</b>	<b><i>Transitive verb</i></b>	<b><i>Transitive verb with adverb options</i></b>	<b><i>Full sentence with motivational purpose</i></b>
<b>Manager's Office scene</b>			
Where is he? Your precious patron - where is he?	<i>I SEARCH</i>	<i>I SEARCH urgently</i> <i>I SEARCH purposefully</i>	<i>I SEARCH</i> urgently for Raoul.
I have your letter – a letter which I rather resent!	<i>I ACCUSE</i>	<i>I ACCUSE directly</i> <i>I ACCUSE strongly</i>	<i>I ACCUSE</i> you (Raoul) directly because you sent me this letter.
You didn't send it?	<i>I INTERROGATE</i>	<i>I INTERROGATE aggressively</i> <i>I INTERROGATE specifically</i>	<i>I INTERROGATE</i> you aggressively because I believe you are lying to me.
You dare to tell me, that this is	<i>I QUESTION</i>	<i>I QUESTION purposefully</i> <i>I QUESTION loudly</i>	<i>I QUESTION</i> you purposefully because I

not the letter you sent?!			<i>do not believe you are telling me the truth.</i>
Will she sing?	<i>I QUESTION</i>	<i>I QUESTION hastily</i>	<i>I QUESTION</i> everyone anxiously because I do not want Christine to sing.
Will she sing?		<i>I QUESTION anxiously</i>	
Let me see it!	<i>I INSIST on</i>	<i>I INSIST firmly</i> <i>I INSIST anxiously</i>	<i>I INSIST</i> to you (Giry) firmly that I must see this letter.
Christine! It's all a ploy to help Christine!	<i>I PROVOKE</i>	<i>I PROVOKE specifically</i> <i>I PROVOKE loudly</i>	<i>I PROVOKE</i> you (the managers and Raoul) specifically because I am tired of these letters saying Christine must perform.
I know who sent this: The Vicomte – her lover!	<i>I ACCUSE</i>	<i>I ACCUSE purposefully</i> <i>I ACCUSE specifically</i>	<i>I ACCUSE</i> you (Raoul) specifically because I know you have sent this letter.
O traditori! O mentitori! ( <i>Oh traitors! Oh Liars!</i> )	<u><i>I ACCUSE</i></u>	<i>I ACCUSE strongly</i> <i>I ACCUSE loudly</i>	<i>I ACCUSE</i> you (the managers) strongly because they should be standing up to him and fixing this situation in my favour.
It's useless trying to appease me!	<u><i>I INFORM</i></u>	<i>I INFORM firmly</i> <i>I INFORM fully</i>	<i>I INFORM</i> you firmly that you will not be able to calm me down.



You're only saying this to please me!	<u>I ACCUSE</u>	<i>I ACCUSE desperately</i> <i>I ACCUSE dramatically</i>	<i>I ACCUSE</i> you of not taking me seriously and just telling me what you think I would like to hear.
Signori vero non, non, non voglio 'udire! (Gentlemen truthfully I do not want to hear it!)	<i>I REJECT</i>	<i>I REJECT dramatically</i> <i>I REJECT passionately</i>	<i>I REJECT</i> you dramatically because I do not believe you.
Lasciatemi morire! O padre mio! Dio! (Let me die! Oh father, my God!)	<u>I DECLARE to</u>	<i>I DECLARE intensely</i> <i>I DECLARE dramatically</i>	<i>I DECLARE to you</i> dramatically that I want to die.
(to MANAGERS) You have reviled me! You have rebuked me! You have replaced me!	<i>I ACCUSE</i>	<i>I ACCUSE specifically</i> <i>I ACCUSE shockingly</i>	<i>I ACCUSE</i> you specifically of these audacious facts.
Abbandonata! (Abandoned!)	<i>I ATTACK</i>	<i>I ATTACK hurtfully</i> <i>I ATTACK specifically</i>	<i>I ATTACK</i> you (Firmin) specifically because you have abandoned me.
Deseredata! (Deserted) O, sventurata! (Oh wretched!) Abbandonata! (Abandoned!)	<i>I BLAME</i>	<i>I BLAME specifically</i> <i>I BLAME dramatically</i>	<i>I BLAME</i> you (the managers) specifically because you have deserted, abandoned and disgraced me and I want you to know

Disgraziata! (Disgraced!)			how I upset I am so that I will get my way.
Non vo' cantar! (I will not sing!)	I REFUSE	I REFUSE firmly I REFUSE loudly	I firmly REFUSE to sing for you.

The inclusion of adverbs yielded new insights and observations into Carlotta's physicalisation. My first new insight was that this Carlotta became significantly more accusatory and her temper increased in its active and reactive intensity. It is evident that while she typically would be very calm and collected, as noticeable at the beginning of the *Hannibal* rehearsal, as soon as she slips into a negative state, she completely loses her grounding and control. I also found that she became far more fear-driven, which mostly manifested itself in a nervous energy and explosive temper. Her explosive outbursts ensure that she is noticed, taken seriously and respected in some way or another. Her vocal presence when she is angry ensures that people must listen to her, no matter what she has to say. Carlotta wants to see results; she wants to get a reaction from the theatre managers and her temper achieves that. From a psychophysical perspective, her explosive nature is a manifestation of her fear of being replaced or forgotten. She needs to feel supported by the company, and she becomes so intensely wound up because she feels so passionately about her career.

Carlotta's natural energy is also expressed through her body language,<sup>49</sup> with some minor changes which came to light throughout this second preparation process. Some of the notable differences that emerged throughout the Actioning with adverbs process was that she walks with a firm tread; everyone can hear her coming, especially when she's angry. She speaks assertively, and in addition to using volume to be heard, the pitch of her speaking voice goes up and down depending her emotional state; it mimics her vocal music which also goes up and down depending on her emotional state.

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<sup>49</sup> See Chapter Four, 4.2.3 Development.

Adding adverbs to the Actioning process allowed me to colour each transitive verb, providing more depth and subtle detail to my dramatic character preparation process. Some further observations I made was that as the musical unfolds, Carlotta is usually and increasingly in a negative emotional state. She is often considered to be pushy, aggressive, bossy and abrupt. She is not considerate of other characters' feelings, especially when she she wishes to accomplish something and they are in her way. She feels that things must be done according to her expectations, and when that does not happen it is completely unacceptable to her.

I also discovered that from a positive perspective, Carlotta's energy does still create an element of reliability, particularly in her professional field. Even considering her temperamental outbursts, the opera company still wants to retain her as the Prima Donna. When she is on stage, where she is most authentic, she is radiant, with an abundance of confidence. She inspires others to believe in her, to value her talents and her ability to get the job done.

Carlotta is also a natural salesperson, she knows how to sell/brand herself, and bring in the buyer, so to speak. For example, in her first introduction with the new theatre managers, she instantaneously has Monsieur André eating out of her hand. Similarly, in the first Manager's Office scene, after much discussion over Christine, within a page of music she has the managers begging her to perform again. While she is not as cunning as Carmen, for example, Carlotta knows how to manipulate the men in the company (those of value to her) to let her sing. She knows exactly what to say and do (her emotional outbursts especially) to make them do what she wants.

Carlotta is an independent, assertive, sure, and accomplished character. She is decisive, deliberate and purposeful in all that she does. The events within the musical take her from the leading Prima Donna of the Opéra Populaire to being replaced by a member of the Corps de Ballet, to disappearing once Piangi dies. Although her role is often considered to be comic relief within the musical, from Carlotta's perspective, there is nothing comical about these circumstances.

#### 4.3.4 Reflection

Contrary to 2014, starting from the beginning of the rehearsal process with the full company was a very different experience because rather than “slotting in”, I was part of the initial creation. Additionally, the longer rehearsal period also provided more time to “unpack”, redevelop and reshape my interpretation of Carlotta. Naturally, some challenges came to light during the rehearsal process, indicating that I needed to rethink and reshape my interpretation of Carlotta. For instance, the stage for this production was significantly larger, which meant more travel distance within the blocking and made it necessary for Carlotta to move much more quickly.

One of the particular challenges I needed to address was my personal comparison between the completed production of 2014 and the new production in 2015/2016. This required a shift in my own thought pattern, as it was not reasonable to compare a finished product to one still being created. It is natural to want to pick up from where one left off, but in the case of doing a production again, with a completely different company and director, that is just not possible. There will be significant differences between interpretation, staging, and casting, and it should be viewed as a completely new show. Although I had previously experienced playing the same role in three separate productions as a student when I played the Narrator in *3 Franks* by New Zealand composer David Griffiths,<sup>50</sup> these differences were particularly noticeable in the *Phantom* productions. This may have been because of the shorter and more intensified rehearsal process of these productions, compared to student productions, and also the larger number of performances, meaning that I was predisposed to perform Carlotta in a specific way. Therefore, I found that I needed to “let go” of my 2014 Carlotta, and allow her to redevelop for this production. While I had been satisfied with my characterisation in 2014, it was not fair to myself as a performer to try to “recreate” her, as a recreation is never as good as the

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<sup>50</sup> I played the Narrator in *3 Franks* by New Zealand composer David Griffiths in three separate productions. I premiered the role in 2005 at The University of Waikato, directed by John Davies; I performed it in 2008 at the Opera Factory, directed by Carmel Carrol; and I performed it again in 2010 at The University of Waikato, directed by Kararaina Walker.

original. Instead, I decided to take a “clean slate” approach and let her develop within the parameters of the current production.

Some specific things I noticed during my preparation process and the company’s rehearsal period was how much more aggressive, explosive and temperamental my interpretation of Carlotta became. It is likely that this was a combined consequence of my use of Actioning with the adverbs, the director’s interpretation, and the increased stage space, meaning that I had to travel further and faster. On the other side of the spectrum, Carlotta also became significantly more vulnerable, losing control over emotions much more often especially after moments of injustice, and expressed much more neuroticism, particularly in relation to the supernatural occurrences at the Opéra.

For my dramatic preparation of Carlotta, I found that the Actioning was more effective in preparing this role for a second production season because I was more comfortable and experienced using this rehearsal technique than I had been in 2014. For example, it is easy to overplay or over-dramatise Carlotta; Actioning, with adverbs in particular, was specifically useful for her very energetic, active and emotional scenes and it allowed me to refine her. From a vocal perspective, there is also a danger of over-singing this role, of getting swept up in her escalating emotions (for example, trying “to sing angrily”), and although that is not possible, the attempt can put unnecessary pressure on the voice. Also, Actioning Carlotta with the addition of adverbs allowed me to make specific active and motivational choices, so that each scene had a clear physical and emotional through-line, resulting in far less temptation to over-sing.

Actioning provided me with a safe environment to experiment, play, try and take risks with my dramatic character development of Carlotta. I found that this technique encouraged me to move physically, and explore my interpretation of Carlotta actively. It confirmed that while character analysis can be a theoretical and analytical process, characterisation is a physical process, and both should be integrated.

I found again that Actioning allowed me to access a Flow state within my preparation process. In addition to my thoughts on this (as explained in Case Study Two), I found that Actioning increased my sense of control, because the transitive verbs with the addition of adverbs gave me a clear direction and a means by which I could measure my success and progress. I also found that it promoted less self-consciousness, as they required me to focus on playing the action (Carlotta's Inner motivations) externally onto another character, meaning that even in my private rehearsal, I was focused on my character and what she was doing, rather than on myself. In addition, it allowed for a merging of action and awareness, as I found myself completely and only involved within the Actioning process, rather than the awareness of the process. I specifically found this to be the case when I was working through the stages of the Actioning process when I was singing the text and playing the action. During this process, I found that my body and voice were engaged physically, and I felt relaxed and energetic at once.

Overall, the production was well received by the public, and my performance received positive attention from local and national critics. We performed five to seven performances per week for four weeks, a total of twenty-five performances.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See Appendix 3: Review Excerpts.

#### **4.5 Applied Case Study Four: Micaëla (2015/2016)**

This section presents my fourth and final applied Case Study on the role of Micaela, with particular focus on my dramatic preparation of her aria *Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante* as prepared for my Final DMA Recital on 23 October 2015. Unfortunately, the University accidentally deleted the recording of this recital, and therefore it was re-performed and re-recorded on 11 November 2016. This Case Study provided the opportunity to experience, test and compare the efficacy of Actioning between my previous full role preparations on Carmen and Carlotta, and my recital preparation of Micaëla. As recital singing is a fundamental, necessary and common aspect of a singer-actor's studies and career, it seemed like a natural progression which needed to be addressed within my research.

##### **4.5.1 Character/Role**

In early 2015 I began my repertoire selections and preparation for my Final DMA Recital. Initially, my intention was to prepare the role of Micaëla "as if" I would be playing the role in production and would sing both her major numbers within my recital: the duet with Don José "*Parle-moi de ma mère*" and her aria *Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante*. Unfortunately, it was not possible to find an available tenor to sing this duet with and therefore it was cut from the recital programme. Although I was not able to sing the duet in the recital, the focus of my preparation remained the same as my original intention. I learned and prepared the full role of Micaëla "as if" I would be playing the full role and I specifically prepared her aria for my Final DMA Recital.

##### **4.5.2 Analysis**

Next, I began the first stages of my character development by completing the necessary background research on Micaëla and using the first three Fundamental Questions *Who? Where? and When?* This first stage was particularly important as I had played the role of Carmen previously, and I needed to place myself

within the dramatic context of the opera once again, but this time as Micaëla. It was therefore crucial that I work extensively on the first three Fundamental Questions, changing the pronoun from “I, June” to “I, Micaëla”, beginning the necessary personalisation and personal identification process between myself as singer-actor and my character.

### **Background**

For an opera that is so widely covered in the literature, the character of Micaëla has received little analytical attention. She is usually discussed only in relation to either the character development of Carmen or Don José, or regarded as having little dramatic value. Few scholars discuss her scenes in detail or consider her to be more than a foil for Carmen. One such exception is Boris Goldovsky and Arthur Schoep, who discuss her aria and scenes at length.<sup>52</sup> McClary also discusses Micaëla, although her primary focus is the analysis of Carmen and Don José. She does, however, note that there are some discrepancies between the standard musical representation of a sentimental heroine and Bizet’s musical representation of Micaëla.<sup>53</sup>

From a performance perspective, Goldovsky and Schoep state that the role of Micaëla “is often unfairly denigrated because of its supposed sentimentality, but there is no reason to sing or act it in a sugary way”.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, international soprano Angela Gheorghiu comments on Micaëla’s resilience and further explains that “the aria and duet are rather difficult – *all* the music in *Carmen* is difficult”.<sup>55</sup> The singer-actor should consider each role as important and vital to the dramatic context.

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<sup>52</sup> Boris Goldovsky and Arthur Schoep, ‘Carmen - Georges Bizet’, in *Bringing Soprano Arias to Life* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2001), pp. 47–60.

<sup>53</sup> McClary, pp. 41, 47.

<sup>54</sup> Goldovsky and Schoep, p. 51.

<sup>55</sup> John Allison, ‘Angela’s Way’, *Opera News*, 61.13 (1997), 24–27  
<<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rih&AN=1997-09637&site=ehost-live>> [accessed 26 March 2015].



### Character background

Micaëla does not feature in Mérimée's novella; her character was added to the opera by librettists Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy as a foil to Carmen. She is said to be the voice and stock character of the Opéra-Comique, representing the idealistic traditional nineteenth-century woman as opposed to the scandalous gypsy. She is a contrast to Carmen; externally Micaëla appears to be graceful, young, innocent, devoted and faithful. She is chaste, modest, loyal and the guardian of ancestral values.<sup>56</sup> Not only is she Carmen's opposite, she is also the model by which to measure Carmen and is a reminder of Don José's past before he met Carmen.<sup>57</sup> Everything we know about Micaëla comes directly from the operatic score, of which there are two versions. As mentioned in Case Study One on the role of Carmen, there is the original edition of the opera with spoken dialogue and the standard version with Guiraud's recitatives. From a character analysis perspective, particularly a character who is only in three prominent scenes of the opera, Micaëla's original spoken dialogue reveals far more about her character than the sung-through version of *Carmen*. For example, in Act 3 of the Schott edition, when Micaëla has gone to look for Don José, she is having a conversation with her guide who has brought her to the Gypsies' den in the mountains. We learn that she has paid the guide to help her find José and she demonstrates considerable bravery in her quest to bring him home. While she expresses fright in the recitative, in the dialogue she explicitly articulates her lack of fear, however, possibly only to convince herself. Naturally, Micaëla is well aware of the smugglers' reputation, and she knows that there is a chance she will be killed for finding their hideout. Even the guide remarks on her lack of fear when they walk through the herd of wild bulls. He goes so far as to compare her bravery to that of Escamillo's: "Earlier when we found ourselves in the middle of the herd of wild bulls driven by the famous Escamillo, you did not tremble".<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Lacombe, p. 717.

<sup>57</sup> Dean, *Bizet*, p. 213.

<sup>58</sup> ("Tout à l'heure quand nous nous sommes trouvés au milieu de ce troupeau de taureaux sauvages que conduisait le célèbre Escamillo, vous n'avez pas tremblé"). Bizet, *Carmen*, *Partition Chant et Piano*, p. 383.

Not only does he equate her bravery with that of men, but he also places her courage equal to that of the bravest character in the opera, the bull fighter. Although Micaëla is considered to be a lead role in the opera, she only features in three prominent scenes: the scene at the guardhouse (Act 1, Scene 1), the duet scene with Don José (Act 1, Scene 7) and the scene in the mountains (Act 3, Scene 22 and 24). It is interesting to consider that after the duet with Don José in Act 1, we do not meet Micaëla again until her Act 3 aria and Act 3 finale. One question whether this was a conscious decision made by Bizet. Dean, Curtiss and McClary note that he did not initially want to include Micaëla in his opera; she was an addition forced on him by his librettists Meilhac and Halévy. However, Bizet composed some of the opera's most memorable music for Micaëla. In fact, her Act 3 aria was the only number to receive applause at the premiere.<sup>59</sup> Considering the popularity of Micaëla's music, Goldovsky and Schoep note that "if [the singer playing Micaëla] is a first-rate performer – she can steal the show from her glamorous rival".<sup>60</sup> One of the primary reasons for this is that Micaëla's aria is one of the opera's single true solo numbers and it is the only time in the entire opera that there is only one person on stage. Carmen's arias (*Habanera*, *Seguidilla*, *Chanson de Bohémienne*, and *Air des Cartes*) are not true solo numbers. Even though Micaëla is not on stage as often as Carmen, or the two other gypsy girls Frasquita and Mercèdes, her function within the plot is pivotal.

### **Fundamental Questions *Who?*, *Where?* and *When?***

Next, I applied the first three Fundamental Questions *Who?*, *Where?* and *When?* to initiate my character development of Micaëla and establish my Given Circumstances.

The following table provides a sample of this process, taken from the informal creative journal I kept throughout this production.

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<sup>59</sup> McClary, p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> Goldovsky and Schoep, p. 51.

**Table 8: Fundamental Questions *Who?*, *Where?* and *When?***

**Who?:** *I am Micaëla, I am from Navarre, and I am an orphan raised by Don José's mother. I am unmarried, but I am in love with Don José, and I want to marry him. I am a woman; I am a caretaker, I am a friend. At the start of the opera, I am seventeen. I wear blue skirts and my hair in a braid. I am humble, I am kind, and I am caring. I have strong religious values, and I pray. I have strong moral values, I am brave, courageous, I fight for justice, I love, I care, and I have faith and hope. In all my scenes, I am looking and searching for Don José. First, because I have a letter from his mother to deliver, and second because I want to bring him home as his mother is dying. During our first encounter, I am in complete awe of him, so much so, I copy both his text and his melodies, and our entire exchange is about him and centred on him. In Act 3 on the other hand, I no longer copy his text and melodies, and am more confident to "hold my own tune". While I am still in love with him, I know he has chosen Carmen, and although I know she is beautiful and dangerous, I do not understand this decision. As the opera proceeds, I begin to realise what kind of person José really is.*

**Where?:** *In my first scene, I am in the guard house, and I am looking for Don José. In my second scene, I am with him, outside in a square in Seville. In Act 3, I am in the Andalusian mountain range; it is dark, cold and dangerous. I have come looking for José. I am from Navarre, I am far away from home, and I am alone. Although Carmen is usually presented as the foreign Other, in reality, I am the foreigner in this setting, not Carmen. All my scenes take place in areas outside of my comfort zone, displayed by my urgency to leave in each scene. I have a continuous desire to be elsewhere. In Act 1, I do not want to wait for José with the soldiers and similarly I do not want to stay in the mountains when I find him. Interestingly, even in the Act 1 duet scene with José, I again run away from the situation, I do not want to be there after a certain amount of time.*

*From a psychological perspective on Where? I am not the main protagonist within this opera; I am a supporting character: I am José's reminder of home, of Navarre and his mother. I am also the contrasting character, to whom Carmen is to/should be compared. I am not in the centre of José's life at any stage of the opera; even before he meets Carmen, he is not particularly interested in me. He is, however, in the centre of my life, particularly at the beginning of the opera. Although I am still focused on him in Act 3, I am no longer completely in awe of him, and I have come to recognise his true character.*

**When?:** *It is set during the early nineteenth century, around 1820, in Seville, Spain, and surrounding mountain range. The first act takes place on a Square in Seville, during summer in the late morning. Considering the Circles of Attention, the big circle is the nineteenth century, the middle circle is summer, and the small circle is late morning. I, Micaëla, meet José in the square to give him his mother's letter which contains her instructions to marry*

*me. At this point, I become embarrassed and run away saying I will be back later. Act 2 projects us three months into the future; it is late autumn, it takes place at Lilas Pastia's Inn, during the evening. Act 3 takes place several months later, Don José is now part of Carmen's entourage, it is winter, and they are hiding up in the mountains. I have not seen or heard from José since Act 1, more than six months ago. It is not specified in the score how I know where he is, but I must have heard rumours that he is with Carmen and I have come to find the smuggler's den, in the hope of also finding him.*

*Throughout the opera, time affects the atmosphere, psychology and motive. Although the opera lasts under three hours and presents a storyline that unravels over the course of about a year, the original story takes place over years. Making the plot run over less time in Bizet's opera adds a lot more drama and dysfunctional passion to the whirlwind relationship between José and Carmen. Also, each act takes place during a different time of day and in a different season, presenting two correlating progressive cycles. Act 1 takes place during spring in the early morning through to midday, Act 2 plays in autumn in the late afternoon into the evening, Act 3 takes place in winter during the evening and into the night time and, finally Act 4 plays during summer once again during the late morning and into midday. By the end of the opera, a full seasonal cycle has been completed as well as a full day-time cycle. For me, the year depicted in the opera completely unravels all my previous life aspirations. I begin believing I will marry José, but by my final scene, I have learned that this will never happen. Even if he does choose to go with me to see his mother, I know he will never be my husband. This is a major shift for me psychologically. In Act 1, being early spring, it symbolises hopefulness, fertility, optimism, and youth, all characteristics that I identify with. In Act 3 on the other hand, it is winter and night time, symbolising death, isolation, danger and the end of my relationship with José.*

#### **4.5.3 Development**

This section begins the psychophysical building of Micaëla as a character. Stanislavsky's Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?* deepen and intensify my journey into my Imagination inspired by the previously gathered information about Micaëla. This is particularly important for a recital performance as the stage is bare, with no set, props or costumes, so that the atmosphere is created through the singer-actor and audience's fantasy. The final Fundamental Question *How?* is addressed through Actioning bridging the gap

between the theoretical and physical. Using Actioning for recital preparation assists the singer-actor in activating their Imagination and communicating that fantasy to the audience.

### **Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?***

Before I addressed the Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?* I established Micaëla's provisional Supertask.

In Act 1 Micaëla's provisional Supertask is "I Micaëla, need to find José and deliver this letter from his mother", while In Act 3, her provisional Supertask is "I Micaëla, need to find José, save him from this terrible place and bring him home".

The following table provides an extract of this questing process taken from my creative journal.

**Table 9: Fundamental Questions *Why?* and *For what purpose?***

*Why is Micaëla in Carmen? There is one very revealing fact to consider: as mentioned previously, Micaëla is not in the original novella by Mérimée, she was added to the plot by Bizet's librettists Meilhac and Halévy as an opposition to Carmen. She is considered to be the stock character of the Opéra-Comique, she is the "good" by which to compare Carmen's "evil". For what purpose is she in Carmen? She is a reminder of Don José's past, and she is a representation of his mother. There are also ensemble dynamics to consider: adding an extra female character gives more depth to the operatic story, for without Micaëla present, the opera would only focus on Carmen and José's relationship. Micaëla represents his other options in life; she is the culturally and socially acceptable choice as his bride. Also, all the characters in this opera are highly emotionally charged as exemplified by Bizet's music. Interestingly, although Micaëla has very little stage time for a lead role, she sings some of the opera's most memorable music. Why did Bizet write her these melodies? There must be a reason why he wrote these melodies specifically for her. I believe that the Gounod-esque lyricism of her music creates a sense of nostalgia and conventionalism. It is also a complete contrast to Carmen's diegetic music which is mostly based on dance rhythms.*

**Act 3:** *In Act 3, why do I want to find José? I want to find him because his mother is dying and she has asked to see him before she passes. For what purpose do I want to find him? I want to find him because I want to see him face to face, I want to know why he rejected his family and deserted his respectable position in the army. Why do I want to bring him home?*

*I believe he is a good man and although I say "I once loved him" I clearly still care about him. For what purpose do I want to bring him home? Because I know that he will do the right thing and come home.*

*Why do I go to get him alone? Because I want to see him and I have heard many rumours that he is with Carmen, I want to see her; I want to know who he chose instead of me. For what purpose do I want to find him by myself? I go to find him by myself because I want to confront them; even though I know, she is dangerous but I want to know why he chose her. In the aria, why do I pray to God? I am asking for courage and bravery, but also I am telling myself to be brave, and I am processing how I will bring José back home where it is safe for him. For what purpose am I praying? I am praying to build my own courage to find him, and because I know that he would be better off away from Carmen. Why am I uncertain that he will come back with me? Because I know he loves Carmen, I know she is beautiful and dangerous, and I am unsure of the hold she has over him. I believe he is a good person, but I also think he has become a despicable person because of her. He was an honourable man, a corporal in the army, but he deserted his battalion and became a smuggler and thief because of Carmen's influence. Why am I afraid? Because I don't know what will happen when I find him, I am not safe in this territory, but I am willing to risk my safety and my life to find him and bring him home. Why do I want to confront her? Because I believe she has turned him into a bad person, and because I want to show him and myself that I am not afraid of her. For what purpose am I not afraid of her? I am not afraid of her because I have already lost José, I have nothing else for her to take from me.*

### **Fundamental Question *How?* and Actioning**

At this stage of my dramatic preparation of Micaëla, I addressed Stanislavsky's Fundamental Question *How?* through the use of Alfreds' Actioning. I followed the same Actioning process as outlined in my previous case studies on Carlotta.<sup>61</sup> Having previously used Actioning in two prior case studies, I was eager to use and test its efficacy for my recital preparation of Micaëla's aria. In addition, it also provided the opportunity to test it on another operatic character and within a different performative context, a vocal recital. I followed a similar process as I did in Case Study Three. I began using only transitive verbs and then I added adverbs to colour my selected verbs. As this was for recital preparation,

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<sup>61</sup> See Chapter Four, 4.2.3 Development and 4.3.3 Development.

and given the introspective nature of her aria (during which Micaëla is on stage by alone), many of the transitive verbs are addressed either to herself or to God. As mentioned previously, Moseley published a handbook on Actioning in April 2016, after I had completed my case studies, except for my re-recorded final recital performance in November 2016. I would like to observe a particular link he established between the importance of the action verbs and their link to the character's Inner monologue. The Inner monologue reveals the character's subtext, what he/she is thinking rather than saying. He believes that "the action verbs and inner monologue should always be worked on together as they have a complementary relationship".<sup>62</sup> I found that this statement draws a parallel between the actor and the singer-actor, as in opera, arias are often monologues of Inner thoughts. While the actor does not necessarily say what he/she is thinking within their dialogue, in opera, arias often function as musical representations of thoughts and emotions. Moseley explains that:

In performance, the inner monologue lends the spoken text *resonance* (making us believe that the words are driven from inner feelings and intentions) while the action verbs provide *dynamic* (making us believe that the character is in a relationship with the other character and constantly reacting to them).<sup>63</sup>

Therefore, in operas it may be considered that the spoken text represents the inner feelings and intentions, while the music provides the text with *resonance* (following Stanislavsky's perspective that the music provides all feelings and emotion for the singer-actor). The action/transitive verbs provide the reactive and active purpose for the physical drive, relationship and communication with the other characters, and to the audience.

The following table indicates my transitive verb choices for Micaëla's aria *Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante*.

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<sup>62</sup> Moseley, *Actioning*, p. 822.

<sup>63</sup> Moseley, *Actioning*, p. 822. Original emphasis.

**Example 4: Transitive verbs for Micaëla. Bizet, *Carmen*, Act 3, no. 22 "Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante", bars 1-87**

<b>Lyrics</b>	<b>English Translation</b>	<b>Transitive verb with adverb</b>	<b>Full sentence with motivation</b>
<i>C'est des contrebandiers le refuge ordinaire</i>	It is the smuggler's hideout	<i>I LOOK carefully</i>	<i>I LOOK carefully</i> for José
<i>Il est ici; je le verrai!</i>	He is here; I will see him!	<i>I AFFIRM myself urgently</i>	<i>I AFFIRM myself urgently</i> because I know I will find him.
<i>Et le devoir que m'imposa sa mere</i>	And the task that his mother imposed on me	<i>I REASSURE myself intently</i>	<i>I REASSURE myself intently</i> because I need to find him for his dying mother.
<i>Sans trembler je l'accomplirai</i>	Without trembling, I will accomplish it	<i>I APPEASE myself quietly</i>	<i>I APPEASE myself quietly</i> so that I will not be so afraid.
<i>Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante,</i>	I say that nothing frightens me.	<i>I SEEK comfort assuredly</i>	<i>I SEEK comfort assuredly</i> because I am trying to be brave.
<i>Je dis, hélas! que je répons de moi;</i>	I say, alas, that I respond to myself;	<i>I SEEK sympathy firmly</i>	<i>I SEEK sympathy firmly</i> from myself and God because I want to be courageous but I am doubtful.
<i>Mais j'ai beau faire la vaillante...</i>	But I play the part of the courageous one in vain...		
<i>Au fond du coeur je meurs d'effroi!</i>	Deep in my heart, I die of fear!	<i>I FRIGHTEN myself quietly</i>	<i>I FRIGHTEN myself quietly</i> because I am scared.
<i>Seule en ce lieu sauvage Toute seule j'ai peur,</i>	Alone in this savage place All alone I am afraid,	<i>I AFFIRM my actions watchfully</i>	<i>I AFFIRM my actions watchfully</i> because I know what I want to achieve but I am afraid of my surroundings.
<i>Mais j'ai tort d'avoir peur.</i>	But I am wrong to be afraid.	<i>I ASSURE myself carefully</i>	<i>I ASSURE myself carefully</i> because I want to do this, I want to see José.



<i>Vous me donnerez du courage;</i>	You will give me courage;	<i>I SEEK counsel urgently</i>	<i>I SEEK counsel urgently</i> from God, I need His support.
<i>Vous me protégez, Seigneur!</i>	You will protect me, God!	<i>I SEEK support earnestly</i>	<i>I SEEK support earnestly</i> from God because I need His protection.
<i>Je vais voir de près cette femme, dont les artifices maudits ont fini par faire un infâme</i>	I am going to have a close look at this woman, whose cursed tricks have ended up making a despicable person	<i>I INCRIMINATE Carmen assuredly</i>	<i>I INCRIMINATE Carmen assuredly</i> because I believe this is her fault.
<i>De celui que j'aimais jadis!</i>	Of the one I once loved!	<i>I ABSOLVE José ardently</i>	<i>I ABSOLVE José ardently</i> because I remember the person he once was.
<i>Elle est dangereuse...elle est belle!</i>	She is dangerous... she is beautiful!	<i>I BLAME reluctantly</i>	<i>I BLAME Carmen reluctantly</i> because I know she is not the only one to blame.
<i>Mais je ne veux pas avoir peur!</i>	But I do not want to be afraid!	<i>I REJECT purposefully</i>	<i>I REJECT this purposefully</i> because I do not want to be afraid of her.
<i>Non, non, je ne veux pas avoir peur!</i>	No, no, I do not want to be afraid!	<i>I REASSURE myself assertively</i>	<i>I REASSURE myself assertively</i> because I do not need to be afraid of her.
<i>Je parlerai haut devant elle...ah!</i>	I will speak up to her...ah!	<i>I CONVINCER myself thoroughly</i>	<i>I CONVINCER myself thoroughly</i> that I will speak up to her.
<i>Seigneur, vous me protégez. Seigneur, vous me protégez.</i>	God, you will protect me. God, you will protect me	<i>I LOOK for support urgently</i>	<i>I LOOK for support from God urgently</i> because I need His protection
<i>Ah...Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante,</i>	Ah...I say that nothing frightens me.	<i>I DOUBT myself slightly</i>	<i>I DOUBT myself slightly</i> because I do not think I can do this.
<i>Je dis, hélas! que je répons de moi;</i>	I say, alas, and I speak for myself;	<i>I REAFFIRM myself quietly</i>	<i>I REAFFIRM myself quietly</i> because I need to convince myself I can do this.

<i>Mais j'ai beau faire la vaillante...</i>	However, I fail being the courageous one	<i>I REAFFIRM myself intently</i>	<i>I REAFFIRM myself intently, because I need to do this.</i>
<i>Au fond du coeur je meurs d'effroi!</i>	From the bottom of my heart, I die of fear!	<i>I DETER myself earnestly</i>	<i>I DETER myself earnestly because I am afraid.</i>
<i>Seule en ce lieu sauvage Toute seule j'ai peur,</i>	Alone in this savage place All alone I am afraid,	<i>I VICTIMIZE myself delicately</i>	<i>I VICTIMIZE myself delicately because I do not believe I belong there.</i>
<i>Mais j'ai tort d'avoir peur.</i>	But I am wrong to have fear.	<i>I REFUSE blatantly</i>	<i>I REFUSE blatantly to be afraid.</i>
<i>Vous me donnerez du courage; Vous me protégerez, Seigneur!</i>	You will give me courage; You will protect me, God	<i>I SEIZE urgently</i>	<i>I SEIZE courage urgently.</i>
<i>Protégezmoi! O Seigneur! Donnezmoi du courage</i>	Protect me! Oh God! Give me courage!	<i>I BEG intently</i>	<i>I Beg God intently to give me courage and protect me.</i>

After the Actioning process was completed, I discovered various insights into Micaëla's physicalisation, her natural energy and her body language. It was important to reassess my physical preparation of Micaëla in relation to both her intellectual and emotional context, as all three aspects of her natural energy are interdependent and should be integrated.

Micaëla's natural primary movement, in an energetic, emotional and physical sense is fluid and flowing. She is calming, inviting, subdued, and sensitive. Micaëla's personality and physicality are soft, subtle, relaxed, nurturing, detail-oriented, comforting and warm. Her soft and subtle nature is inviting, and her presence adds a refinement and grace to the opera. Her place within the story softens the intensity of Carmen and presents the audience with a calmer alternative to Carmen's active and reactive drive. Micaëla may be thought of as

the feminine ideal (for the nineteenth-century male), for she is kind, gentle and expresses her femininity not through her sexuality like Carmen, but through her soft and nurturing qualities. Her primary motive, particularly at the beginning of the opera, is to make life comfortable for the people she cares about, particularly Don José and his mother.

Micaëla notices the details that make life flow more easily and smoothly for everyone else. For example, she hand-delivers the letter to Don José, rather than mailing it or leaving it with Moralès. She is the embodied connection between José and his mother. She is sensitive to how others feel around her and notices particularly if someone is uncomfortable. In addition, she is also very sensitive to details and plans, which is one of the many reasons why she does not understand why José chooses to be with Carmen, who seems unpredictable and unreliable to her.

Micaëla moves through life with quiet determination. When she is challenged or treated with too much intensity her tendency is to hold back and become introverted, as she feels the need to retreat or to remove herself from a situation. For example, when José is reading the letter from his mother, once he reads that his mother tells him to marry Micaëla, Micaëla becomes embarrassed and leaves, saying she will come back later. Even though marrying José is exactly what she wants at that stage of the opera, the mention of it is too intense for her, which is possibly out of embarrassment, or even a fear of rejection.

Micaëla's communicative style is slower than that of Carmen; she takes more time to establish her thoughts, and plans and rehearses them in advance. For example, her slower communicative style is clear in her duet with José, as she copies his text and his melodies, mostly to please him, but also because it is the response with least resistance. Her rehearsed thoughts and actions are particularly noticeable in her aria, where she is asking God for the strength and courage to confront Carmen. In relationships, Micaëla values emotional availability, consistency, and accountability, all of the qualities that she wishes she had found in José, but which he cannot provide for her. In any social or group

setting, she is diplomatic, empathetic, proper, and prefers to observe rather than participate.

Micaëla's natural energy is also expressed through her body language. Following the Actioning process, I identified how she walks, stands, sits, gestures, as well as the quality of her voice and use of language.

**Walking:** she walks with a smooth and graceful walk. She takes longer steps and keeps her feet close to the ground. There is no bounce in her step; rather, her movements are very fluid and flowing.

**Sitting/Standing/Gesture:** she sits and stands creating soft curves. For example, she stands with a relaxed bend in the waist, or holding her head to one side. Her movements and gestures are slow, delicate, soft and graceful.

**Voice/Language:** Micaëla speaks with soft determination, and her choice of language is comforting and nurturing. For example, she is considerate of José's nostalgia; she copies both his text and melodies. When she finally does confront him in Act 3, she only urges him to come back for his mother who is dying; her comforting nature is now expressed by pleading for his mother.

The overall quality of her physical expression is softened, blended, supple and feminine. She creates an ambience of calmness and connection, and her fluid, flowing energy relaxes those around her. She comes across often as modest and humble. At times, she can be experienced as sceptical, questioning and worrisome, which is particularly evident in her aria.

It is important to consider how Micaëla's physicality develops throughout the opera. In Act 1, she is soft, accommodating, subtle, gentle, nurturing and comforting for José. She is there to remind him of his mother and the comforts of home. In Act 3, on the other hand, there is far more display of her quiet determination. She has gone to find José, by herself, in unfamiliar territory. Once she cares enough about someone or a situation, she is quite capable of being

courageous, mostly because it is the right thing to do. However, her courage is never about or for herself; her driving force are the people she cares about. Even though she is clearly very angry with José and knows that he has chosen Carmen, she selflessly still goes to find him, so that he can see his dying mother.

#### **4.5.4 Reflection**

My intention as a singer-actor was to prepare the role of Micaëla as if I would be singing the the full role, with particular focus on her *Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante* for my Final DMA Recital. In addition, in this Case Study, I set out to test and compare the efficacy of Actioning between my previous role preparations and recital preparation.

First, there were significant differences in the rehearsal processes of this Case Study compared to Case Studies One, Two and Three. It was most comparable to the rehearsal period of *Carmen* in 2012, as most rehearsals for my final recital were focused predominantly on the music.

The rehearsal structure for recital preparation is quite different compared to the rehearsal structure of a production. My recital rehearsals took place mostly as a one-on-one setting between myself and my coach or singing teacher, as well as a few rehearsals between all three of us. Contrary to a production in which rehearsals would focus predominantly on blocking and staging with the director and other cast members, the rehearsals for my recital focused mainly on the music (accuracy, tone quality, vocal-technique, expressiveness, vocal characterisation, imagination and so forth).

However, regardless of a recital or production performance context, the aim of good vocal pedagogy is that the singer-actor must always be prepared, while at the same time remaining fully present in the moment (i.e. be present in the character and the characterisation). The danger is that if the singer-actor is trained to always think about what they are doing, they will continuously “be in their head” and not capable of responding or reacting to what is happening

around them. Smith makes a case for this, saying that “good technique is *not knowing* what is going to happen when we sing; rather it is being very clear and sure about what we are *doing* and the parameters in which those actions occur”.<sup>64</sup>

It could certainly be argued that a vocal recital is still a performance within a theatrical framework, and therefore, like opera and musical theatre, the vocal recital is also theatre, requiring the singer-actor to prepare dramatically as well as vocally. One of the fundamental similarities between production and vocal recital performance contexts is memorisation.

Memorisation allows the singer-actor to communicate and express freely with the audience, but most importantly, it shifts the focus from music to text.

Historically, memorisation became an expected aspect of recital singing in the early twentieth century.<sup>65</sup> Previously, singers had performed recitals, score in hand, focusing on the music and virtuosity of the vocal instrument.

Memorisation presumably became fashionable because freeing the hands and eyes from the score allowed the singer to become far more expressive in their performances, allowing them to use gesture and improve their communication and connection to the audience.<sup>66</sup> This connection between singer-actor and audience further demonstrates that, regardless of the type of performance, the singer-actor’s art is theatrical by nature.

For my dramatic preparation, I used Actioning extensively for Micaëla’s aria, and I went through the process several times in several variations. First I spoke-and-played the transitive verbs, spoke the lyrics and played the transitive verbs, sung the music and played the transitive verbs. Second, I repeated this process, experimenting with different adverbs. I believe that one of the reasons I used the Actioning process so many times for just one aria was because I felt I needed to compensate for only singing one of her pieces within my recital and wanted to be as prepared as possible. In addition, as there is no time in recital

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<sup>64</sup> Smith, p. 23.

<sup>65</sup> Monahan, p. 214.

<sup>66</sup> Monahan, p. 220.

performances to build a character throughout, as would be possible in a full production, I felt that I needed to be secure in my characterisation of Micaëla and be able to ‘jump’ straight into her character in Act 3.

The most significant difference between preparing a role for production and preparing a piece for a recital is the actual difference between the performance conditions. In a production, the singer-actor can create and build their character gradually and continuously throughout the opera/show. In a recital, on the other hand, there is no time for the gradual construction of a character. Instead, the singer-actor is required to switch characters from one piece to another, and that changeover has to be immediate. As Stanislavsky stated: “acting beside a piano is a most subtle and difficult thing to do. The reason is that all depends on fantasy, on yours as an artist, and ours as spectators”.<sup>67</sup> Even though the switching between characters in rapid succession is a requirement of recital singing, and a challenge for any accomplished singer-actor, the recitalist is expected to be as fully communicative and expressive as they would be in a production.

Interestingly, I found that the difference in performance conditions also affected my ability to access a Flow state, as I found it more difficult to attain this in recital preparation and performance compared to production preparation and performance. This could have been because in a production several of the Given Circumstances are created for you, such as the set, props, costume and so forth, while in a recital you are required to solely use your imagination to create that reality for yourself as a singer-actor and for the audience. However, I found that concentrating specifically on Micaëla and her goals (transitive verbs), and purposefully shutting out the world around me, helped me to gain a sense of control and reduced self-consciousness. Furthermore, I found that the loss of self-consciousness, also referred to by Csikszentmihalyi as a “self-forgetfulness”,<sup>68</sup> did not mean that I lost my sense or consciousness of self, but instead it heightened my awareness of my internal process. I found that I became immersed in what was going on in Micaëla’s life, in Bizet’s music, in her

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<sup>67</sup> Stanislavski and Romyantsev, location 965.

<sup>68</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975), p. 42.

text and motivations, so that it felt like total involvement and it seemed that I as the singer-actor no longer existed.

Micaëla's aria was placed as the first piece beginning the second half of my recital. The reason for this placement within the programme was very specific. I wanted to create an isolated feeling and atmosphere similar to that in the opera. In the opera, Micaëla has not sung since Act 1 when she makes her entrance mid-Act 3; we do not know what has happened to her in the time between these two scenes. Placing the aria after the interval created a similar intensity for both myself as singer-actor as well as the audience. For me, as singer-actor, this was a very vulnerable place for the aria as it is technically challenging to sing, requires focus and I had already sung the first half of my programme. For these reasons, I had to be careful not to let any physical fatigue creep into my voice and my performance. Although I was tired at the time of this aria within the recital, I used the vulnerability I felt myself to fuel Micaëla's vulnerability within her situation. I had to change my focus of being a singer creating a beautiful sound, to being a singer-actor who is an effective artist.

Another noticeable difference between recital preparation and role preparation is that I found myself focusing more on snapping into my characters from a perspective of communicating with my audience, rather than focusing on communicating with my colleagues on stage as I would in production. The ability to communicate artistically with my audience in a recital setting was a skill I had to practice. In a production, there is the assistance of the full cast, props, set, costumes, makeup, and special effects that create the world to which you are contributing as a singer-actor. In recital you do not have that benefit, but you must create the world for yourself and the audience. It was important that I focused on balancing my musical instrument (what I set out to do with my singing) with my behavioural instrument (how I set out to communicate and express). In recital, there is a lot of pressure on the singer-actor to produce a beautiful vocal tone, however, although something might be sung perfectly, a beautiful sounding voice alone is not enough. It is equally important to communicate through action, which results in vocal communicative expression.



## 4.6 Summary

The four applied case studies provided a range of different performance conditions as well as a variety of operatic characters. Case Study One on Carmen provided a foundational character development process which was influenced solely by elements of Stanislavsky's 'system' and theories of psychophysical acting. A notable limitation within this first Case Study was that the majority of my character preparation was a literary, thought-driven process. I found that it was difficult to practice and rehearse physicalising Carmen in the practice studio because there was no set technique in place outside of experimenting and improvising how she would walk, sit, gesture, talk, and so forth. As this was a graduate student production, however, I had the advantage of an extended rehearsal period, providing me with the time to "unpack" the role analytically and then physically reconstruct it step by step. Knowing that this extended timeframe was a luxury rather than a commodity, I found that I needed to find a way to address my dramatic character preparation using a faster process. Case Study Two on Carlotta used the same Stanislavskian foundation and began the experiment on the efficacy of Actioning within the singer-actor's character/role preparation within the context of a semi-professional production. Including Actioning allowed me to speed up the physical preparation of the dramatic character, as it instigated an instant focus on what the character was doing rather than thinking or feeling. Case Study Three on Carlotta allowed me to test my dramatic character preparation process again, and refine my approach to Actioning within the context of a second semi-professional production. I refined my process of Actioning through further experimentation with this technique, as well as by adding adverbs to colour each transitive verb, providing more depth and more nuanced detail to my dramatic character preparation. The final case study on Micaëla provided the opportunity to test and compare the efficacy of Actioning between my previous full role preparations on Carmen and Carlotta, and my recital preparation of Micaëla. As recital singing is a common and necessary aspect of the singer-actor's career, it seemed like a natural progression to address it within my case studies.

My experimentation with Actioning was an exploratory process, with moments of insight and discovery as well as frustration. Initially, as evident in Case Study Two, I found this technique difficult to grasp, and it took some time to familiarise myself with the process. One of the reasons for this may have been that I initially learned about this technique theoretically, not practically. However, the more I practiced this process, and improved my vocabulary of transitive verbs, the easier it became. In addition, it was beneficial to use Actioning without singing initially, as it gave me the freedom to experiment with the actions, the character's Inner motivations and how they, in turn, affected the character's feelings, reflected in the music. Throughout Case Study Two, I adapted the Actioning process to suit the singer-actor and to be used by an individual in the practice studio. These adaptations included adding a third layer to the process (say-and-play action; speak text and play action; sing text and play action), identifying how to break the process into manageable steps, and how to rehearse it within a practice studio setting. I found it most beneficial to begin the third step (sing text and play action) only once I had the scene memorised, as this prevented my voice from being compromised while also enabling me to focus on the action, rather than memorisation.

In addition, Actioning proved to be a valuable technique for recital preparation, as well as role preparation for production. As explained in Case Study Four, as with a production, a vocal recital is likewise a theatrical phenomenon, requiring the singer-actor to prepare their pieces dramatically as well as musically. Testing and applying Actioning within recital preparation/performance conditions provided a precise technique that allowed me to identify Micaëla's actions and connect with her psychophysically.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

I set out to examine how the singer-actor could prepare their dramatic characters actively in the practice studio. To do this, I conducted a practice-led experiment, using myself as subject, to test the efficacy, adaptability and practicality of Actioning within my usual Stanislavskian-based dramatic character preparation process for operatic roles. I conducted my research through four applied case studies which integrated my dramatic character development within the early preparation stages of my role learning process. Each case study comprised a four-part progression: Character/Role; Analysis; Development; and Reflection, which generated significant outcomes.

The four applied case studies address a wide spectrum of performance conditions: a graduate university production, two semi-professional productions and a recital. In addition, they display how my dramatic preparation process evolved in practice, and provided a response to the research inquiry. Case Study One on Carmen provided a foundational or “base-line” character preparation process which was conducted only using elements of Stanislavsky’s ‘system’. A limitation of this first case study was that the majority of this character preparation was a literary and thought-driven process, while the physical and active preparation for Carmen seemed unfocused as it followed no specifically set process, and therefore took an extensive amount of time. Through a process of trial and error I concluded that it was necessary to find a simple and expedient technique to actively and physically prepare my dramatic characters in future case studies. When I was introduced to Alfreds’ Actioning I decided to investigate and test it to see if this could be adapted to suit the singer-actor and be used as a preparatory technique. Case Study Two on Carlotta used the same Stanislavskian foundational preparation process and initiated the experiment on Actioning as an active preparatory technique for the singer-actor. Including Actioning allowed me to speed up the physical preparation of Carlotta, as it instigated an immediate focus on her objectives and how to physicalise them through action. I was able to test and refine the Actioning process further in Case Study Three,

once again on Carlotta but within the context of a second production. I achieved this by adding adverbs to colour each transitive verb, providing a deeper complexity and subtle detail to my dramatic character preparation. Case Study Four on Micaëla allowed me to test and compare my dramatic character preparation process between my previous role preparations on Carmen and Carlotta, and my recital preparation of Micaëla's aria. I was also able to specifically test the applicability of Actioning for recital preparation.

My study is significant because no research has previously been undertaken to test the efficacy of Actioning for the operatic singer-actor, nor has it been tested in combination with Stanislavskian techniques. Although Dunbar, Harvard, Bergman and Moore, and Deer and Dal Vera recommend the use of Actioning, or similar variations, for the musical theatre singer-actor, there is no account or explanation on the effect, practicality or applicability of this process. Similarly, Bussell mentions the use of 'action verbs' in her operatic character preparation process, but offers no example, opinion or result on the effect or practicality of this technique.

In response to this lack, my study specifically adapted Actioning to suit the singer-actor's dramatic character preparation process for operatic roles. Actioning is originally a technique used in theatre rehearsals within a group setting, where each transitive or 'doing' verb is played onto another actor. As my research specifically focuses on the preparatory process of the singer-actor in the practice studio, this rehearsal technique needed to be adapted so it could be applied in a private setting and used by a single person. While Deer and Dal Vera discuss how the singer-actor could use Actioning for musical theatre song analysis, they do not discuss this beyond Actioning songs that are reflective and therefore do not address another character. This led me to adapt this technique so that the singer-actor could "*Action*" their entire role, including group and ensemble scenes as part of their role-learning process. To enhance my research and dramatic preparation, I tested a selection of different variations on Actioning within my Stanislavskian-based process, arriving at an amalgamation of different methods, such as adding adverbs as suggested by Anderson and Merlin, and

experimenting with directing the actions towards myself, as suggested by Harvard, and Deer and Dal Vera.

My dramatic character preparation process comprises Stanislavsky's Fundamental Questions, establishing the character's Given Circumstances (*Who?, Where?, When?*), beginning the process of imagination (*Why?, For what purpose? and How?*), setting the Supertask, and applying Actioning. As noted by Alfreds, Moseley, and Caldarone and Lloyd-Williams, there is a fundamental connection between Stanislavsky's 'system' and Actioning. They also identify that it is not possible to effectively use Actioning without having an understanding of the 'system' or applying elements of it as a means to establish the character's background and Given Circumstances. Stanislavsky's Fundamental Questions provided a simple and effective way to analyse the character's background and set the Given Circumstances, while also initiating the personalisation process between myself as singer-actor and myself as the dramatic character. The inclusion of Actioning as a preparatory technique bridged the gap between my theoretical and literary character preparation and its physical realisation. It specifically allowed me to address the final Fundamental Question *How?* with a precise technique, in a disciplined and open-ended manner, that generated an immediate focus on the motivations and objectives of my dramatic character and taught me how to play these objectives through action.

Furthermore, this is the first study to take a practice-led approach to dramatic character preparation for the operatic singer-actor, placing my own experience and practice as a singer-actor at the heart of my research inquiry. Using a practice-led research method provided a dual-lens perspective, as my position within this research encompassed both subject and researcher. I was able gain first-hand knowledge and experience as both singer-actor and researcher, keeping a holistic and 'real-life' perspective, stretching my understanding of embodied knowledge beyond the theoretical. My interdisciplinary background and search for a dramatic preparatory methodology to focus on creating a connected, meaningful, theatrical performance, facilitated the inclusion and incorporation of elements of Stanislavsky's 'system' in combination with Alfreds'

Actioning. Although the application of actor-training techniques is not a new concept for the singer-actor, this research and my model of dramatic character preparation contributes to the growing knowledge surrounding role preparation and learning strategies for the singer-actor, particularly aiming to increase their level of dramatic self-sufficiency.

Actioning also had a significant impact on my musical preparation. Essentially, singing is about communicating, and Actioning is a practical and active technique which establishes and communicates the character's physical actions, their resulting Inner motivations, and instigates an expressive and emotive response. Using elements of Stanislavsky's 'system' and Alfreds' Actioning early in my character preparation process ensured that I was aware of *what* my character was doing, as well as *how* and *why* she was doing it, while I was also learning the music. Even though I initially separated my vocal practice and Actioning, knowing these aspects of my character provided deeper knowledge and insights into my musical interpretation, as well as my dramatic interpretation. As Stanislavsky explained, the singer-actor's expressiveness and the character's feeling are created by the composer through the music, as the music provides the character's Inner emotions.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the singer-actor must listen carefully to the music and hear the reasons "for what you are doing and *how* you are to do it".<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it could be argued that the Inner rhythm in the music is the equivalent of action on the stage, as both imply a forward-moving drive, giving the character motive and purpose. Using Actioning in combination with my Stanislavskian-influenced dramatic character preparation process created an Inner-Outer-Outer-Inner psychophysical connection with the character through physical action and its harmonisation with the emotive intentions reflected in the music.

As result, Actioning also influenced my vocal production, particularly my breathing and phrasing. The breath is the primary energy source for the singer-actor, and it is psychophysical by nature, as it is both a physical action and a

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<sup>1</sup> Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, location 673.

<sup>2</sup> Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, location 437.

psychological reaction. Using Actioning as a preparatory technique taught me how to focus on what my character was doing within each moment, immersing myself into their physical reality. Therefore, each breath and each phrase was energised by my character's impulses rather than my own, creating a psychophysical continuum of breath, voice, character and singer-actor.

Actioning required me, as singer-actor, to connect my thoughts and feelings to physical action and response. It assisted me in discovering the physical narrative of each scene, and allowed me to examine the artistic and expressive potential of the physical body within the parameters set by the score. Throughout its application, Actioning taught me how to intentionally stay within the moment, focus on the other characters on stage, (or the intended subject of the text) while playing the action. Actioning my characters permitted me to avoid generalised characterisation, over-analysed Inner emotions, or a lifeless and detached performance. Actioning provided me, as singer-actor, with an analytical process that encompassed my own will as well as my presence in each moment of my dramatic preparation and eventually leading towards performance. Essentially, the series of moments reflect a psychophysical embodiment of the text within the singer-actor, which is then presented through physical action. As established throughout this thesis, the most crucial aspects of creating a psychophysically connected and embodied performance is by studying the text, as singing is not the communication of non-specifics. Therefore it is essential to know the text literally and sub-textually, and to understand its purpose. The radical nature of Actioning is that it provides an analytical yet active character development technique which deals directly and primarily with the text. It allows the singer-actor to systematically identify how each phrase informs a thought, intention or moment, aiming towards connected presence within each moment through intertwined thinking, action and text. This concept of 'connected presence' within each moment describes how my dramatic preparation process, and particularly Actioning, evoked components of a Flow state throughout my preparation. Stanislavsky's Fundamental Questions, Given Circumstances and Alfreds' Actioning worked together to focus attention, set specific and clear

goals, promoted lessened self-consciousness, allowed for a merging of action and awareness, and distorted my perceived sense of time. As previously noted, Flow has been established as a common phenomenon experienced by musicians in performance. Interestingly, I found that Actioning in particular also induced a Flow state within my preparation process, potentially because Actioning is a physical and active process which requires “a centering of attention on a limited stimulus field.”<sup>3</sup> The combined approach using elements of Stanislavsky’s ‘system’ with Alfreds’ Actioning allowed a bridging between my own reality as singer-actor and the reality of my dramatic character. The vivid application of Actioning, and the use of my imagination prompted by the Fundamental Questions, led to a point where my character’s objectives became so engaging for my character, merging my reality with that of my character that I achieved a Flow state.

The incorporation of Actioning in my Stanislavskian-based dramatic character preparation process led to a strong connection between myself and the characters I was preparing. Experimenting with Actioning had a profound transformative impact on myself as a singer-actor/researcher. It resulted in increased confidence in my performance and dramatisation skills. The transformative value took the form of embodied knowledge and increased understanding of myself and my characters, so that I achieved increased dramatic self-sufficiency.

My findings suggest that my approach to dramatic character preparation would also be beneficial to other singer-actors because it is a simple, expedient and practical way to prepare the character dramatically in the practice studio. Additionally, my model of dramatic character preparation has the potential to teach other singer-actors how to actively prepare their roles/characters and increase self-sufficiency. My dramatic preparation process could be adopted by a range of singer-actors at varying stages of their careers. Although my research

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<sup>3</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, p. 40.



specifically addressed this process in relation to operatic roles, the process could also be applied to other musical genres.

### **5.1 Limitations of the research**

Conducting research wherein the researcher is both observer and participant presents certain challenges, particularly in terms of separating the researcher's viewpoint and experiences from that of the research subject, as both are intertwined. My position as both researcher and participant could be considered a limitation of this study. However, the decision to follow a practice-led research method and use myself as the subject of my research was deliberate. Assuming a number of roles — including participant and observer, researcher and singer-actor — ensured a variety of perspectives through first-hand experience.

The number of applied case studies was small. However, the sample was representative of a range of performance conditions: a graduate student production, two semi-professional productions and a recital. The applied case studies also represented a range of operatic characters: Carmen, Carlotta and Micaëla, meaning that the experiment on Actioning was not limited to one type of performance or dramatic character. Actioning, as an act of dramatic character preparation, produced an abundance of physical characterisation insights and discoveries.

It may be asked whether my preparation process combining elements of Stanislavsky's 'system' and Alfreds' Actioning would have a negative or undesired effect on a production rehearsal process. I personally did not have this experience in Case Studies Two and Three and found my preparation process to be compatible with my director's and colleagues' perspectives. I found that its compatibility, as a technique, originated from the fact that it did not create "fixed" characterisations, but instead gave me, as singer-actor, the physical skill and technique to practice characterisation actively and physically, offering me further insight, depth and variance within my characterisations beyond literary character analysis. It must be noted however, that this study focused specifically

on the initial preparation process of the singer-actor, conducted in the practice studio. The role of the director and the potential effect of dramatic preparation on company rehearsals are not addressed in detail because they lie beyond the scope of this research.

The level of physical and mental engagement has been a particular focus during the creation, development and application of the applied case studies.

Throughout this experience as singer-actor, researcher, and participant, the value of dramatic self-sufficiency in the process has been directly related to the degree of engagement – physically, mentally, emotionally and imaginatively. The higher the level of engagement, the deeper, more lasting and more significant is the gaining of dramatic self-sufficiency. Actioning and elements of the ‘system’ provide the singer-actor with suitable, effective techniques and theories on how to approach dramatic character development in the initial role learning process, allowing the singer-actor to further increase their dramatic self-sufficiency.

## **5.2 Future recommendations**

Any continuation of this research should ideally encompass a larger sample of productions, cover a longer timeframe, extend the study to cover company rehearsals and performances, study recital preparation more extensively, or encompass a larger number of participants. The dramatic character preparation process was limited to the preparation process of just one singer-actor; introducing this process to other singer-actors has the potential for further refinement of the process. This research represents an inspiration for fellow singer-actors to pursue new methodologies and techniques within their dramatic preparation process, such as the one presented here. I urge them to construct further practical study within their work as singer-actor/practitioners through the use of Actioning, Stanislavsky’s ‘system’ and psychophysical acting.

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## Appendix 1: DMA Recitals One to Four

### Recital One – “A Little Opera”

Two double bill staged performances of Douglas Moore’s *Gallantry* and Georges Bizet’s *Le Docteur Miracle*, directed by Brendan West and accompanied by Dr. Greg Neil.

Douglas Moore (1893-1969)	<b><i>Gallantry</i></b> Announcer Lola Markham Donald Hopewell Doctor Greg	June Dams Diantha Hillenbrand Chase Douglas Jarvis Dams
Georges Bizet (1838-75)	<b><i>Le Docteur Miracle</i></b> Laurette Véronique Captain Silvio Le Podestat	June Dams Diantha Hillenbrand Michael Potts Jarvis Dams

### Recital Two: “Walls of Troy”

World premiere of *Walls of Troy* by New Zealand composer David Griffiths. A staged production directed by Michael Potts, under the baton of James Tennant and with The University of Waikato Orchestra.

Leading cast:	
Achilles	Jarvis Dams
Priam	Chase Douglas
Hecuba	June Dams
Helen	Diantha Hillenbrand

### **Recital Three: “Carmen”**

Concert production of Bizet’s most famous opera *Carmen*, with The University of Waikato Orchestra and conducted by Adam Maha.

Leading cast:

Carmen	June Dams
Don José	Chase Douglas
Escamillo	Jarvis Dams
Micaëla	Beverley Pullon

### **Recital Four: “A recital of French and Italian songs and arias”.**

Accompanied by Dr. Greg Neil

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)	<i>Ah! Chi mi dice mai</i> ( <i>Don Giovanni</i> )
Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)	<i>La Promessa (Soirées Musicales No. 1)</i> <i>La Regata Veneziana</i> <i>Anzoletta Avanti la regatta</i> <i>Anzoletta co passa la regatta</i> <i>Anzoletta dopo la regatta</i>  <i>Dunque io son (Il Barbiere di Siviglia) — With</i> <i>Jarvis Dams as Figaro</i>
Geatano Donizetti (1797-1848)	<i>Quel Guardo Cavaliere (L’esir d’amore)</i>
Charles Gounod (1818-93)	<i>Air de Bijoux (Faust)</i>
Jules Massenet (1842-1912)	<i>La mort de la Cigale (Mélodies Cahier 7, No.1)</i>  <i>Ouvre tes yeux bleux (Poème D’amour, No. 3)</i>
Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)	<i>Mimi! (La Bohème) — with Jarvis Dams as</i> <i>Marcello</i>  <i>Dunque proprio finita (La Bohème) — with</i> <i>Jarvis Dams as Marcello, Alice Gower as</i> <i>Musetta and Michael Potts as Rodolfo.</i>

## Appendix 2: Final DMA Recital Programme

June Dams – Soprano

Also featuring soprano Oriana Kershaw and accompanied by Rosemary Barnes

Disclaimer: The recording of the recital included in the thesis is a repeat of the recital on 23 October 2015 that the New Zealand examiner reviewed and where recordings were made by the University. It was re-performed and re-recorded on 11 November 2016 because the original take was mistakenly deleted by the University of Waikato.

### The programme:

Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-99)	<i>Cuatro Madrigales Amatorios</i> <i>¿Con qué la lavaré?</i> <i>Vos me matásteis</i> <i>¿De dónde venís, amore?</i> <i>De los álamos vengo, madre</i>
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)	<i>Ah Guarda Sorella (Così fan Tutte)</i> — With Oriana Kershaw as Dorabella
Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)	<i>Mi Parea....Piangea Cantando...Ave Maria (Otello)</i>
Richard Strauss (1864-1949)	<i>Meinem Kinde (Sechs Lieder, Op. 27, No. 3.)</i>
Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)	<i>V Molchan'i Nochi Taynoy (O, dolgo budu ya) (Six Songs Op. 4, No.3)</i>
Franz Liszt (1811-86)	<i>Pace Non Trovo (Tre Sonetti di Petrarca, No. 1.)</i>
Interval	
Georges Bizet (1838-75)	<i>Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante (Carmen)</i>
Joseph Canteloube (1879-1957)	<i>La Délaissádo (Series 2, No. 4.)</i> <i>Pastourelle (Series 2, No 1.)</i>
Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)	<i>Scuoti quella fronda di ciliegi (Madama Butterfly)</i> — With Oriana Kershaw as Suzuki

*Signore Ascolta (Turandot)*

Douglas Moore (1893-1969)    *The Silver Aria (The Ballad of Baby Doe)*

**Programme notes:**

***Cuatro Madrigales Amatorios***

**Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-1999)**

Spanish composer Joaquín Rodrigo was born in Sagunto, Valencia on St Cecilia's day, the patron saint of music, on 22 November 1901. He tragically lost his sight at age three as a result of an outbreak of diphtheria. He later affirmed that this personal tragedy led him toward a career in music. Throughout his career, Rodrigo wrote his works in braille and dictated them to a copyist. In 1927, Rodrigo started his studies in composition in Paris at the École Normale de Musique with Paul Dukas, and he later worked in Germany during the Spanish Civil War, Switzerland, and Austria before returning to Spain. He met his wife Victoria Kamhi, the Turkish pianist, in 1933 and she became the most important collaborator in all areas of his work as a composer. They returned to Madrid in 1939, where he went on to become one of the most popular Spanish composers of his time, composing around one hundred and seventy works in almost all musical forms throughout his lifetime. In regard to his vocal compositions, like Richard Strauss, Rodrigo had a strong preference for the soprano voice, for which he composed the majority of his songs. He wrote one of his most famous works, *Cuatro Madrigales Amatorios*, or *Four Madrigals of Love*, in 1947, orchestrating them in 1948. The song cycle is set to poems (authors unspecified) from the collection of 16th Century madrigals for four or five voices by Juan Vásquez entitled "Recopilación de sonetos y villancicos a cuatro y a cinco voces" (1560). *Cuatro Madrigales Amatorios* are inspired and influenced by Spanish music of the 16th century. None of the four songs within the set, however, are related either by subject or character. The first song, *¿Con qué la lavaré?* (With what shall I wash?), considers that although wives and mothers may bathe in lemon water, the poet's face is washed only with tears of grief and suffering. In the second

song, *Vos me matásteis* (You have killed me), the poet passionately expresses how he has seen a beautiful girl with long hair on the riverbank and that he is so overwhelmed and taken by her beauty that he feels he has died instantly. In the third song, *¿De dónde venís, amore?* (From where have you come, love?), the poet asks the question “from where have you come, love?” and immediately answers with a mischievous theatrical aside “I know very well from where”. The final song, *De los álamos vengo, madre* (From the poplar trees I’ve come, mother), the poet joyfully exclaims that he has met his beloved under the poplar trees of Seville. In all of the songs, Rodrigo has created his own themes in close homage to the original Baroque melodies, with the exception of the fourth song, where he has used the original melody, though providing his own exuberant accompaniment.

***Ah Guarda Sorella — Così fan Tutte*      Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)**

Fiordiligi – June Dams, Dorabella – Oriana Kershaw

*Così fan Tutte* was first performed in 1790 at the Wiener Burgtheater in Vienna, Austria. The libretto was written by Lorenzo Da Ponte (1749-1838), who also authored the libretti for Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1786) and *Don Giovanni* (1787). *Così fan Tutte* tells the tale of two friends Ferrando and Guglielmo, who are in love with sisters Fiordiligi and Dorabella. Don Alfonso, an acquaintance of Ferrando and Guglielmo, has become increasingly frustrated with their naivety in love, so he presents the two men with a wager, as he believes that all women are fickle. Alfonso suggests that they pretend to go to war, and then return to the sisters disguised as Albanians and attempt to seduce the other’s fiancé. The men agree and begin their scheme to trick the sisters, with the help of the women’s maid, Despina. Successful in winning the hearts of the opposite women, the men arrange a fake double wedding and marry the other’s fiancé. The “Albanians” then leave and Ferrando and Guglielmo reappear, confronting the sisters, who quickly confess their deceit. The men pay Alfonso his wager and they forgive the women. In the first duet of the opera, *Ah Guarda Sorella*, Fiordiligi and Dorabella are each gazing at portraits of their lovers and admiring their various qualities.

Finally, they both swear that if they ever change their affections, Cupid can make them suffer for the remainder of their lives.

***Mi Parea...Piangea Cantando...Ave Maria — Otello Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)***

Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi composed twenty-six operas throughout his lifetime. Verdi had retired after the immense success of *Aida* in 1871. His publisher, Giulio Ricordi, attempted to change his mind for ten years, and finally persuaded him with *Otello*, a libretto by Arrigo Boito (1842-1918), adapted from William Shakespeare's (1564-1616) *Othello* (1603). *Otello* premiered at Teatro alla Scala in Milan in 1887, and it was later revised for French audiences in 1894. Verdi's aim for this opera was to break from the traditional concept of Italian musical drama and produce a new and modern approach while still incorporating some traditional Italian operatic elements. Boito's libretto does not follow a strict metric pattern, and therefore neither does Verdi's music, creating a more established connection between the music and the text. In Desdemona's *Mi Parea...Piangea Candando* and *Ave Maria*, which take place in Act Four, the entire scene constitutes a single stream of consciousness, serving dramatic motivation rather than conventional musical structure. Throughout *Piangea Cantando*, Verdi intersperses recitative-like phrases between verses of the aria. The *Ave Maria* uses a more traditional recitative to aria format, but the recitative does not drive the dramatic action forward.

The story of *Otello* is a tragic tale of love, jealousy, power and deceit. Desdemona has been falsely denounced for infidelity by Otello and he has told her to go to bed and wait for him. She can feel that something is very wrong and while she is preparing for bed she tells the story of her mother's maid, Barbara, to her own maid Emilia. Barbara was in love with a man who abandoned her, but she always sang the song of willow. Throughout the aria, Desdemona relates Barbara's story to her own tragic situation, as she knows she will die soon. After Emilia leaves, Desdemona says her final prayer to the Virgin Mary; she asks to pray for all the people, the sinner and the innocent, the weak, oppressed and powerful, and

those subject to the injustice of a cruel fate. But most of all she asks to pray and protect especially those in the hour of their death.

***Meinem Kinde — Sechs Lieder, Op. 27, No. 3.*      **Richard Strauss (1864-1949)****

Richard Strauss is considered as one of the greatest German composers of his time. During his lifetime, he composed over two hundred songs for voice and piano and arranged around fifty of them with orchestral accompaniment. His early lieder are firmly placed in the German Romantic tradition and his later orchestral *Gesänge* reflects the influence of opera. Richard Strauss always had a particular preference for the soprano voice; he even married his pupil soprano Pauline de Ahna (1863-1950) in 1894. Strauss composed *Meinem Kinde* (my child) while Pauline was pregnant with their son Franz, in 1897. It is the third song in the song cycle *Sechs Lieder für eine Singstimme mit Klavierbegleitung*. It is set to Gustav Falke's (1853-1916) sentimental poem "Meinem Kinde" and follows a strophic format.

***V Molchan'i Nochi Taynoy — Six Songs Op. 4, No. 3* **Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)****

Russian composer, pianist, and conductor Sergei Rachmaninoff was the last great representative of Russian late Romanticism. Composed during 1890-92, Opus 4 was Rachmaninoff's first selection of songs to be published. *V Molchan'i Nochi Taynoy* is the third song from the set, composed to the text by Afansy Afanas'yevich Fet (1820-1892). It is a passionate telling of an infatuation and the first stages of falling in love. The poet finds himself unable to sleep as he is overwhelmed by the images of his beloved and he keeps thinking about her hair, the way she talks and how she smiled. He is thinking about every nuance in the words she spoke to him and he is second guessing every little thing he has said to her. Finally, he whispers her name to welcome the night's darkness.

Rachmaninoff's vocal melody in this song reflects the poet's inability to stay on one subject and instead lets his imagination fly from thought to thought.

Towards the middle of the song the melody builds to a powerful climax, supported by arpeggios in the piano accompaniment, emphasizing the poet's

overwhelming emotions looping through his mind. Finally, the song recapitulates the opening phrases, bringing the song to an optimistic closure.

***Pace Non Trovo — Tre Sonetti di Petrarca, No. 1.*                      Franz Liszt (1811-86)**

Liszt composed *Tre Sonetti di Petrarca*, or Three Sonnets of Petrarch, between 1838-42 and they were first published for voice and piano in 1846. Liszt initially wrote them for solo piano, and he revised a new piano transcription of the three sonnets, which were published in 1858 as part of *Années II*. The three songs are based on Francesco Petrarch's (1304-74) sonnets 47, 104, and 123. Overall, very little academic attention has been devoted to Liszt's vocal music. When his songs are discussed, scholars tend to focus on his lieder. *Tre Sonetti di Petrarca* are heavily influenced by the Italian school of music and written in a bel canto style, representing a different side to Liszt's compositions. They feature long legato melodic lines, display virtuosity, span over a large vocal range, incorporate cadenzas and sit high in the vocal *tessitura*. *Pace Non Trovo* follows an operatic form, beginning with recitative followed by an aria and the accompaniment is almost orchestral in character. Petrarch's sonnets focus on his love for a married woman named Laura. It has been speculated that this was based on a real person, Laura de Noves, but it could also be a fictional character. In *Pace Non Trovo*, the poet's anguish at loving an unattainable married woman is evident in the intense conflicting emotions presented: He cannot find peace, but he does not make war, he is fearful and yet hopeful, he is on fire but also ice cold, he hates himself but loves another. Both life and death equally displease him and it is because of Laura that he is in this constant state of anguish.

***Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante — Carmen*                      Georges Bizet (1838-75)**

Georges Bizet's *Carmen* is one of the most popular and commonly performed operas in the repertoire. It was based on the novella *Carmen* (1845) by Prosper Mérimée (1803-70) and premiered at the Opéra-Comique in Paris on March 3 1875. It tells the ultimate tale of unrequited love. A soldier, Don José, falls in love with the gypsy beauty Carmen. However, José's infatuation with Carmen's nature grows and begins to smother her. Carmen, who is incapable of accepting a



possessive lover, tells him to leave with his fiancé Micaëla, and Carmen instead chooses Escamillo, the famous Toreador. Consumed by jealousy, Don José confronts Carmen and begs her to leave with him. As she rejects him once again, Don José stabs Carmen while the crowd inside the arena cheers on Escamillo's victory. Carmen expresses her rebellion, passion, and fatalism right until her early death at the hands of her rejected and desperate lover. Bizet outlived the premiere of *Carmen* by only three months, to the day. Micaëla does not feature in Mérimée's novella; her character was added to the opera by librettists Henri Meilhac (1831-97) and Ludovic Halévy (1834-1908) as a contrast to Carmen. She is the voice and stock character of the Opéra-Comique, representing the idealistic traditional nineteenth-century woman as opposed to the scandalous gypsy. Originally, *Carmen* was composed with spoken dialogue instead of recitative, following the conventional structure of operas performed at the Opéra-Comique. After Bizet's death, Ernest Guiraud composed the recitatives, replacing the original spoken text for the first performances of *Carmen* in Vienna in 1875. Guiraud's recitatives have become part of the standardized and most commonly known version of *Carmen*. Micaëla's aria *Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante* takes place during Act III. She has gone into the mountains to find Don José and bring him back home, as his mother is dying. This is strange territory for her, however, and she is frightened and alone, begging God to give her the courage she so desperately needs. Although Micaëla might not feature in many scenes, she sings some of the most memorable music. Her aria is written in a Gounod-esque style, with long legato phrases, supported by arpeggios in the orchestral accompaniment. At the premiere of *Carmen*, this aria was the only well-received number in the final two acts of the opera.

***La Délaïssádo* - Series 2, No. 4**

**Joseph Canteloube (1879-1957)**

French composer Marie Joseph Canteloube de Malaret is most famous for his five series of *Chants d'Auvergne* which were first published between 1923 and 1954. Canteloube was a student of Vincent d'Indy at the Schola Cantorum in 1907. As well as growing up surrounded by the regional folk music of the Auvergne, Canteloube must also have been influenced by D'Indy's love of folk

music and at the Schola Cantorum, Canteloube was encouraged to pursue his fondness of this repertoire. The five series of *Chants d'Auvergne* are written in Auvergnat (or Auvernhat), a variety of the Occitan language, a Roman dialect closely related to Provençal and Catalan. Canteloube collected the melodies by roaming the country regions through farms and villages to listen to the songs. Canteloube achieved his aim of collecting folk songs and turning them into concert pieces. His orchestrations evoke the picturesque landscape of the Auvergne, often with elaborate harmonies, highlighting the rapturous and luxurious folk melodies.

La Délaissádo is the fourth song in the second series. It tells the tragic story of a poor shepherdess who has been jilted by her lover. A shepherdess is waiting for her lover by a big oak. But he doesn't come. "Have I been deserted? I thought he loved me, and I love him so much". The evening star rises; she is still alone and weeping.

***Pastourelle – Series 2, No 1.***

**Joseph Canteloube (1879-1957)**

*Pastourelle* is the first song in the second series. It is a conversation between a shepherd and a shepherdess. He begins by asking her to cross the river so that they can first discuss business and then talk of love. She responds by saying she would come over but she cannot find a bridge or a boat to cross, she cannot even find a shepherd to love her faithfully. To which he cheekily responds that if she was really pretty she would easily have all those things.

***Scuoti quella fronda di ciliegi – Madama Butterfly* Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)**

Cio-Cio San – June Dams, Suzuki – Oriana Kershaw

Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* premiered at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan in 1904 and was not a success at first. Puccini made alterations to the score and when the revised version was performed later in the same year it became a roaring success. He revised it another three times, first for its premiere at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1906, then for a season in Paris in 1907 and

finally the fifth revision which has become the standard score. This tragic opera tells the story of Naval Officer Pinkerton who marries a fifteen-year-old Japanese girl, Cio-Cio-San (Madama Butterfly), while he is in Japan. To Pinkerton, Butterfly is just a fleeting infatuation, but Butterfly is deeply in love with him. Shortly after their wedding, Pinkerton returns to America for three years before coming back to Japan, where Butterfly has been anxiously waiting for him. He does not, however, come back for Butterfly, but to collect their blue-eyed blond-haired child which his new American wife Kate Pinkerton has agreed to raise. Once Butterfly realises the true situation, she completely loses her will to live and commits suicide. The duet *Scuoti quella fronda di ciliegi* (also known as the flower duet) takes place earlier in the opera, during Act II. A cannon shot is heard in the harbour and Butterfly and her maid Suzuki look out to see if it is Pinkerton's ship. They follow the ship's movement until she can make out the name. It is Pinkerton's ship, the "Abraham Lincoln", for he has returned. Butterfly is excited and relieved that he has finally come back to Japan, exclaiming that no matter how many people did not believe her, she always knew he would return. She then orders Suzuki to pick all the flowers in the garden and decorate the whole house with blossoms to welcome his arrival.

***Signore Ascolta – Turandot***

**Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)**

*Turandot* was Puccini's last opera. Unfinished at the time of Puccini's death in 1924, it was completed by Franco Alfano (1875-1954) in 1926. It premiered at the Teatro alla Scala in 1926, but without Alfano's additions, the first performance of the opera as completed by Alfano was performed the following night. The story of *Turandot* was taken from *The Book of One Thousand and One Days*, a Persian collection of stories. The opera tells the tale of the captivating but man-hating princess Turandot, who requires her suitors to answer three riddles correctly. If they are right then she will marry them but if they are wrong, the punishment is death. Completely taken by her, and despite many warnings, Prince Calaf sets out to answer her riddles, which he does correctly. Turandot is shocked and horrified at the thought of having to marry him so she prepares to take her own life, but in an attempt to stop her, the prince asks her to answer a

riddle of his own – she has to discover his name, and if she does, he will give his life. Ultimately, his name is revealed but Turandot is so enthralled by his love, she embraces him and renounces her cold-hearted past. The aria, *Signore Ascolta*, is sung by Liú, the slave girl who accompanies Prince Calaf and his father Timur. In Act I, they are watching the execution proceedings of the Prince of Persia, who failed to answer Turandot’s riddles. During the processional, Calaf catches a glimpse of Turandot and immediately falls in love with her and decides to attempt to answer her riddles and win her heart. Liú then sings this aria to beg him not to risk his life for the princess.

***The Silver Aria – The Ballad of Baby Doe*                      Douglas Moore (1893-1969)**

In 1956 *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, an American opera by Douglas Moore and librettist John Latouche (1914-56), premiered in Central City, Colorado. It is considered to be the “quintessential” American opera because of its true life origins. Moore and Latouche made only minor adjustments to the historical accuracies to fit within operatic convention. It is the story of Elizabeth (Baby) Doe Tabor, the second wife of Silver Baron Horace Tabor, and his first wife Augusta Tabor. Baby Doe stakes everything on love; she and Horace have an affair while he is still married to Augusta. Horace and Baby Doe finally marry (much to the disapproval of the community, as they are both divorcees), only to see Horace make devastating financial mistakes with his fanatical support of the silver standard. He dies a ruined man, and she herself dies in complete poverty. The opera spans from Horace meeting Baby Doe in Colorado, when he was the wealthiest man in town, to his death thirty years later (in the form of a hallucination) in Matchless Mine. This aria is sung during the wedding of Baby Doe and Horace, while the men are arguing about the silver standard compared to the gold standard. Baby Doe stops them and sings *The Silver Aria*, explaining that while gold might be flashy and luxurious like the sun, silver is like the moon, holding the core and dreams of America together.

### Appendix 3: Review Excerpts

#### **2014: The Phantom of the Opera, New Plymouth Operatic Society, TSB Showplace, New Plymouth**

“As Chris Crowe (The Phantom), Toni Gibson (Christine), Bevan Williams (Raoul) and June Dams (Carlotta) reach notes of unbelievable heights, and dive up and down musical scales with apparent ease, you are constantly amazed time and time again. Their talent and professionalism are brilliant. You can almost hear the crackle of passion and emotion in the air as they perform.”<sup>1</sup>

“Society stalwart Anthony Joines stole a few scenes as the memorably unlikeable Ubaldo Piangi, while his opposite, Carlotta Giudicelli was played perfectly by June Dams who managed to show how satire should be played.”<sup>2</sup>

#### **2016: The Phantom of the Opera, Amici Trust with Amici Productions, Civic Theatre, Auckland, 2016**

“I smile at June Dams’ pitch-perfect performance of Prima Donna Carlotta, but scowl at Piangi.”<sup>3</sup>

“The leads are accompanied by excellent performances by Rory Nolan (Vicomte de Chagny), June Dams (Carlotta) and Linda Shearer (Madame Girya) all of whose talents soar admirably.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jo Hills, ‘REVIEW: The Phantom of the Opera’, *Taranaki Daily News*, 4 July 2014, para. 6 <<http://www.stuff.co.nz/taranaki-daily-news/lifestyle/10232652/REVIEW-The-Phantom-of-the-Opera>> [accessed 4 July 2014].

<sup>2</sup> Gordon Brown, ‘Phantom Phantastic’, *New Plymouth Operatic Society*, 9 July 2014, para. 4 <<https://www.facebook.com/NPOperatic/posts/673724059348176>> [accessed 9 July 2014].

<sup>3</sup> James Wenley, ‘REVIEW: The Phantom of the Opera (The Civic) [Far Too Many Notes for My Taste]’, *Theatre Scenes The Auckland Theatre Blog*, 12 February 2016, para. 8 <<http://www.theatrescenes.co.nz/review-the-phantom-of-the-opera-the-civic/>> [accessed 12 February 2016].

<sup>4</sup> Dione Joseph, ‘Succeeds in the Quality of Its Talents’, *Theatre Review*, 12 February 2016, para. 9 <<https://www.theatrereview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=8814>> [accessed 12 February 2016].

## Appendix 4: Creative Journal Extract

This is a passage from the creative journal I kept throughout the Applied Case Study process. These excerpts were taken from my preparation and my first company rehearsal for *The Phantom of the Opera* in New Plymouth in 2014.

**March 29, 2014**

*I received my score of Phantom yesterday and began my learning and preparation process today. My first week of rehearsals is set for May 12<sup>th</sup> and I am contracted to have the role memorised by then. First, I read through the whole score, noting where Carlotta features. I also noticed that several of her lines are in Italian and not in English, so I translated them. My first impressions were that her music is very difficult, covers a large range, and has a high tessitura. As a character, I noticed that she is very temperamental, stubborn, and treated unfairly by the Phantom. I am curious about her relationship with Piangi. It is not clear within the score whether or not they are in a relationship, have any kind of romantic involvement or are just friends. It is evident that they are fond of each other, but I do not know to what degree. I am interested to find out how the director will interpret this.*

**April 10, 2014**

*Today I began experimenting with Actioning as a preparatory process. I selected some initial transitive verbs and decided to begin with Hannibal. The reason I selected this scene to work on first is because many of Carlotta's lines in this excerpt are presentational and not specifically addressed to anyone in particular and it is also one her most significant scenes. I must admit, when I first tried this process in practice, it felt rather awkward, overly exaggerated and made me feel rather self-conscious. This could be because I've learned about this technique theoretically, not practically. I decided to practice the same 'bit' over and over, to give myself a chance to settle into this technique. I feel one of the reasons it felt so odd initially is because Alfreds notes that the actor should over-exaggerate playing the action, and that is a rather new approach for me. In previous productions, it can take a little while to warm up into a character physically. This technique, on the other hand, seems to push you into the deep end, so to speak, when it comes to physicalisation. Interestingly, the awkwardness quickly went away with a little bit of practice. I also found it helpful to practice this technique in front of a full-length mirror so I could monitor my actions initially.*

**May 12, 2014**

*I am in New Plymouth this week for the first week of my rehearsals for Phantom. I arrived this morning on May 12<sup>th</sup> and met with the Director. We had a substantial discussion about Carlotta and how we both interpret her as a character and her role within the overall plot. I was pleased to discover that we had both interpreted her similarly. Some character notes we addressed:*

- *Carlotta takes herself very seriously, she has worked hard for her position in the company and is very threatened by Christine;*
- *She feels like there is a significant injustice being played out by the Phantom because it is obvious Carlotta is the superior singer, but the Phantom is in love with the ballet girl, and his admiration and sexual infatuation is destroying Carlotta's career. (Prematurely in the case of this production, as I am younger than Carlotta is usually played);*
- *The Phantom takes Carlotta's most prized possession – her voice. By making her croak on stage, it is her biggest fear realised;*
- *Carlotta is a highly stubborn and temperamental character, she is explosive and when she is mad, everyone will know about it;*
- *She uses Piangi as both her confidante and protector. She also uses him to advance her status, as she believes it is good practice to be close with the company's leading tenor. Also, as a tenor he is not in direct competition with her, and as he is infatuated with her, he will always support her.*

*My first rehearsal began one-on-one with the director and we worked specifically on the Hannibal scene, from Carlotta's opening Cadenza to my exit after the dialogue. Later that same evening I blocked the scene with the other leads (without the ensemble). That first day we worked for about seven hours, going through the majority of my blocking for my most significant scenes, and working on characterisation. Particularly making sure that there were physical differences between Carlotta, Carlotta as Elisa and Carlotta as the Countess. This was certainly an extensive day of rehearsals and I am grateful I had 'Actioned' Carlotta in my pre-rehearsal preparation. Having worked on her actions, and having them written into my score, definitely helped me pick up the blocking faster than I would have if I had not prepared so extensively. Also, I found that because I already had a fair amount of knowledge on what drives and motivates Carlotta, I found that it was easier to adapt to what the director envisaged for her in this scene.*